

The Haham DeCordova of Jamaica

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The first American volume of Jewish apologetics was written and published not in the United States, but on the island of Jamaica.¹ Written to defend the integrity of revealed religion against the as-severations of such philosophers as Spinoza, Hume, and Voltaire, this volume was lengthily entitled:

האמת והאמונה/Reason and Faith,/or,/Philosophical Absurdities,/and the/
Necessity of Revelation,/Intended to/Promote Faith among Infidels,/and
the/Unbounded Exercise of Humanity among all Religious/Men./By one
of the Sons of Abraham to his Brethren./לאפיקורוס [know
what to answer unbelievers]/Jamaica:/Printed by Strupar and Preston, at
the cost,/and for the Use of the Subscribers./M, DCC, LXXXVIII.²

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¹ This is only one of many pieces of evidence which need to be studied for the evaluation of the relative significance of the Jewish communities in the West Indies during the eighteenth century in contrast to the settlements on the North American mainland; systematic investigation of Jewish life in the Caribbean, and particularly in Jamaica, has not kept pace with scientific study of the growth of the mainland colonies and states.

² A copy of this rare volume was examined by the writer in the West Indies Research Library of the Institute of Jamaica, Kingston. It is listed in Cecil Roth's *Magna Bibliotheca Anglo-Judaica* (London, 1937), p. 332, and in Frank Cundall's *The Press and Printers of Jamaica Prior to 1820* (Worcester, 1916), p. 39, reprinted from the *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* (Oct., 1916).

This was not the first use of Hebrew type in a Jamaican publication. Beginning with the 1776 Jamaica almanac published by James Fannin in Montego Bay, the compilers of such guides included a Jewish calendar page which listed the Holy Days, holidays, the first days of the Hebrew months, and other such details. The writer does not know whether this procedure was copied from almanacs published in London (Roth, *op. cit.*, does not include such information), but this would seem to be an indication of the importance of Jewish residents in the eyes of Christian Jamaicans. At any rate, Fannin's 1776 *Almanac* and Robert Sherlock's succeeding volume in 1778, published in St. Jago de la Vega (now Spanish Town), printed these Jewish data in English, but Ann Woolhead's 1779 *Almanac*, Kingston, utilized Hebrew type for the names of holidays and months.

Because the book was intended to uphold Judaism not against Christianity, but against philosophical deism and atheism, it found an audience among Christians as well as Jews. Although not a single non-Jew is listed among the thirty-four subscribers — thirty-three Jamaicans and one Curaçao — who subventioned its original publication,³ its distribution could hardly have been limited to the Jewish community of the island. Far more important, it was reprinted three years later in Philadelphia by F. Bailey,⁴ with no indication of Jewish sponsorship. While it is possible that Philadelphia Jewish leaders arranged for the publication, it is worth noting that neither Benjamin Gomez nor Naphtali Judah, the two active New York City Jewish publishers and booksellers who marketed American editions of the writings of the British Jewish polemicist David Levi in answer to anti-Judaic strictures by Dr. Joseph Priestley and Thomas Paine, took any interest in offering an American edition of the Jamaican volume.⁵ A Richmond edition which was printed in 1804 by John Dixon,⁶ on the other hand, bears an additional preface signed by Marcus Levy,⁷ as publisher — but, here again, there were surely not enough Jews then resident in Richmond to warrant the printing of the volume merely for distribution among them. There must have been reason to think that non-Jews would be particularly interested in a book which defended the concept of revelation against the attacks of the philosophers.

Thenceforth, all the printers of eighteenth-century almanacs which the writer has been able to examine in the West Indies Research Library and elsewhere utilized Hebrew type for the invariable page of Jewish religious data. It would be instructive to discover when almanac publishers in the United States began to include information about Jewish holidays, and when such listings utilized Hebrew type for this purpose.

³ The subscribers are listed on pp. vii and viii. The copy examined by the writer has the name of Mr. Abraham Levien added in script.

⁴ A. S. W. Rosenbach, "An American Jewish Bibliography," in *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* [PAJHS], XXX (1926), Number 84.

⁵ *Ibid.*, Numbers 93, 95, and 114.

⁶ *Ibid.*, Number 133.

⁷ For Levy's civic and business activities, see Herbert T. Ezekiel and Gaston Lichtenstein, *The History of the Jews of Richmond* (Richmond, 1917), p. 36 and *passim*.

