

The Honen Daliem Congregation of St. Eustatius

JOHN HARTOG

"Statia" — St. Eustatius — is a small island, part of the Netherlands Antilles, in the northern reaches of the Caribbean Sea. The island enjoys a certain fame in the United States, because in 1776 the cannon of "Statia"'s Fort Orange fired off a salute to the Great Union Flag, the predecessor of the Stars and Stripes. It was the second time that the fort of a foreign power had saluted the flag of the new North American nation; a few weeks before Governor Johannes de Graaff of St. Eustatius ordered the Great Union Flag to be greeted, a similar salute took place on the island of St. Croix, which was then a Danish dependency. There was, however, a difference, for it was a merchantman flying the Great Union Flag that the Danes had saluted, while the Dutch on St. Eustatius greeted a vessel belonging to the navy of the new United States.

A visitor to present-day St. Eustatius will find no Jewish community on the island, but during the years of the American Revolution, "Statia" sheltered a flourishing Jewish congregation, called "Honen Daliem," which means: He who shows mercy to the poor. When Jews first settled on St. Eustatius, we cannot say, but we do know that, of the many Jews who left Dutch Brazil after the Portuguese reconquest of 1654, several came, via Amsterdam, to the Caribbean area. Some probably settled on St. Eustatius, and there are records which indicate that the Amsterdam Jew Jacob Loew had relatives on the island.¹ Later, in 1711, two Jewish merchants,

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¹ Isaac S. Emmanuel, "New Light on Early American Jewry," *American Jewish Archives*, VII (1955), 1.

Juda Obediente and Salomon Nunez Netto, visited "Statia," though they did not live there.² The registrar's lists and the parish registers suggest that, in 1722, St. Eustatius had 1,204 inhabitants, of which four families — twenty-two persons — were Jewish. Six of the Jews were adult men, five were adult women, and there were five boys and six girls. Though these four families were not poor — they had, respectively, three, seven, four, and two slaves — they certainly possessed no great wealth.³

In 1730, the parnasim of the Jewish congregation in Amsterdam requested equal rights for the Jews who were settling on St. Eustatius — which gives us reason to believe that a significant immigration of Jews had taken place even before that year. Apparently, the immigrants were a rather contentious lot, because a letter which Everard Raecx, the commander, or administrateur, of St. Eustatius, wrote on September 18, 1730, reveals that he had found it necessary to ameliorate conflicts among the few Jews on the island.

There were several periods of immigration after 1730. Usually, the Jews were individual immigrants, and their numbers were not very large, but there was a steady flow of immigrant Jews, and the settlement increased. Most of the Jews came from Amsterdam, and distinguished names were often to be found among them. In 1768, for example, Joseph d'Ishac Mesquita de Lima settled on St. Eustatius; Joseph Baesa was there in 1771, David d'Isaac Preto Henriquez in 1772, and Samuel d'Isaac Mendes Balboa in 1774.⁴ In 1737, the Statian Jews sought permission to build a synagogue, and their petition was granted two years later, though the Dutch authorities saw to it that the synagogue would be situated so that "the divine service of the Jews would not hinder the one of the

² Indictment of Noël and Johanna Clinet, Dec. 29, 1711; Testimony of Two Jews, Curaçao, Jan. 24, 1714 (State Archives, The Hague, folio 414).

³ Letter, Chamber of Amsterdam to Gov. Everard Raecx, Sept. 18, 1730 (State Archives [W. I. Comp. 473]).

⁴ *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society [PAJHS]*, XXIX (1925), 38; according to *PAJHS*, XLIV (1954-55), 116, there were in 1810 on the island of St. Thomas nine Jewish families and, in 1803, thirty-two families, "who arrived from Europe, St. Eustatius, and Curaçao." The emigration of Jews from St. Eustatius probably took place around 1800.

Christians.”⁵ The synagogue was constructed on the site where present-day visitors still find the ruins of the house of prayer in the center of Oranjestad, the capital of St. Eustatius. Built of yellow bricks, the building measures 12.75 meters by 8.50 meters and is situated on a street known to this day as “Synagogue Pad” — Synagogue Path. The walls of the synagogue are about 60 centimeters thick and some 7 meters high; the floor and roof have disappeared, but a flight of stairs leads one to conclude that the synagogue was a two-storied building. Elsewhere on the island is the Jewish cemetery, in which sixteen beautifully carved tombstones have been preserved.

