

THE *HEVRAT GEMILUT HASADIM* OF LUGO AND THE DEATH RECORDINGS OF TWO
DISTINGUISHED FELLOWS: RABBIS AVRAHAM DAWID AND ŠELOMOH YAḤYAH

In Judaism mourning and death, which are regulated by a conjunction of traditions and precepts inspired by biblical texts and rabbinic literature, are based on the idea of *kavod*, that means honour and respect. Feelings such as these should be experienced facing the pain for the loss of a relative or a loved one. Consequently, mortuary and burial ceremony, with differences between various communities, were primarily intended to salute the deceased.¹ Furthermore, all the operations necessary for the implementation of *thanatopraxy*, that is to say a set of techniques used to preserve and present the body of a deceased person including the san-

itary treatments before the funeral expenses, as well as the burial and the care for the relatives, was considered a generous and disinterested act of *ṣedaqah*, that can be translated as ‘charity’ or ‘love of humankind’.²

To this end, within the Jewish communities, from the second half of the sixteenth century and particularly in the seventeenth century, were formed fraternities known as *Hevrah qaddiša* (Holy Brotherhood) and *Hevrat gemilut ḥasadim*³ (Good Works or Mercy Society), otherwise called *Ḥesed we-Emet* (Charity and Death Society). These associations, among other things, handled the burial of each member of the commu-

¹ For a more detailed explanation, please see: A. DIAMANT and H. COOPER, *Living a Jewish Life. Jewish Traditions, Customs and Values for Today's Families*, Harper Collins, New York 1991, pp. 289-297.

² The Hebrew word *ṣedaqah* – which literally means ‘righteousness’ – according to the Bible it concerns all sorts of rectitude denoting honesty and probity consistent with divine law, and can be translated as ‘charity’ or ‘love of humankind’ to indicate the feeling of concern for the fate of the fellow man. In Italian the emphasis is on the shift from *benevolenza* (goodwill, good disposition towards someone) to *beneficenza* (charity and philanthropy, to provide help and raise money for those in need). These two words of Latin origin must be carefully chosen depending on the context for what they have in common, that is, the *bonum*, and what they indicate as a differential, that is, to have the best interest at heart and to do good. This distinction is essential because in Judaism it is not enough to develop the feeling, but it is important the way in which it is achieved: in other words reference is made to a private act which goes public. It is possible to maintain the equivalence between *ṣedaqah* and the Latin word *caritas* or use other terms – such as altruism, goodness, brotherhood, solidarity, compassion, mercy, philanthropy – on condition that it must be kept in mind that *ṣedaqah* implies a human relationships system which can't differentiate between religious,

ethical and social imperative. See in this respect the interesting article of V. MARCHETTI, *The Fundamental Principles of Jewish Philanthropy*, in G. GEMELLI (ed.) *Religions and Philanthropy. Global Issues in Historical Perspective*, Baskerville, Bologna 2007, pp. 47-65. According to Rabbi Epstein charity develops through three stages: «[...] But what is Charity? On analysis we find that, according to its application, it has its three stages, corresponding to those which lead from *Justice to Righteousness* and from *Righteousness* to the full deployment of social conscience in the spirit of *Love*». Cfr. I. EPSTEIN, *The Jewish Way of Life*, Goldstone, London 1946, pp. 30-32. See also: J. KATZ, *Tradition and Crisis. Jewish Society at the End of Middle Ages*, Schocken Books, New York 1974, pp. 158-159; P. PIERRET, *La Maison des vivants - Beth Hayim - The House of the living*, catalogue d'exposition, Musée Juif de Belgique, Bruxelles 2013, pp. 65-66.

³ According to the two terms which compose it, the word *Gemilut Ḥasadim* brings together the goodwill as a feeling or intention but also charity as an act for the public institution of the community. The term is a rabbinic development of biblical notion of *Ṣedaqah* and in *Avot* 1,2 it is described as one of the three fundamental principles of the Jewish social order. Rabbis transformed the biblical meaning into a central element of Jewish tradition: there is no *Ṣedaqah* without *Gemilut Ḥasadim*. This means

nity, without distinction of social class. Albeit with variations, their activities specifically consisted in looking after the family members of the dying and supporting them during the passage; preparation and purification of the body before the burial; organization of the funeral procession and ceremony; cemetery maintenance; assisting mourners; saying ritual prayers; distributing provisions and medicine for dying and sick people.