A QUESTION OF IDENTITY

Who was the author of *Reason and Faith*? The volume itself offers only a few vague clues concerning the author's identity. In the preface, he asks the readers of his book to "excuse the improprieties . . . in it, unavoidable in a foreigner who learned the English language, without a master, in his old age . . ." ⁸ Far into the book, in the chapter dealing with immortality and resurrection, he refers to an argument which "I have shewn in my *Saphnot Pangeag*, in Hebrew and French," ⁹ but it has been impossible to discover a surviving copy of such a volume (if indeed it did not remain in manuscript form), let alone to ascertain whether or not it, too, had been published anonymously. Only the 1804 Richmond edition gives the pseudonym "Rabba Henriquis, Esq." on the title page; one wonders what it was that stimulated Marcus Levy to utilize this name — perhaps the person in Jamaica who supplied him with a copy of the original printing of the volume was one of the five members of the Henriques family who were among its subscribers, one of whom was named Abraham of David Nunes Henriques. At any rate, neither Frank Cundall, the distinguished bibliographer of early Jamaica imprints, who recognized the significance of this first Judaic volume published in Jamaica, ¹⁰ nor Cecil Roth, whose monumental bibliography of British Judaica includes Jewish imprints from all corners of the British Empire, attempted to ascertain the identity of the author of *Reason and Faith*. A. S. W. Rosenbach did not even include the Kingston edition in his *American Jewish Bibliography*, although he did list the Philadelphia and Richmond editions, and other, later Jewish works which were published in Jamaica.

The name of the author is given in a hitherto unnoticed fourth printing of *Reason and Faith*, or, at least, I must state more accurately, the first installment of a fourth printing, because I have not been able to discover whether or not it was ever completed. This installment, which includes the first two sections of the book, is

⁸ Philadelphia edition, p. vi.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

¹⁰ Cundall, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

printed in the fourth monthly (October, 1865) issue of the מורה, The Guide, /A Monthly Magazine, /Devoted To /The Diffusion of Knowledge in Jewish Literature, /Edited by Raphael D'C. Lewin, /Head Master of the Hebrew National Institution. /M. DeCordova, McDougall & Co., /Booksellers, Stationers & Publishers, 62, Harbour Street: /Kingston Jamaica. /MDCCCLXV.¹¹ I have been unable to locate any further issues of this periodical, but it may well be that this was the last, in view of the fact that its editor soon left his position with the Jewish private school in Kingston to occupy the pulpit of the congregation in Shreveport, presumably prior to the High Holy Days of 1866.¹² Lewin's preface to this installment is worth citing *in extenso*:

"It is with great pleasure we announce our intention of publishing in the pages of the 'Guide' the miscellaneous writings of the late Rabbi Joshua Hezekiah DeCordova who held the office of *Chacham* [rabbi] to the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue in this city, from the year 1755 to 1797. Fortunately, we have obtained possession of several of his works, both in print and manuscript, and we feel sure our intention will be appreciated, not alone by the surviving relations of the Chacham, but by the majority of our co-religionists in this island. We do not intend in our present number to give his biography, but we deem it right to state that the Chacham was a native of Amsterdam, that when he arrived in this island he was totally ignorant of English, and therefore every allowance should be made as to the style of writing in this self-taught language.

"The first production of his which we propose to place before our readers was the only one (with the exception of a sermon) he published. Its title is 'Reason and Faith' and was written in support and defence of Revelation against the cavils of the Skeptics and Infidels of the age. We believe the copy in our possession is the only one in existence."¹³

¹¹ The first four issues are in the Dropsie College Library. *The Occident* (Philadelphia), XXIII (1865), 282-83, refers to the publication of the first number.

¹² *The Occident*, XXIV (1866), 287. Additional biographical details about Lewin, whose middle name was Da Costa, are given in Jacob A. P. M. Andrade, *A Record of the Jews in Jamaica* (Kingston, 1941), p. 124; *The Occident*, XXV (1867), 46-47, 216-17, 314, 316; *The Israelite* (Cincinnati), Jan. 7, 1869; Feb. 4, 1870; Feb. 18, 1870. Lewin continued to write, edit, and publish until his death in 1886.