Most of the Jews settling on St. Eustatius were Sephardim, people of Iberian ancestry. The year in which they founded Congregation Honen Daliem remains unknown, but the *Memorias Curiel* in the archives of Curaçao’s Congregation Mikvé Israel⁶ indicates that, in 1738, a certain Salomon de Leon, acting in the name of the Statian congregation, appealed to the Curaçaoans for help in building the synagogue. A collection was held in the Curaçao community for that purpose, and money was sent to St. Eustatius. The Statians were apparently not well-off; their community was, of course, much smaller than the Curaçao community, and it appears, in fact, that the Statians relied heavily on their Curaçao coreligionists, because several letters are extant to prove that the Curaçao Jews supported the Statians. In 1762, for instance, Ishac Diaz Delgado and Samuel Hoheb, Jr., thanked Mikvé Israel for a remittance of 300 pesos, and in 1772, after a hurricane had damaged the Statian synagogue, the parnasim of Honen Daliem, David Furtado and Judah Benjamin, together with the congregation’s treasurer, Samson Mears, wrote that they had started the repairs and reconstruction of the synagogue and that the damages were estimated at about 5,500 pesos. The Curaçao congregation helped then, too.⁷

⁵ Letters, Chamber of Amsterdam to Gov. I. Faesch, Feb. 23, 1737, and Nov. 21, 1739. A letter from Gov. Faesch, dated July 9, 1738, indicates that the synagogue had not yet been built (State Archives, The Hague, 341 — W. I. Comp. 474).

⁶ *Memorias Curiel*, manuscript in the archives of Mikvé Israel, Curaçao.

⁷ Letters in the archives of Mikvé Israel, Curaçao.

Honen Daliem, however, maintained a correspondence not only with its sister congregation on Curaçao, but also with the Shearith Israel congregation in New York City. After the hurricane of 1772, the Statians seem also to have petitioned help from New York, for the same parnasim addressed a letter of gratitude to Shearith Israel for having sent them £38.10.6. Still, it is worth noting that, where the Statians could help others less fortunate than themselves, they did not hesitate to do so. In January, 1775, for instance, when a Scottish lady visited St. Eustatius, she remarked that she had met there two Inquisitional victims whom the Statian Jews had received warmly and affectionately.⁸

We know that, on Curaçao, by far most of the Jews were Sephardim, though there were also a few Ashkenazim — Jews of Central and East European background — there. On St. Eustatius, too, Sephardim predominated, but there were many more Ashkenazim there than was the case on Curaçao. Indeed, there were enough Ashkenazim on “Statia” for conflicts to trouble the relations between the two groups. The friction between Sephardim and Ashkenazim came repeatedly to a boiling point, and it happened more than once that the government had to be called in to help settle disputes. In 1760, however, after some years of such difficulties, Governor Jan de Windt appointed a commission to draw up communal regulations — *ascamoth* — and this appears to have helped, for we hear of no conflicts in later years.⁹

The social status of the Statian Jews was, it appears, not on a par with that of their Curaçaoan coreligionists. On Curaçao, the Jews formed a separate corps of the Civil Guard, whereas on St. Eustatius, they were not allowed to be members of the Guard. On the other hand, the Statian Jews did take part in elections for members of the Council.

How many Jews did St. Eustatius shelter at her apogee? We get an idea of this from the story of British Admiral George B.

⁸ N. Taylor Phillips, “Items Relating to the History of the Jews of New York,” *PAJHS*, XI (1903), 150–51. See also Janet Schaw, *Journal of a Lady of Quality*, edited by E. W. and C. M. Andrews (New Haven, 1921).

⁹ Letter, Chamber of Amsterdam to Gov. Jan de Windt, Dec. 19, 1760 (State Archives, The Hague, 342 — W. I. Comp. 475).