The Jewish community of Lugo di Romagna is documented with certainty only by the presence of small groups of money lenders from the second half of the fifteenth century, while at the beginning of the seventeenth century exceeded 10 percent of the Christian population because of a papal decision that obliged all the Jews of the area to be concentrated only in the three cities of Ferrara, Lugo and Cento. Also within this important community, which was at its best in the Six and Eighteenth Century, within the ghetto there was a brotherhood for a welfare purpose named *Hevrat gemilut ḥasadim*, which was considered one of the most important Fraternities together with the other company called *Talmud Torah*, which aimed to teach the children the biblical texts.⁴ The Mercy Society was basically a voluntary religious association whose purpose was the constant practice of charity and fraternity, through good works for both individuals and community.

that charity is not just a simple act, but it requires goodwill. In other words, the legal act of charity as law enforcement evolves into act of philanthropy. See MARCHETTI, *The Fundamental Principles*, cit., pp. 47-65. According to Attilio Milano, *Gemilut Ḥasadim*: «[...] è qualcosa di più complesso ed elevato della elargizione di elemosine e beneficenze, a cui ricorre il pensiero quando si parla di confraternite e di opere pie. Ghemilùth Chasadim è il dare al prossimo con animo fraterno; dargli non soltanto denaro o assistenza materiale, ma altresì consiglio, conforto, istruzione, ossequio secondo la necessità. È quindi diretta al povero come al ricco, al vivo come al morto; e, verso ognuno, con sentimento di amore e non di compassione: sono manifestazioni di solidarietà che il fratello colpito ha il diritto di attendersi da quello più fortunato». See A. MILANO, *Il ghetto di Roma*, Carucci Editore, Roma 1988, pp. 235-236.

⁴ Besides these, there were also other confraternities in Lugo, but its statute books haven't been preserved. From the consultation of the Community Registries and the Book of dead people, I was

able to check the existence of the Congregation of Good Works (*Ma'asim Tovim*), The Precepts Lovers Society (*Ohev mišvot*), Morning Sentries (*Šomerim la-boqer*) and the Midnight Cabbalistic Association (*Ḥašot*).

It was instituted on 16 Hešwan 5418, i.e. 23rd October 1657, and its statutes, renewed on several occasions in the course of time, as well as articles, rules of conduct and resolutions, can be found on the front pages of the manuscript containing the Book of the Dead of the Jewish Community of Lugo. This important document, entirely drawn up in Hebrew, was written between the years 1658-1825 and, as evidenced by Umberto Cassuto,⁵ is been stored since the early 1930s in New York at the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (Ms. No. 3960), where it still remains today. It consists of 83 *folios* – numbered afterwards with a pencil only in the *recto*, probably by the archivist – although ff. 27r and 83r were wrongly bound and should be placed after f. 7v.⁶

On the front pages, from 1r to 2v, can be found the brotherhood statute divided into 13 articles, signed by all members and by the leaders of the community. Ff. 3r-5r contain the minutes of the brotherhood meetings between the years 1662 and 1711, while ff. 6r-7v include a revised version of the statute, this time composed only of 11 articles.⁷ At f. 9r begins the registration of the deaths opening with the title סדר זכרון נפשות הנפטרים מנוחתם בגן עדן של קק"י לוגו which means *Ordered register for the memory of the souls of the dead of the holy Community of Lugo, their rest may be in the garden of the Eden*.⁸

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⁵ See the subheading 'Lugo' in the X volume of Encyclopaedia Judaica, Eshkol Publishing Society, Berlin 1929-1934. The encyclopedia was published in Berlin from 1928 to 1934 by Eshol Publishing Society of Nahum Goldmann, and never completed. The editorial directors were Jakob Klatzkin and Ismar Elbogen, but after 10 volumes the project was stopped by Nazis.