¹³ Vol. I, No. 4, p. 95. Ironically, it was not until after the writer discovered this elusive reference in *The Guide* that he subsequently found references to the same information in two other sources, both of which are far more easily consulted: in *The Occident*, II (1845), 519, in the midst of an editorial on "Cheap Religious Publications," which eventually led to the establishment of the first Jewish Publication Society, Isaac Leeser

It is altogether fitting that the author of *Reason and Faith*, the first extensive, original work on Judaism written and published in America, should have been the precursor of a famous family of printers and writers whose Kingston *Daily Gleaner* (founded in 1834) is still today probably the best-known newspaper in the entire Caribbean area, and whose descendants spread to New York City, Texas, and London, carrying the written word with them. Although the family's genealogy is extremely difficult to establish in final form, the Haham DeCordova's grandnephews included Jacob DeCordova, who eventually became a newspaper publisher, author of books of propaganda for Texas and (with his half-brother Phineas) Texas real estate promoter;¹⁴ Raphael J. DeCordova, the well-

referred to "The Reason and Faith,' by Rabbi De Cordova of Jamaica," as one of the few "English books on our religion," in circulation "twenty years ago"; and in Ezekiel and Lichtenstein, *op. cit.*, pp. 127-28, in their discussion of the 1804 Richmond edition, the authors also indicate that another DeCordova manuscript in refutation of Voltaire was in the library of the Jewish Theological Seminary whose authorities, however, have been unable to locate it. The copy of the Richmond edition in the American Jewish Historical Society's library has the inscription, "The author is Joshua D. Cordova in Jamaica, W. I." Though erroneous, the information is fairly close.

¹⁴ The writer has been attempting for years to gather information about the DeCordova family genealogy, and the data are far from complete, but they are sufficient to correct the errors in James M. Day, *Jacob de Cordova, Land Merchant of Texas* (Waco, 1962), pp. 1-3, and in one of his sources, Mrs. J. W. Skinner's typewritten letter to the Texas Board of Control, dated March 30, 1953 (photostats in the Texas State Archives, and in the American Jewish Archives).

Mrs. Skinner, a granddaughter of Jacob DeCordova, and Mr. Day both refer to Jacob's father as "Joshua Raphael." But DeCordova family data printed in the Centenary Issue of the *Daily Gleaner* (Kingston), Sept. 13, 1934, p. 2, and in Edwin Wolf 2nd and Maxwell Whiteman, *The History of the Jews of Philadelphia from Colonial Times to the Age of Jackson* (Philadelphia, 1957), p. 488, clearly indicate that Jacob's father's name was Raphael, and that Joshua R. was a half-brother to Jacob. Mrs. Skinner also asserts that Jacob "was not a member of any specific church, neither were his father or grandfather." While it is undoubtedly true that Mrs. Skinner's grandfather did not identify himself with Jewish life in Texas after having married a non-Jewess in Philadelphia, and that he supported churches of various denominations, it is likely that this came about through lack of Jewish contacts in the early days in Texas, rather than from any hostility to Judaism; at least he was not unwilling to act as the Jewish godfather at the ritual circumcision of his nephew, Michael, in Kingston on April 23, 1833 ("Records of a West Indian Mohel," *PAJHS*, XXV [1917], 118); he is also known to have associated with Jews in business during his New Orleans stay before his departure for Texas (*New Orleans Bee*, June 25, 1839). It is altogether inaccurate, however, to say that Jacob's father and grandfather were indifferent to Judaism. Wolf and Whiteman offer documentary and photographic evidence of Raphael DeCordova's activity in and devotion to Congregation Mikveh Israel of Philadelphia: plate 27 pictures a Ritual Basin for use by *kohanim* which was presented to the congregation by Raphael DeCordova

known American humorist and orator, who served as lecturer in English at New York City's Temple Emanu-El for several years

in 1816, on which occasion he apologized for the fact that he did not have a ewer to go with it (p. 257); p. 488 indicates that, in 1820, Jacob's father served for a brief period as *parnas* (president) of the congregation. David and Tamar de Sola Pool, *An Old Faith in the New World* (New York, 1955), p. 429, note that he wrote to Shearith Israel Congregation of New York City on behalf of the Philadelphia congregation, on June 18, 1829, soliciting help in securing a hazzan for Mikveh Israel. Additional testimony about Raphael DeCordova's Jewish interests is contained in a letter which his son, Phineas, Jacob's half-brother and partner, wrote in 1890; Phineas said of his father and Wolf Benjamin (who acted as cantor, or hazzan, at Congregation Rodeph Shalom of Philadelphia): "... in Philadelphia they became fast friends. Both were strict Jews." (Edward Davis, *The History of Rodeph Shalom Congregation Philadelphia 1802-1926* [Philadelphia, 1926], pp. 40-42.)

Jacob's grandfather, Raphael DeCordova the elder (d. 1794), demonstrated his feelings for Judaism by bequeathing fifty pounds to the Spanish Town congregation in order that a prayer might be said in his memory on the morning of Yom Kippur, and ten pounds to the Kingston congregation for a prayer on the eve of Yom Kippur (Will, dated June 11, 1794, probated June 26, 1794, recorded L. O. S. 61, Folio 9, Island Record Office, Spanish Town, Jamaica). The will, of course, mentions by name his son, Raphael DeCordova, and his daughter, Simha Bravo, wife of Jacob of Moses Bravo, to whom the estate was bequeathed; the son and son-in-law were designated as executors.