Rodney's occupation of the island in 1781.¹⁰ On February 13, 1781, Rodney ordered all male Jews to appear at the city weigh house, which at the time was being used as a guard house. On the set day, 101 male Jews appeared. They were searched, and the money and valuables which they carried — some 8,000 pounds sterling, all told — were confiscated. So badly mistreated were they by Rodney's men that, during the search, the English even tore out the lining of their victims' coats. Ultimately, thirty Jews were banished from "Statia" and found sanctuary on the neighboring English island of St. Kitts, whose Assembly "to their great honor passed an act for their present relief and future provision until they should have time to recover from their calamitous situation."¹¹ The other seventy-one Jews were held in custody for three days, and then sent home to watch the sale of their properties. Interestingly enough, several cases concerned Jews who, before they came to St. Eustatius, had served the English. The Jewish tea-merchant Pollock, for example, had previously served the English so well that they even granted him lands on Long Island. He was, nevertheless, so roughly used by Rodney on St. Eustatius that he and others — Samuel Hoheb, among them — petitioned Parliament, which led to an investigation. The subsequent events of Rodney's occupation may be left to other writers, however. What concerns us most in this instance is the Jewish community. As we have seen, 101 male Jews had assembled at the weigh house. According to Rodney's order, no women or children were required to present themselves, so that one is inclined to consider the 101 persons at the weigh house as heads of families. The Statian congregation must, therefore, have been by then quite a sizable one.

No records are extant as to what happened to the thirty deportees; we cannot determine where they finally went or whether they ever returned to their homes on St. Eustatius following the

¹⁰ T. C. Hansard, ed., *The Parliamentary History of England from the Earliest Period to the Year 1803* (London, 1814), XXII, 218: debate about the persecution of the Jews; petition of Samuel Hoheb, in Hansard, p. 1023. See also two Dutch-language sources about the fate of St. Eustatius and the Jews: *Nieuwe Nederlandsche Jaerboeken* (1781), XVI (2), 784, and H. Gartman, ed., *Engelsche Tyranny* (Amsterdam, 1781), pp. 96-98 (pamphlet).

¹¹ *PAJHS*, XI (1903), 152.

short-lived English occupation. Whatever the case with these unfortunates, Congregation Honen Daliem survived the ordeal, as we know from a letter which Moses de Fonseca, a Statian Jew, directed to the board of Mikvé Israel on Curaçao concerning various affairs. In short, Rodney's attack on the island turned out to be no more than an episode, and prosperity returned to "Statia" as soon as her English occupiers had left. Around 1790, the island was supporting many mercantile firms, both large and small, and we find 157 Jews registered that year as residents of St. Eustatius.

The congregation had no qualified rabbi, but was served by a hazzan, Jacob Robles, the first Statian congregational functionary to be known by name.¹² When Robles died in 1792, Eliau de Pinna, who failed to mention his own position in the community, besought the Curaçaoans to find a successor. De Pinna did, however, declare in his letter that he was sending his request "*por ordem do señores do Mahamad*" — in the name of Honen Daliem. Who succeeded Robles as hazzan cannot be determined. Indeed, there are no records to show that he had any successor at all. After the year 1795, the situation on St. Eustatius changed for the worse, and most of the Statian Jews left.

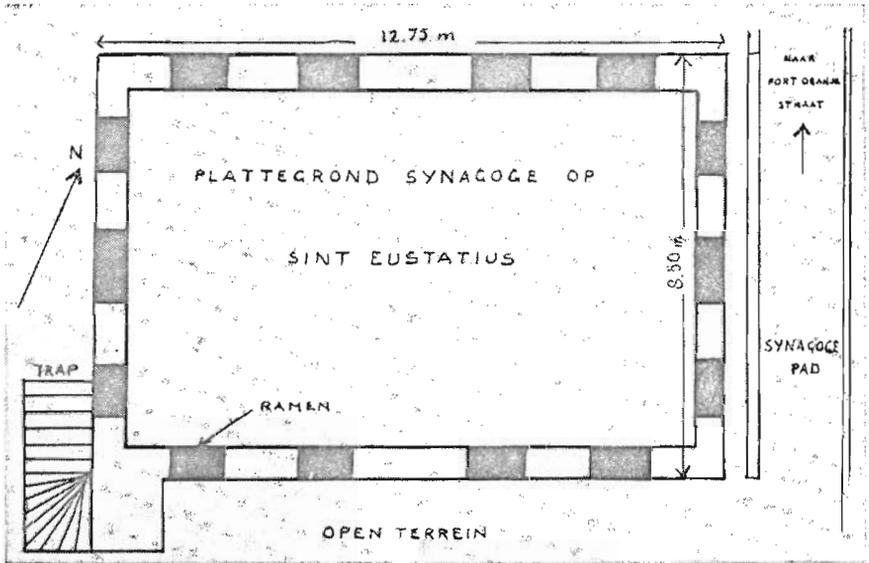
What happened after 1795 was a period of utter confusion due to French and English occupation. Little is known of those years, but St. Eustatius was not restored to the Kingdom of the Netherlands until 1816. A census showed in 1818 that there were only five Jews left on St. Eustatius and only one on St. Martin.¹³ By 1837, St. Martin had seen her sole surviving Jewish settler go the way of all flesh, and by then, too, four of the remaining Statian Jews had died. Only one Jew still lived on St. Eustatius — Mrs.