⁶ These pages contain annotations related to the ליסטת מהחייבים לקופת ג"ח עד הת"ב, a list of debtors to the charity fund up to 5412 (= 1652) and a list of tombs owners in the cemetery. See Ms. New York, Jewish Theological Seminary of America (henceforth JTS), 3960, ff. 27r and 83r.

⁷ The fifth chapter of the revised statute is skipped, perhaps because of a writer's mistake.

⁸ See Ms. New York, JTS, 3960, f. 9r.

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The founding article – of which I propose a translation below – appears on *folio* 1r of the mentioned register:

[...] *Iniquity is expiated by loyalty and faithfulness, and evil is avoided through fear of the Lord.*⁹ This is all that the members of this splendid brotherhood have chosen and wished, / that is to say to approach by pure mercy¹⁰ that does not expect / any reward, although there will be a reward in the future world for every single “righteous in the 310 worlds”, and though the fruits / of the fruits of the Lord will be full of their barns and *their vats will burst with new wine*¹¹ in this world and in the end, amen. *This is the only price for removing guilt,*¹² when they will take care of the living and the dead for pure mercy, *by this alone shall their / sins be purged away,*¹³ to turn away from evil and to be feared of God. This is the Torah, which is the first source of God’s wisdom and fear, and a good mind / will donate the good Lord to those who act with them and who learn for heaven’s sake. May faith can be without interruption, / and may their glory be forever, amen, and so be the will of God. So, by unanimous agreement, they have decided to start this brotherhood, may the Lord rebuilds his city. All together, therefore, have established – at the house of the excellent, our honored master, rabbi Šabbetai Beer, may the Lord preserve him and give him life, on the eve of Tuesday 16 Hešwan,¹⁴ *parašat Wa-yera,*¹⁵ 5418 according to our calendar, which is October 23, 1657 according to the Christian calendar, – to deliberate and record correctly all that concerns the existence of Mercy Brotherhood (*Gemilut Ḥasadim*), (and its action) both for the alive and for the dead.

As can be seen, there was undoubtedly an urgent need from a narrow and wealthy group

of the Jewish community of Lugo, which was made up of most influential members, such as intellectuals and leaders who had to provide their fellows the most pressing services, to start a charitable congregation, as well as consolidate organically through the drafting of a regulation, whose structural lines were probably already established, but not codified in a systematic manner and therefore regulated just by custom.

In this regard, it has to be specified that, as in the case of the Book of the Dead contained in the manuscript examined, the wording of the Statute of the Brotherhood reflects the will of a legal reorganization of the Jewish Community institutions, which was one of the results of that renewed civic sense brought by the urbanization process that had spread in the Peninsula during the 16th century.¹⁶ Even though we must consider that there have always been charitable organizations within Jewish communities, and we have clear evidences of that in the late 14th and 15th centuries in Sicily, in which people helped some disadvantaged and poor fellows, perhaps with different ways, but the substance was, essentially, the same.¹⁷ In northern Italy the phenomenon is defined more clearly since the 16th century. Indeed, the structure of definite organisms in the Jewish community of Lugo reflects the need to fix, record and document, typical of the renewal process that had invested the Israeli institutions of central-northern Italy during the first modern age, in a parallel manner to what happened in the Christian majority world.¹⁸

In the 16th century the new climate brought by development process caused the need of a more modern and defined self-governance system within Italian Jewish communities through

⁹ Pr. 16,6.

¹⁰ Term that means burying the dead.

¹¹ Adapted from Pr. 3,10.

¹² Is. 27,9.

¹³ Adapted from Is. 27,9.

¹⁴ The date is annotated in the margin of *folio*.

¹⁵ Gen. 18,1-22,24.

¹⁶ See A. Y. LATTES, *Le fasi di un fenomeno urbanistico ed organizzativo ebraico nell’Italia del Cinque - Seicento* in M. ROMANI ed E. TRANIELLO (EDS.), *Gli ebrei nell’Italia centro settentrionale fra tardo Medioevo ed età moderna (secoli XV-XVIII)*, Cheiron, n. 57-58, anno XXIX annata 2012, pp. 131-141.