Andrade, *op. cit.*, quite mistakenly refers to Jacob's father as Abraham Haim DeCordova (p. 160), for Jacob's father, as we have seen, was Raphael. Since Abraham Haim's tombstone indicates that he was born in 1766 Raphael the elder could not have been his son for the simple reason that he was an adult by 1775. See the advertisement in the *Royal Gazette* (Kingston), September 23, 1780, in which Raphael offers to settle with his creditors and complains that he has been "kept confined for these five years past, and obliged to make a gaol of my own home." Raphael insisted in this notice that he had more than enough resources to satisfy his debts, if his creditors would accept stock or paper assets — mortgages, notes, etc. — in lieu of cash. A few weeks before, Raphael had offered a reward of fifty pounds for the apprehension of "some ill designed people" who late at night had set fire to his fence "with an intent to burn the said Dwelling and House" (*Royal Gazette*, Aug. 26, 1780). The DeCordova family genealogy has been somewhat clarified by the discovery of a number of letters which Phineas DeCordova wrote between 1891 and 1901 to Max Kohler, an American Jewish historian of an earlier day, who also interested himself in the life of the Haham; these letters are deposited in the Library of the American Jewish Historical Society. Further clarity is due to the kindness of Dr. Richard A. Barnett, who has made available to me the transcriptions of Jamaican Jewish cemetery inscriptions on which he and Philip Wright, Librarian of the Society of Antiquaries of London, are presently working. According to Phineas' notations to Kohler, the Haham was the eldest of three or four sons and a daughter, all of whom made their way to Jamaica from Amsterdam. Phineas mentions by name only his own grandfather, Raphael the elder. It is likely, however, that one of the others was an earlier Jacob DeCordova active in Kingston business circles in 1787 (*Kingston Journal*, May 19 and Nov. 3, 1787) and probably identical with the Jacob Haim DeCordova visiting New York City in 1761-1762. This Jacob Haim DeCordova was listed as "a stranger" in Congregation Shearith Israel's records and did business with Daniel Gomez, of New York; his wife gave birth to a daughter Simha in New York on February 16, 1762 (*PAJHS*, XXVII [1920], 245; Joseph R. Rosenbloom, *A Biographical Dictionary of Early American Jews, Colonial Times through 1800*

during the Civil War period;¹⁵ and Joshua DeCordova, who had firmly established the place of the *Gleaner* in Kingston before his untimely death in 1843.¹⁶

Joshua's son, Michael, was carrying on the family's printing and publishing business in 1865, and he probably poured his own money into *The Guide*. It may have been he who had turned over to Lewin some of the Haham's papers which still remained in the family's hands — although that copy of *Reason and Faith* could hardly have been the only one to survive on the island. Interestingly enough, however, this was not the first time that the family had been involved in the printing of the Haham's works in a monthly magazine. Twenty-one years previously, the Reverend Moses N. Nathan and the newly arrived Edinburgh physician, Dr. Lewis Ashenheim,¹⁷

[Lexington, 1960], p. 28). He is probably one with the Haham's brother Jacob, who — so Dr. Isaac S. Emmanuel informs me — resided with the Haham on Curaçao. A third brother was probably the Isaac D'Abraham DeCordova who (see note 22) left Amsterdam for Jamaica in 1771. Phineas indicates that the Haham was sufficiently older than the others to have been responsible for the education of Raphael the elder, but he gives no further information about his grandfather. He tells us that his aunt Simha, the wife of Jacob Bravo, was born in 1768 and died in 1846. Jacob de Moses Bravo died in Philadelphia on April 29, 1812, and was buried in the Mikveh Israel cemetery. Dr. Benjamin Rush expressed pleasure at the widow's generous remittance from Jamaica to defray the medical expenses of Bravo's last illness; L. H. Elmaleh and J. Bunford Samuel, *The Jewish Cemetery . . . Philadelphia* (Phila., 1962), 14, 16. The Barnett-Wright transcriptions give the precise dates for Raphael DeCordova the younger, who is buried in Kingston's Orange Street Jewish Cemetery: May 25, 1770—April 26, 1846. The younger Raphael had at least two wives: the first, Judith, is probably buried under the defaced stone (#30a) in the Spanish Town Cemetery A, age 40, next to the grave of Abraham, infant son of Raphael and Judith DeCordova, who died on Aug. 14, 1802, at the age of 19 months and 26 days; Leah, his second wife, died Feb. 26, 1847, at the age of 65. Abraham Haim DeCordova, the Haham's "only son," as he is described on his tombstone, was born in 1766 and lived until 1852; his eldest son was the Dr. DeCordova referred to in note 17. The Haham's only other child whom we have succeeded in documenting was a daughter named Luna, who died on Sept. 14, 1782 (*Royal Gazette*, Sept. 21, 1782). It has been impossible to locate the Haham's will in the Island Record Office of Jamaica.