¹² Archives, Mikvé Israel, Curaçao.

¹³ We know, for sure, that there must have been a small Jewish community on St. Martin during some part of the eighteenth century. In 1778, Jacob Diaz Delgado swore on the Books of Moses in a lawsuit (Letter, Commander Abraham Heyliger, of St. Martin, to the Board of the West India Company, Feb. 5, 1778 [State Archives, The Hague, W. I. Comp., book 5, fol. 424-44]). From a later traveler, Marten D. Teenstra, we know that, "at the East end of the Backstreet, to the South," there was even a synagogue, but when Teenstra came to St. Martin during the 1820's, he found the building in ruins. Marten D. Teenstra, *De Nederl. Westindische Eilanden* (Amsterdam, 1837).

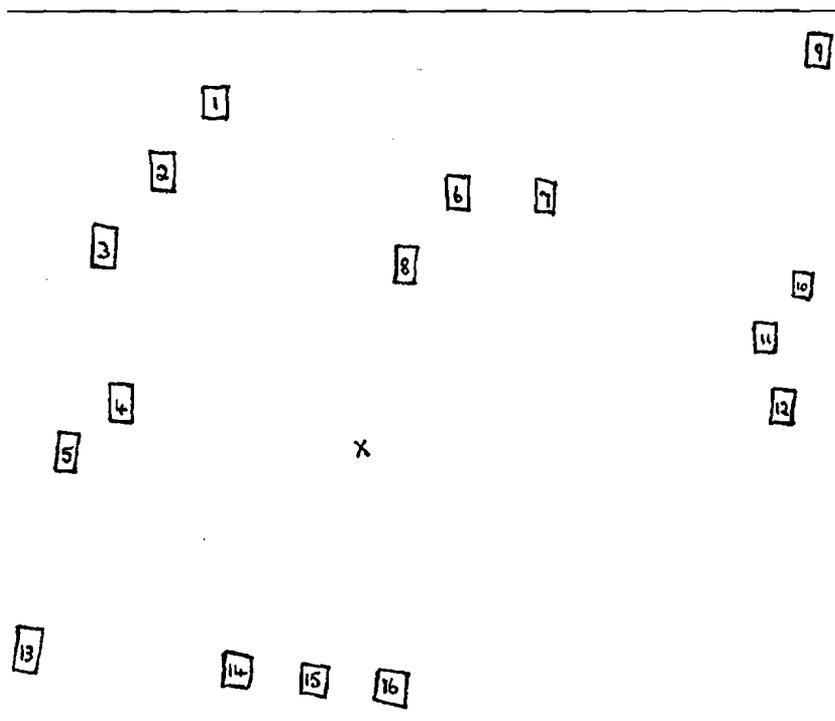
Anna Vieira de Molina, a widow of Surinamese birth — and with her death in 1846 Jewish history came to an end on St. Eustatius.¹⁴

FLOOR PLAN OF THE SYNAGOGUE



¹⁴ J. de Hullu, *St. Eustatius in 1819*, reply to the questionnaire of the Director-General of the Colonies of 1815, published in *Bijdragen tot de land- en volkenkunde van Ned. Indië* (1913), p. 432; and *St. Martin en Sabaomstreeks 1818*, reply to the same questionnaire, published in *De Indische Gids* (1916), p. 203. Journal of the lieutenant governor of St. Eustatius, 1846 (Government Archives, Curaçao).