¹⁷ See A. SCANDALIATO, *Gli Ebrei in Sicilia alla*

luce delle fonti notarili, in J. TARGARONA BORRÀS - A. SÀENZ BADILOS (eds.), *Jewish Studies at the Turn of the 20th Century*, Proceedings of the 6th EAJS Congress, Toledo, luglio 1998, Brill, Leiden-Boston-Köln 1999, pp. 513-520.

¹⁸ The keeping of marriage and baptism registers was introduced in canonical legislation by the *Decretum de Reformatione Matrimonii* of the Council of Trent (XXIV, chapters 1-2), while the *Rituale Romanum* issued by Paul V in 1614 proposed rules to be observed for the compilation of registers, as well as *Status animarum*, confirmed and dead books. These norms were applied in relatively short time and had to be quickly transposed even within the

high points of organized life documentation, such as election of leaders, council decisions, income taxation, economic planning, and all the other aspects of social and religious community life. In this way, the statutes of fraternities which overseeing the various community needs, the structure and type of organization, and all the regulations governing the relationship between various institutions dependent on the main community, began to be fixed with pen and paper. In other words, Jewish communities, which were recognized by the Church and other states as autonomous entities, tended to become more and more independent, not only in religious and cultural fields, but also in juridical and fiscal, social and moral ones.

The text of the statutes shows a very interesting insight of religious and social welfare life of the Jews of the city and contains the first version approved in 1657 and a second renewal dating to thirty years later, which was completed in 1687. The regulation with its articles was not a definitive and invariable text, but flexible and subject to any modification time after time required by the circumstances. It regulated devotional and welfare activities which were coordinated by health and social services more articulated than in the past so as to partly fulfill the functions of a charity hospital. It also dictated the conditions for admission, as well as the rules of conduct and for the payment of membership fees, the nomination of various members, the assignment of new posts, the management of the burials, the practices of worship and charity, how to help and take care of needy and sick people, as well as welcome the guests and recitation of the suffrage prayers for the souls of the dead (*Qaddiṣ*).¹⁹

The image of Jewish religious and social welfare life that we find in the pages of the statute is meaningful and moved by high spiritual ideals, despite the concrete problems and the difficulties with which the leaders of brother-

hood were daily facing such as the failure to pay membership fees and charitable contributions which in some periods heavily burdened the budget of the partnership.²⁰

The group of actual members formed an assembly that was the most important institution of the Brotherhood, as a direct expression of the whole association. Concerned Jews had to pay a substantial membership fee to become members, in addition to making often generous donations of money called *nedivot*, when the Brotherhood needed extraordinary amounts to deal with peculiar circumstances. This explains why partners were all wealthy members of the Jewish bourgeoisie of Lugo, more or less high-class people, and besides, with a significant income. The Committee convened regularly each Sunday to discuss draft measures as well as to address the issues raised, to face demands and express opinions to serve political and strategic purposes. Moreover, the budgets were periodically approved and they had to elect various officials representing the administrative body of the brotherhood which was originally composed of twenty members divided into administrators, treasurers, servants, scribes and active members. In accordance with the profoundly religious roots of the association, the spiritual guidance of the congregation naturally belonged to the rabbi, who was considered the moral benchmark of the members. Even looking at the need to know how to write well in Hebrew, often the chief rabbi or his collaborator also played the role of *sofer*, i.e. scribe who verbalized sessions minutes.

It was considered very prestigious to be a member of the Brotherhood. This is clearly apparent not only from the analysis of the statute, but also from the passages taken from the death records of some of the most illustrious members, such as the rabbis Mika'el Avraham Dawid and Šelomoh Yaḥyah, of whom I intend to present the death records.²¹ In these acts the qualities and virtues of the deceased are enhanced through a

Jewish communities. See N. SCHÖCH, *La solennizzazione giuridica della 'forma canonica' nel Decreto Tametsi del Concilio di Trento* in «Antonianum», 1997, p. 637 etc.