¹⁵ Myer Stern, *The Rise and Progress of Reform Judaism* (New York, 1895), pp. 52–53, 58; Hyman B. Grinstein, *The Rise of the Jewish Community of New York 1654–1860* (Philadelphia, 1945), pp. 460–62, *passim*.

¹⁶ *Daily Gleaner* (Kingston), Centenary Issue, Sept. 13, 1934, p. 2.

¹⁷ Dr. Ashenheim married Eliza DeCordova, daughter of Dr. Joshua Haim DeCordova, grandson of the Haham, and eldest son of Abraham Haim DeCordova. Dr. DeCordova was a member of the Royal College of Surgeons, London, and served, in 1846, as presi-

had joined forces to edit the first Jewish periodical in the West Indies: בכורי הים/The First Fruits of the West,/and/Jewish Monthly Magazine;/A Periodical Specially Devoted to/Jewish Interests,/Edited by/The Rev. M. N. Nathan,/and/Lewis Ashenheim, M. D.,/Kingston, Jamaica:/Printed by R. J. DeCordova, 66, West Harbour Street. In the second issue, dated March, 1844, the editors printed a translation of one of the Haham's unpublished Portuguese sermons;¹⁸ in the third number, they offered a fable by him on "The Telescope and the Microscope" and promised more to come.¹⁹ Most of the Jewish pamphlets published at Jamaica in the 1840's and 1850's, when the rabbis and other religious leaders of the island community were quite prolific, were issued over the imprint of the DeCordova family firm; unfortunately, no further manuscripts by the Haham were printed. Thus, they fell victim to the inevitable loss which recurrent Kingston fires, floods, and earthquakes have brought to so many of the island's records.

GRAVE AND SATURNINE

The Haham Joshua Hezekiah DeCordova — the Sephardim called him Haham Jesuah Hizquiau DeCordova, and he signed himself, in an advertisement for a runaway slave, Haham Jeossuha His. DeCordova — was born in Amsterdam in 1720.²⁰ He was educated in the communal schools and then continued his studies in the famed Etz Hayim Yeshibah, while at the same time developing his competence in such secular subjects as mathematics and Latin. For a

dent of the Jewish and General Literary and Scientific Society of Kingston. Andrade, *op. cit.*, pp. 175-76; *Jewish Chronicle* (London), II, Jan. 23, 1846; Feb. 6, 1846. It was probably from the Haham's son, then 78 years old, that Dr. Ashenheim and the Rev. Nathan obtained these manuscripts.

¹⁸ Pp. 49-56.

¹⁹ P. 133.

²⁰ *Royal Gazette*, Dec. 15, 1792. Biographical data are derived from *The Columbian Magazine, or Monthly Miscellany* (Kingston), Oct., 1797, pp. 267-71; Dr. Isaac S. Emmanuel's as yet unpublished *History of the Netherlands Antilles*, Chapter Eleven, generously provided by its unselfish author prior to its publication; Andrade, *op. cit.*, pp. 43, 202, 281.

time he served as preacher and teacher in the Talmud Torah Congregation of his native community; a sermon which he preached on *Shabbat BaMidbar* in 1744 was so well received that it was deemed worthy of publication by the congregation.²¹ He was called to Curaçao in 1749, where he served under Haham Samuel Mendes de Sola. His duties in Curaçao's Mikveh Israel Congregation consisted of teaching Rashi, Talmud, and the Bible in Ladino translation, and of preaching at services. At least one of his Curaçao sermons has been preserved in manuscript in the Montezinos Library in Amsterdam, *Sermão pregado por R. Ieosuah de Cordova Em 11. Adar Risson 5513*. [1753] *dia instituido de Jejum & Rogativas na Ilha de Curaçao*, delivered on a day of official mourning.²² His salary was 240 pesos a year. The additional responsibility of keeping the accounts of the congregation, which he assumed later, increased his annual salary to 490 pesos. He may also have acted as bookkeeper to a merchant of the community in order to improve his material condition. Although, according to Dr. Isaac S. Emmanuel, there is no record in the Curaçao congregational archives of his marriage while he served there, an extensive biographical sketch which was published in the Kingston *Columbian Magazine* by Isaac Dias Fernandes²³ indicates that the rabbi had married while in Curaçao, but that this first wife died shortly after his removal to Jamaica, in June, 1755, to accept the invitation of the Kingston community to become its Haham. From then until his death on October 2, 1797, he was the religious leader and servant of the Jews of Jamaica. His tombstone describes him as "Reverendisimo Insigne . . . Venerado," the haham of three congregations, "K.K. Shehar Ashamaim em Kingston

²¹ M. Kayserling, *Biblioteca Española-Portuguesa-Judaica* (Strasbourg, 1890), p. 39.