PLAN OF CEMETERY



Numbers marked here correspond to the description of stone attached.

This is only a rough map, and is NOT to scale. The numbers are my invention (RJW) and are purely arbitrary.

× marks a broken inscription, which may not belong to this cemetery. The words on it are:

emory of
 MRS
 NNAH MEARS
 WIFE OF MR.
 SAMSON MEARS
 WHO DEPARTED THIS
 LIFE JAN^{RY} THE 18th
 AD 1768 AGED 44 YEARS.

STONE NO. 1.

SA.

DA B.A. JAEL HOHEB

F^o EM 2 KISLEV

5538

S. A. G. D. G.

STONE NO. 2.

ריעמר [ריעמד]

ריהי קרל השופה [sic - ויהי קול השופר?]]

[THERE IS HERE A PICTURE
OF A MAN, & UNDERNEATH
TWO TABLETS. ON THE [הה?] קה קיים
FIRST ARE THE ROMAN
NUMERALS I TO V & ON
THE SECOND VI TO X]

ומשה עלה אל האלהים [ם]

מצבת

קבורת איש תלך [הלך?] תמים ופעל צדק הה החכם
המשפיל ונבק מורה ריך [דרך?] החסיד ועניו הישיש הנלבר [הנכבר]
הגביר הנעלה פינחס משה בר יהודה נע אב היה
לאבי תים [יתומים?] ולכ [לב] אלמנה הרניף [הרניף?] תמלים [הציל?] עני משוע
ויתום ולא עוזר לו מנתא [מידת?] היה לקהילת[גו] וכה
לומילות [לגמילות] חסדים ולהכנסת אורתים [אורחים] קבע עתים
לתורת [לתורה] גשא ונתן באמונה ציפה לישועה והקרן
קיימת לו לעולם הבא נלע בן סב שנים ושבע
חדשים בכב לחדש תמוז שנת התקמט ליצרה

תנצבה

Here lieth the remains of Mr. Solomon Levy who was a bright example to Virtue a loving Hosband Father to M^r ? mankind he departed this life belovd and lamented by all who knew him 16 of July 1789 Aged 62 years & 7 mo.

STONE NO. 3.

ויעקב הלך לדרכו ויפגעו בו מלאכי ענים [אלהים]

S E P U L T U R A .

DO.

BEM AVENTURADO
 AMASQUIL VENABON
 AGUEBIR ANEHELA
 NEHIM ZEMIROTH
 BEJISRAEL JAHACOB
 HISQUIAO ROBLES
 FALECEÕDA DA IDADE
 DE 40 ANNOS SERVINDO
 O CARGO DE
 HAZAN N'ESTA ILHA
 ST. EUSTATIUS
 EM 2 TEBET ANNO 5551.
 QUE CORRESPONDE
 28 DEZEMBRO 1791

תוצבה

STONE NO. 4.

HERE LIES
 interd the remains of
 MOSES WAAG
 Born 11 May 1758
 and departed this life
 On the 25 Febr. 1825
 Sacred to whose memory
 His beloved and affectionate
 Wife hath placed this
 STONE.

STONE NO. 5.

מצבה

קבורת הבחור [הבחור] הנתמד
 [הנהמד]
 תיים [חיים] די ליאון גלע ביום
 א גירב [ערב] יום הכיפורים
 שנת תקמו לפק היה [היה]
 תס [תם] וישר וירא [א]להים סר
 מרע ומכבד את אביו
 ואת אמו על כן היה [היה]
 נאהב מכל יודעיו ויהי ימי
 חייו תשע עשרה שנה
 תנצבה