¹⁹ According to tradition, *Qaddiṣ*, which is an Aramaic prayer of exaltation of God's name, was recited by the survivors in the eleven months following

the death of a relative or beloved person. For further information, refer to: A. DIAMANT, *Saying Kaddish. How to Conceive the Dying, Bury the Dead & Mourn as a Jew*, Schocken Books, New York 1998, *passim*.

²⁰ See Ms. New York, JTS, 3960, f. 4r.

²¹ Although they had the same last name, they were not relatives. Mikae'l was the brother of

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refined baroque language, which is an example of extraordinary stylistic, formal and lexical system. Moreover, it is also explicitly stated that the characters examined were members or even heads of the fraternity.

Mika'el Avraham Dawid Yaḥyah, rabbi of the Jewish community of Lugo since 1682,²² appears as treasurer at the beginning of the founding process of the congregation:

[...] All the members of the confraternity, could the Lord guard them and give them life, unanimously agree to elect as treasurer the honored Mr. Mika'el Yaḥyah, / and the honored Mr. Yiśra'el Ḥayyim Risignano, together as one; two keys for the above mentioned box are delivered, so that they both have them. Also the register will be in their hands,

and it will be stored inside the box. It is intended for recording all the income / delivered by the *pro tempore* managers. The members of the council will have to record the memories (of the deceased for future generations) and also the order of burials [...]. *The blessing of the Lord brings wealth*,²³ amen.²⁴

His act of death is dated 4 Nisan 453, i.e. March 21, 1693, and can be read at f. 24v. It follows the pattern used for prominent personalities, so we find: biblical motto, a poem and finally a long description of his life.

After the initial biblical motto, written in square characters, there is a poem in rhyme and rhythm in cursive script, made up of various syllabic combinations, in which the qualities of the deceased are exalted:

עם לב נדכא	מילא יבכה	יצעק כל פה	זולת מרפא
אך כל שנה	לא יום בלבד	ישא קינה	על הר נשפה
מאור הגולה	זקן נשוא פנים	נזר הקדש נשבה	שארון האלקים
עמוד הקהלה	עטרת תפארת	ומשפחה רמה	הוא מגזע ישישים
אוי לנו כי פנה	נקי וישר זך בלי שמרים	נאמן רוח בלא שפתי מרמה	רחוק מפנינים מי ימצא

To make the meter and the rhymes understandable to those who do not read Hebrew, I transliterate Hebrew, and highlight the rhymes:

Zulat marpé -e	Yiṣ'aq kol pēh -e	mila yivkēh -e	im lev nidkā -a
'al har nišpēh -e	yiśša qinàh -a	lo yom bilvād -a	ak kol šanàh -a
še-aron ha-Elohīm -im	nezer ha-qodeš nišbàh -a	zaqen našo panīm -im	me'or ha-golàh -a
hu me-geza' yešišīm -im	u-mišpaḥah ramàh -a	'aṭeret tif'eret -e	'ammud ha-qehillah -a
raḥoq mi-peninim mi yimṣe -e	ne'eman ruaḥ be-lo šifte mirmah -a	naqi we-yašar zak beli šemarim -im	hoi lanu ki fanah -a

Šemu'el Yaḥyah, a member of the Jewish community of Lugo; Šelomoh instead was brother of Mošeh. In this regard, consult respectively: Ms. New York, JTS, 3960, f. 3v; Jerusalem, Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People (CAHJP), Book of Minutes for the years 1670-1759, f. 1V.

²² I could get this information from f. 7v of the register of minutes of board meetings for the years 1670-1759: «Adi 5 Ottobre 1682. / [...] Concordarono

li Signori massari di comune concordia dar in avenir alli suddetti Signor Michiel Jachia per suo salario di Rabino scudi quaranta cinque di pavoli l'anno a eguagliarlo anco per li anni passato come la somma suddetta». Jerusalem, Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People (CAHJP), Book of Minutes for the years 1670-1759, f. 7v.

²³ Pr. 10,22.

²⁴ Cfr. Ms. New York, JTS, 3960, f. 1v.