²² Cardozo de Bethencourt, "Notes on the Spanish and Portuguese Jews in the United States, Guiana, and the Dutch and British West Indies during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *PAJHS*, XX (1925), 123. Curiously, de Bethencourt does not connect the preacher with the later Haham of Jamaica, whom he mistakenly names as "Isaac d'Abraham de Cordova," who, he says, left Amsterdam for Jamaica in 1771 (p. 36). But this Isaac, as we have indicated, may have been a brother to the Haham.

²³ While the sketch was published anonymously, *The First Fruits of the West*, No. 2, p. 49, asserts that Isaac Dias Fernandes, a member of the family which produced Grace Aguilar, was its author. This information, too, must have come from members of the DeCordova family.

...K.K. Nevé Shalom em Spanish Town...K.K. Nevé Sedek em Porto Rial na Ilha de Jamaica."²⁴

Fernandes' sketch is remarkably frank: he refers to the Haham's dry, immature views on subjects which he had not studied; his mediocre preaching; his harsh voice; his awkward pulpit manner; his "wretchedly defective" style; his argumentative nature; his refusal to exercise; his rejection of medication. One would almost think this was an attack rather than a eulogy. Yet there is also some praise: for the Haham's erudition; his assiduous devotion to study; his remarkable self-education in the English language; the subject matter of his preaching; a manuscript on the book of Job — "the best work by far he ever wrote"; his remarkable fund of scientific knowledge.²⁵ This unusual character sketch of the Jewish divine, couched in surprisingly realistic language, is coupled with an equally astringent physical description of the Haham: "In stature Mr. De-Cordova was much below the middle size, inclined to corpulency; particularly as he advanced in years. His person was however venerable; but his eyes, far from being lively and piercing, were dull and void of animation. He had a truly grave, saturnine look; and his step was remarkably slow & solemn." But perhaps there was some nastiness as well as truth in Fernandes' evaluation of the Haham, for when forty-two leading citizens of Kingston formed "The European Club," a social-literary society, among the ten Jews who were invited to join was the Haham — but not Fernandes.²⁶ It may also be instructive to note that, while two other members of the Dias Fernandes family — Solomon and Daniel — were among the subscribers to *Reason and Faith*, Isaac was not.²⁷ The truth is that the Haham's homiletical and philosophical style is quite char-

²⁴ *Royal Gazette*, Oct. 7, 1797; *Spectator* (New York), Dec. 7, 1797; Andrade, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

²⁵ Fernandes mentions the Haham's sermon on "the tremendous earthquake with which we were visited in 1766; in my judgment the best he ever preached... the only sermon of his which I believe was ever printed." If Fernandes' recollection was accurate, was this the sermon to which Rabbi Lewin referred in *The Guide*, or had Lewin seen a copy of the old 1744 Amsterdam sermon? If the former rather than the latter, perhaps there is somewhere a copy of a far earlier Jamaican Jewish imprint than *Reason and Faith*.

²⁶ *Kingston Journal*, April 14, 1787.

²⁷ Kingston edition, p. viii.

acteristic of the time, and that his writing does not reflect discredit upon either his learning or his views. So poor a volume as Fernandes thought *Reason and Faith* to be would hardly have been reprinted twice in the United States.

The earliest contact of the DeCordova family with the North American mainland, whither so many of its members eventually went to live, was when the Haham wrote to the authorities of Shearith Israel in New York City, on December 8, 1758, urging stricter supervision and certification of kosher meat sent by the congregation to Jamaica.²⁸

PROGENITORS AND PRINTERS

Some latter-day members of the DeCordova family, it seems, have wanted to believe that their line goes back to noble Spanish ancestors. In its Centenary Issue, the *Daily Gleaner* of September 13, 1934, printed an article headlined, "The Story of Don Fernando Melgarejo deCordova, a Governor during Spanish Occupation from whom Descend the deCordovas of the Gleaner."²⁹ The anonymous writer depicts the career of the Spanish Governor from 1596 to 1606 and calls him "the progenitor of the family who started the Gleaner," but fails to indicate the connection between Don Fernando and the Jamaican deCordovas. James Day writes of General Gonzalvo deCordova as the ancestor of the family, but he, too, does not attempt to trace the genealogy.³⁰

²⁸ The Haham's letter is translated in *PAJHS*, XXVII (1920), 12-13. The original Portuguese letter is in the *AJHS* Library. *PAJHS*, XXI (1913), 77-78, prints the answers from the Shearith Israel officers.