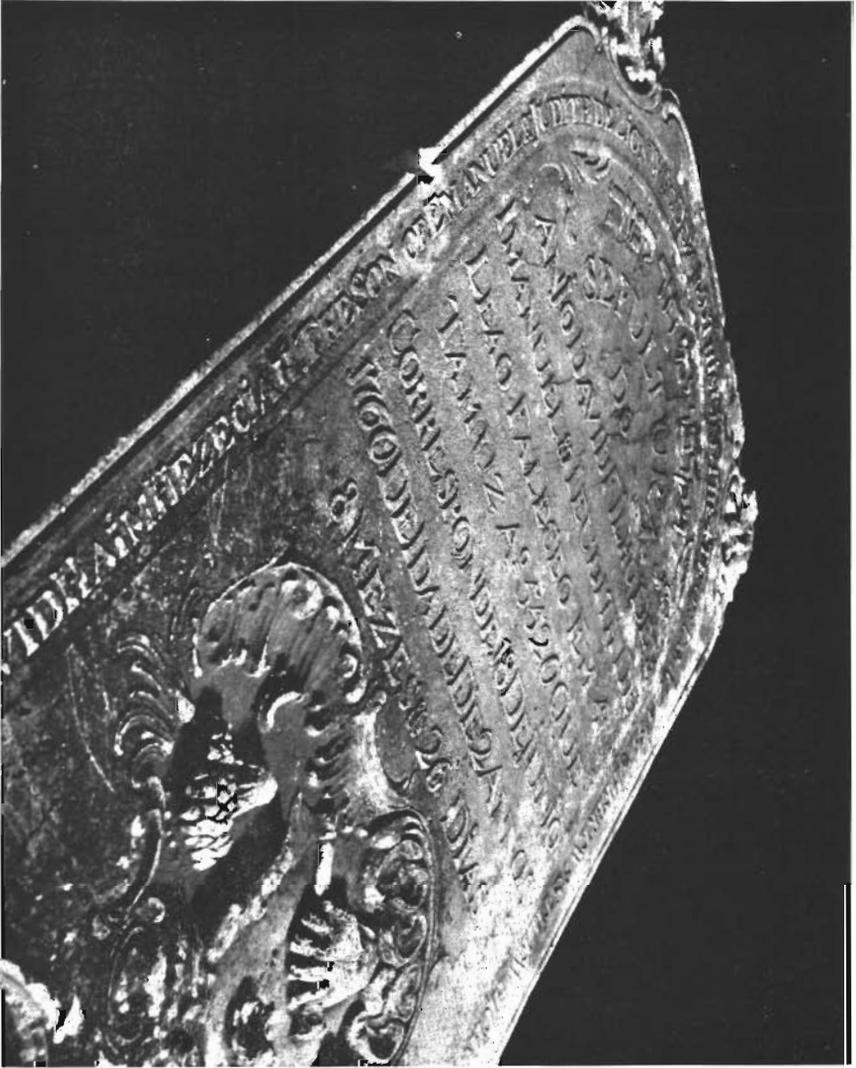
Here lye the Remains of the
 Worthy youth Haim de Leon
 who departed this life on
 Sunday being the Eve of the
 Grand Day of Atonement in
 the year 5547 of the Creation
 which answers to the day
 of October Anno 1787 he was
 for his Virtues his fear of
 God Obedience to his Parents
 & fair dealings with all
 Mankind beloved by every
 one who had the Pleasure
 of his acquaintance he was
 snatched from this troublesome
 World to enjoy Eternal bliss
 at the Age of Nineteen.*

* On the stone, the English appears below the Hebrew.



Courtesy, Dr. John Hartog, Aruba, N.A.

The ruins of the eighteenth-century synagogue
on St. Eustatius



Courtesy, Dr. John Hartog, Aruba, N.A.

A tombstone, dated 1760, in the
old Jewish cemetery on St. Eustatius

STONE NO. 6.

מצבת

קבורת המאושרת הזקנה
 והנכבדת מרת חנה די ליאון
 אלמנת הגביר פיליפ בנימין זל
 אשר בחיים חיתה היתה
 רופאה בקיאה ומילדת מומחית
 ויהללו בשערים מעשיה
 נפטרה בת שמונה וששים שנים
 ה' לחדש אדר ראשון בשנת
 התקמ"ז שהוא ז' פברוייר משות
 אתשפג לחשבון הנוצרים

* * * * *

תוצבה

STONE NO. 7.