The metric structure appears to be constructed as follows:

- line 1: 4 quaternary rhythms, outgoing in: -e -e -e -a
 line 2: 4 quaternary rhythms, outgoing in: -e -a -a -a
 line 3: 2 septenary rhythms + 2 six-syllable, outgoing in: -im -a -im -a
 line 4: 1 septenary rhythm + 3 outgoing six-syllable in: -im -a -e -a
 line 5: 3 nine-syllable rhythms + 1 six-syllable outgoing in: -e -a -im -a

Here is the English version:

Without any cure	every mouth will cry out,	let them cry	with a broken heart,
<i>Above a barren mount</i> ²⁵	a groan will rise,	not just one day	but for the whole year,
because the Ark of God,	a diadem of sanctity has flown away,	an elder with an eminent appearance,	light of exile;
of a lineage of elders	and of a high family,	(he was) a glorious crown,	column of the community,
<i>(he was worth) far more than rubies, who knows how to find it?</i> ²⁶	A righteous spirit, <i>it does not rise from deceitful lips,</i> ²⁷	innocent and upright, pure, without fault.	<i>But, alas, (the daylight) is fading</i> ²⁸

In the third part in the same semicursive writing but in prose, the life of the deceased is told as well as the events of the passing away; note the use by the scribe of graphic expedients

within the text that highlight the name as well as the initials of the deceased; for example, the word *me'od* is underlined, whose letters constitute the acrostic of his name.

Here is his act of death:

הלא הוא מכנא ורבנא הגאון המפלא כמוהר"ר מיכאל אברהם דוד יחיא שגלוקח מאתנו ונתבקש בישיבה של מעלה / בליל ששי סמוך לא' שעה של לילה ד' ניסן התנ"ג סדר ביום טהרתו והובא אל הכהן, והובא למנוחתו ביום ו' בהשכמה אחר / אשמורת הבקר בשעה שהיה רגיל הוא בחייו להג חיל הזמירות בבית הכנסת בקול נעים, תנוח נפשו בגן עדנים, / והלוהו אותו כל הקק"י אחר הספד וכבוד והקפות שעשו לו, ובשעת פטירתו עיניו למרום תלה, ובקש להיות הוא מזבה כפרה, / לכל הקהלה הקדושה כי עונות הדור גרמו האבידה, הן כל בית יש' [ראל] יבכו את השריפה, כי כשמו כן הוא, / אי חסיד שמגזע דוד בא, ואי עניו תלמידו של אברהם אבינו, איש האלקים הוא, בקי מאד בדינים ופסקים, / ובכל לימוד חכמה וחדרי תורה, ותורתו אומנותו שהיה הולך מחיל אל חיל, כל ימיו לילה ויום, שוקד בישיבות ובתי מדרשות / משכים ומעריב בבהכ"נ מעשר ראשונים ובכונה גדולה היה מאריך בתפלתו, קנה לו דברי תורה, קנה לו חיי העולם הבא, / בין הצדיקים וחסידים הקדושים, על שהיה דובר שלום לכל אנשים, ורוב ימיו בתעניות וסיגופים, מטיב לכל ומרחם / לכל המעשים, הרבה לעשות צדקות לעניים, ושמן מצוות הכנסת אורחים, היה הולך בזריזות ובשמחה לבקר חולים, / ובמצות היה כן כצבי לקנות ברמים יקרים, ובפרט הקדושים שהיה רגיל לאומרם בכונה גדולה ובקול נעים, תמיד היה / עושה ג"ח לחיים ולמתים, לעניים ולעשירים, והוא ראש החברים מחבורת ג"ח, וקיים מאד הוי שפל רוח, / שמראהו כמלאך האלקים כי שעיניו לעולם למטה מביטים ולבו למעלה בין העליונים, להשיב נפשו לאלקי האלקים, / ללכך לנוח נפשו באור החיים, ולנו בנינים הנחם נאנחים, ושוממים, דואגים, ובוכים ואין לנו להשען אלא על אבים / שבשמים. י"ר שזכותו יגן עלינו ולכל יש' [ראל] לעולם עולמים, ועלינו יהמו רחמי הר-

²⁵ Is. 13,2.

²⁶ Adaptation from Prov. 31,10.