²⁹ P. 10.

³⁰ *Jacob de Cordova*, p. 1. According to Sir Neville Noel Ashenheim, the present Jamaican Ambassador to the United States, and a great-grandson of Dr. Lewis Ashenheim and Eliza DeCordova, in a letter to the writer dated April 18, 1963, Julian DeCordova, founder of the DeCordova Museum in Lincoln, Mass., "claimed to have traced his direct descent from Gonzalvo and to have established that he was the true heir to Gonzalvo's title . . ." The Museum authorities know nothing of the records which their founder was supposed to have assembled, and he had no children who might have preserved them. So eager was Joshua R. DeCordova (d. 1843) to claim this military leader as his ancestor that he named one of his sons Gonzalvo! But the child lived only five months and 20 days in 1829, so he was spared having to bear that name into maturity; he is buried in Kingston's Orange Street Cemetery, Row 14, No. 387 (Bennett-Wright mss. transcriptions).

Until someone can investigate the records of the deCordova family or families in Spain, however, such claims as these must be regarded as unproved. Far better clues to the family's origins are to be found in the records of the Jewish community of Amsterdam, where the Haham was born in 1720. So far as can now be ascertained, the earliest member of the DeCordova family to reach Amsterdam was Moses Raphael ben Isaac DeCordova, who came to Holland from Constantinople before 1641-1642 and died in the Dutch city in 1649.³¹ The family may have carried the additional name of "Kuzin," a fairly common Sephardic — but not Marrano — name in Venice and Salonica. To determine whether "Kuzin" was the family's original name, and the name "DeCordova" was adopted after its departure from Spain, or whether only one member of the family married a member of the Kuzin family, would require far more investigation than this writer has been able to undertake.³² Moses Raphael was a typographer of whose work little is known; his son, Jacob Hayim ben Moses Raphael DeCordova, spent some time in Dutch Brazil and may have been the first Jewish compositor, known to us by name, in America; but whether he practiced his craft in Brazil is not known.³³ From 1662 until 1703, he was active in the printing trade in Amsterdam and in Wilmersdorf, working as

³¹ M. Steinschneider, *Catalogus Librorum Hebraeorum in Bibliotheca Bodleiana* (Berlin, 1852-1860), II, No. 7960; *Jewish Encyclopedia* [JE] (New York, 1906), XII, 310; J. Meijer, *Encyclopaedia Sefardica Neerlandica* [ESN] (Amsterdam, 1948), I, 187. Dr. Emmanuel informs me that DeCordova family descendants still live in Constantinople (Istanbul) today.

³² ESN, I, 153; letter to the writer from Cecil Roth, Oxford, May 3, 1963. That there was a printer named Fernandez DeCordova in Valladolid in 1555 presents an attractive suggestion for the family's origins; but this would be meaningless if Kuzin or Cusin was the original family name.

³³ ESN, I, 153, and M. M. Kleerkooper and W. P. Van Stockum, Jr., *De Boekhandel Te Amsterdam Voornamelijk In De 17^e Eeuw* ('S-Gravenhage, 1914-1916), II, 1234-35, assert that it was Jacob's son Isaac who was in Brazil, rather than Jacob himself. Kayserling, *op. cit.*, p. 39, and Cecil Roth, *A Life of Menasseh Ben Israel* (Philadelphia, 1934), p. 80, refer to Jacob as having sojourned in Brazil. Unfortunately, neither Jacob's nor Isaac's name occurs in the published lists of Brazilian Jews in Arnold Wiznitzer, *The Records of the Earliest Jewish Community in the New World* (New York, 1954), and Isaac S. Emmanuel, "Seventeenth-Century Brazilian Jewry: A Critical Review," *American Jewish Archives*, XIV (1962), 32-68. A comparison of the dates of Jacob's and Isaac's vocational activity leads the writer to believe that it was Jacob who had been in Brazil, since he is documented as being a wage-earning adult in 1662, whereas his son Isaac does not appear in the records until 1688.

