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The Dutch and Portuguese-Jewish background of David Ricardo

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Abstract

This article deals with the Dutch and Portuguese-Jewish background of David Ricardo. The important pieces of information, found in the Amsterdam municipal archives, on the one hand correct, and on the other complement, the data presented by P. Sraffa. Recently, new evidence has been found on Ricardo's stay in Amsterdam in the years 1783–85. This evidence throws new light on Ricardo's relationship with his uncle Moses in Amsterdam. It is shown that his formal education was poor, but that his informal education may have been rich. The question of whether Ricardo visited the famous Talmud Tora in Amsterdam is settled in the negative.

Keywords:

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Notes

I mention N.Cohen, I. Nijenhuis, H. Rodrigues Pereira, and, in particular, J. Zwier.

I would like to thank O. Vlessing, Senior Archivist of the municipal archives in Amsterdam, for her generous help, Jack Letiche for his insightful comments, and the managing editor and the referees for their stimulating remarks.

Sraffa writes that Joseph married twice: the first marriage was in 1721 to Hannah Israel, and the second in 1727 to Hannah Abaz (Sraffa, X, [1951](#), p. 19). This must be considered an error. The marriage certificate of Joseph Israel Ricardo and Hannah Abaz in the municipal archives is dated 31 January 1721, and in the Portuguese archives it is dated 8 Sjewat 5481: the error is understandable. In the archives of the Portuguese Synagogue Hannah Abaz is named Hannah Israel. After her name was written 'Gijoret', which means 'Christian converted of Judaism'. It is quite possible that, as a result of the old Dutch style of writing, the year 1721 may have been misinterpreted as 1727. Sraffa corrected the mistake at my suggestion in Volume XI of *The Works* (Sraffa, [1973](#), XI, p. XXXIX).

It is Moses who was born in 1738 and not Abraham as I earlier reported (Heertje, [1970](#), p. 589). In other words, Abraham was not the youngest son, as has been stated by Sraffa and Henderson, but the second son (Sraffa, [1951](#), X, p. 19; Henderson, [1997](#), p. 83)

The letter-book is now in the British Museum. In fact, David Mendes da Costa acted on behalf of Abraham Prado, who, during the war was in charge of the army commissariat. (Hyamson, [1951](#), p. 103). Although, in 1739, Joseph Israel Ricardo took part in the drawing up of better rules for trade in options on the Amsterdam Bourse, he never became a member of the brokers' guild (Bloom, [1937](#), p. 188).

We still do not know his exact date of birth.

Ricardo supported several family members financially, as well as Portuguese Jews outside his family (Sraffa, [1951](#), X, p. 133). He also supported the foundation of a Jewish School in the Hague in 1820, as can be learned from a letter of Abraham Suasso of 24 November 1820 in the Ricardo Papers in Cambridge.

This passage is from his Travel Diary of 1784. John Aikin was a doctor and Benjamin d'Israeli was one of his patients. His family were Unitarians. He knew Maria Edgeworth, and in later life he was the editor of a General Biography in ten volumes (Aikin, [1823](#); Weatherall, [1976](#), p. 13).

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