ויקרבו ימי דוד למות

SEPULTURA

DO

ANJO DAVID FILHO DE
 IMANUEL & IEUDITH DE
 LEAO FALECEO EM 4
 TAMUZ A° 5520 QUE
 CORRESPONDE 18 DE JUNIO
 1760 DE IDADE DE 2 ANNOS
 8 MEZES & 26 DIAS

HERE LYETH & ENTERED THE BODY OF DAVID HAIM HEZECIAH THE
 SON OF EMMANUEL & JUDITH DE LION WHO DEPARTED THIS LIFE
 THE 4TE OF TAMUZA 5520 HEBREWS STILE WHICH CORRESPONDS
 THE 18TH JUNE 1760 AGED 2 YEARS 8 MONTHS 26 DAYS.

STONE NO. 8.

וייעא [ישא] אברהם [ם] את עצ [עיניו] וירא ית [את] המק[ו]ם

DO BEM AVENTURADO E, VIRTUOZO
ABRAHAM HISQUIAU DE LA MOTTA
Fº EM 6 YIAR Aº 5502
QUE CORRESPONDE A 10 MAYO Aº 1742.

STONE NO. 9.

ויהי יוסף כן [יוסף בן] ששים
שנים בלכתו לחיי
שלמים [עולמים?] יוס [יום] א טו לאייר
שנת התקכא אהביו
ורעיו בגדו בדאותם
יוסף סוף ימיו קנה
שם מאבותם
תוצבה

Prosecuted All His Days
Enveyed[?] to the Grave
Inspite of False Friends
Is Raised Bi the Brave
Joseph Buzaglo de Pazo
Aged 60 years May 15 1761.

STONE NO. 10.

וישכב דוד עב [עם] אבותיו

פנ

דודש [דורש] ומבקש היה לחסד ואמת
 רב מתים היה גמל חסד ואמד [ואמת]
 דבר פיו היה ישר ואמת
 כל מעשיו היה עושה בכושי [בכושר?]
 בה היה דבק נפשי ביישר [נפשו ביושר?]
 היה מתגבר כארי וקל כושר [כנשר?]
 במצותיו היה מתגבר ינערץ [ונערץ?]
 גופו שוכן בקדושים אשר המה בארץ
 ונשמתו בן עזן מאירה מפז ומחרץ
 הה כהד [כהר?] דוד בן המענקי? [לני [עני?] פרעגור?]
 מאמשטרים [מאמשטרדם?] נפטר ביום הג ניסן
 ונקבר למחרתו ביס [ביום] ו עשק ד ניסן [ניסן]

תקל

....

תנצבה

STONE NO. 11.

SA

DOBEMAVENTURADO ABRAHAM RODRIGUES
 HENRIQUES FALESEO EM2 KISLEU
 A° 5532 QUE CONKE PONDE A8
 NOVEMBRO 1771

תנצבה

STONE NO. 12.

[פן]ג

תנולד [הילד?] שמואל מן [בן] שלמה
 בכרך גפטר ונקבר יום [יום] ג טו
 תמוז תקלג לפק
 תוצבה

STONE NO. 13.

SEPULTURA
 DO BEMAVENTURA ADO
 IACOB CANTER FAL^O
 26 SEBAT 5545
 CORRESPONDE A 6 DE
 FEBRO 1785 DA IDADE
 DE 44 ANNOS.
 SBAGDG.

STONE NO. 14.

SEPULTURA
 DO
 ANJINHO RACHEL F^A DE IS H^M DE D^D.
 H^O JSR^L PEREIRA FALECE^O EM
 6 HESVAN 5548 QUE CORRESPONDE A 18
 OUT^O 1787 DA IDADE DE 3 A^{OS}
 2 M^S E9 DIAS
 SAGDG.

STONE NO. 15.

SEPULTURA

DA

BEMAVENTURADA

RACHEL QUE FOY

MULHER DE IACOB

CARCIA DA IDADE

DE CIRCA 58 ANOS

FALECEO EM 29

SIVAN 5551 QUE

CORRESPONDE A

PRIMEIRO DE IULIO

1791

SAGDG.

STONE NO. 16.

ואברהם [ם] שב למקומו

Do Bem do Abm de Seml.

Aº 5548.

תוצבה

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