a compositor for other printers (including the well-known rabbi, author, and visionary Manasseh ben Israel, and the Athias and Castro firms). He also published a number of works over his own imprint, such as the Spanish translation of and commentary on the Pentateuch by Isaac Aboab da Fonseca (1681), who had also been in Brazil; the first volume of sermons delivered in London to appear in printed form, *Discursos Predycaveys Que o Docto Haham Yeosuah da Silva* (1688); and a historical volume by Daniel Levi de Barrios (1689).³⁴ Jacob died either in 1712 or in 1714.³⁵

Jacob's sons, Isaac Hezekiah ben Jacob Hayim DeCordova and Abraham ben Jacob Hayim DeCordova, seem to have followed naturally in their father's footsteps. Isaac (or Yshak, as he printed his name on his title pages) published far more volumes over his own name than any other member of the family. The bibliographers have located about twenty volumes in Hebrew, Spanish, and German bearing his imprint from about 1688 to 1726, including prayer books, various tractates of the Talmud, other rabbinic works, sermons (at least two delivered by the Haham de Sola under whom Joshua Hezekiah was to serve), and a Pentateuch in Spanish. His entire career was pursued in Amsterdam, with the exception of a hiatus from 1710 to 1714, when he worked in Hamburg.³⁶ This Isaac was probably identical with the Isacque de Jacob Haim Cordova who married Rahel de Jacob Dias Arias in the Bevis Marks synagogue in London on the seventh of Nisan, 5462 (1702).³⁷ His brother, Abraham ben Jacob DeCordova, was apparently less ambitious, or at any rate less successful; he worked for Isaac in 1706-1708

³⁴ Cecil Roth, *op. cit.*; *JE, op. cit.*; M. Steinschneider, *op. cit.*, II, No. 7961. The catalogues of the firm of A. Rosenthal, Ltd., Oxford, England, have been extremely valuable sources for the writer's research. Jacob Hayim's imprints are included in the Rosenthal Catalogues 48 (no. 177); 52 (no. 2628); and 61 (no. 1030, illustrated on p. 48).

³⁵ *ESN*, I, 192, gives 1714 as the date; Isidore Harris, "A Dutch Burial-Ground and its English Connections," *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England*, VII (1915), 137, gives 1712.

³⁶ Steinschneider, *op. cit.*, II, No. 7963; Rosenthal Catalogue 12 (nos. 1152, 1153, 1630, 1632, 1689, 1702, 1703); *ESN*, I, pp. 153-55; Kleerkooper-Van Stockum, *op. cit.*

³⁷ Lionel D. Barnett, ed., *Bevis Marks Records; Being Contributions to the History of the Spanish and Portuguese Congregation of London; Part II, Abstracts of the Ketubot or Marriage-Contracts of the Congregation* (Oxford, 1949), p. 66.

after five years with the printing house of M. Mendez.³⁸ Little else is known about Abraham, who was, in all likelihood, the father of the Haham. The evidence is just short of conclusive: 1) Dr. Isaac S. Emmanuel recalls some reference to Abraham as the father of the Haham in the records of Curaçao Jewry which he has thus far been unable to pinpoint for me. 2) The Haham named his son Abraham, following thereby the hallowed Jewish tradition of giving the name of a deceased parent to a child. An Abraham DeCordova died on April 3, 1776, and is buried in the old Kingston cemetery at the corner of Church and North Streets, according to the Barnett-Wright transcriptions; this may well have been a small child of the Haham's who died before the surviving "only son" Abraham was born — namely on August 11, 1766, or it may have been a child of another one of the DeCordova brothers in Jamaica. 3) The Haham may have been giving a broad hint of his identity when he decided to describe the *Reason and Faith* volume as having been written by "one of the sons of Abraham." 4) If we accept Phineas DeCordova's testimony that the only members of the DeCordova family to come to Jamaica were the Haham's brothers and sister, the father's name is actually recorded as Abraham in the record of the emigration of Isaac D'Abraham DeCordova from Amsterdam to Jamaica. It may be that somewhere in the massive Sephardic records in Amsterdam there is a definitive statement establishing without question the name of the Haham's father. But whether it was Abraham or Isaac, both made their livelihood in the printing trade.

And is it unreasonable to surmise that the Haham remembered his family's devotion to the art of printing, and transmitted it to his descendants? It would be stretching coincidence too far to imagine that there was no connection between the eighty-five years — 1641 to 1726 — during which the DeCordovas had supported themselves as printers and the day when Jacob DeCordova and his brother Joshua established the *Daily Gleaner* newspaper and printing business which has played so significant a role in the cultural, political, and economic life of the island of Jamaica whose Jewish community the Haham served as spiritual leader two centuries ago.

³⁸ Steinschneider, *op. cit.*, II, No. 7962.