²⁷ Psal. 17,1.

²⁸ Jer. 6,4.

בים באדיבות ימים ושנים, ויזכנו בתחיית המתים, לראות
בנין ירושלמים, במהרה בימינו אכ"ר.

English version

He was the *mekana we-rabana*, the *Gaon*, the exceptional, our honored master, Rabbi **Mi-ka'el Avraham Dawid Yaḥyah**, who was taken from us and he was summoned to the celestial academy / on Friday night at 1am, 4 Nisan 453 (= 1693), during the reading: «These are the regulations for any diseased person at the time of their ceremonial cleansing, when they are brought to the priest»,²⁹ and he was brought to his rest at dawn after the recitation of the prayers of the sentinels of the morning, at the hour when he used to say the psalms in the synagogue in a gentle voice, may his soul rest in the garden of delights. / After having recited the eulogy, the whole holy community of Israel accompanied him in a procession and with honor they made him the apotropaic circles. At the hour of his death his eyes rose to heaven and he was altar of the atonement for the whole holy community because the sins of the generation caused loss. *All the Israelites may mourn for those the Lord has destroyed by fire*,³⁰ because *he is just like his name-his name means*.³¹ *Alas, the pious man* coming from the lineage of David, *alas his eyes on the disciple of Abraham our father*,³² *he was a man of God*,³³ great expert in judgments and decrees, / he studied every aspect of the wisdom and secrets of the Torah, the Torah was his vocation, and he has grown from strength to strength. All his days, night and day, he worked diligently at religious sessions and school. / He used to get up early in the morning and stayed at the synagogue for the recital of the *Ma'ariv*. He always came with the first, and with great devotion he prolonged the recitation of his prayers. *Who increases the Torah, increases the life*³⁴ of the future world; he was among the righteous, the pious and the saints, because he always said words of peace and sought it out for all mankind. In most days

of his life he used to fast and mortify himself; he did good to all and was merciful / in all his works. He generously used to give quarters to poor people, bring unleavened bread to guests, as well as easily and joyfully visiting the sick. / With the precepts he was certainly like a gazelle in search of superior and important things, and especially in holy things because he was used to telling them with great devotion and kind voice. He was always generous / with the living and the dead, with the poor and the rich; he was head of the members of the Brotherhood of Mercy, and he put into practice the teaching that one must be *very, very humble*.³⁵ His appearance was that of an angel of the Lord, because his eyes were always turned downwards, but his heart was aimed at the highest skies. He has given his soul to the God of the gods, / therefore his soul rests in the light of life and left us alone sons moaning, broken, restless and weeping. We can only rely on our fathers / in the heavens. May his credit protect us and all Israel forever; may his mercy fill our days and years with kindness, and may us see in the resurrection of the dead the edification of Jerusalem, and it will be said in our days, amen and so be God's blessing.

Another important member of the group was Šelomoh Yaḥyah, a cabbalist and rabbi of the Jewish community of Lugo from 1689.³⁶ He joined the brotherhood in 1662 assuming the official role of scribe:

[...] on the same day and in the same session, the honored and excellent member / Šelomoh Yaḥyah, may God keep him and give him life, deliberately and according to his will declared before us that he commits himself / to playing the role of scribe, who takes care of all the affairs of the aforementioned brotherhood, on condition of being admitted as a member in the group / of the confraternity. He has accepted all the statute, committing himself to observing every chapter as written above. He paid 40 coins to the aforementioned cash box, as established by the chapters, and then, all the members

²⁹ Lev. 14,2.

³⁰ Lev. 10,6.

³¹ I Sam 25,25.

³² Adaptation from TB, *Sanhedrin* 11a.

³³ Deut. 33,1.

³⁴ *Pirkei Avot* 2,7.

³⁵ *Pirkei Avot* 4,4.

³⁶ He took the place of Rabbi Rava. The reigning rabbis could also be more than one, depending on the needs of the community. See Jerusalem, CAHJP, Book of minutes for the years 1670-1759, f. 11v.

³⁷ Ps. 107,8.

present responded to his request and told him: so be it, amen. And let them give tank to the Lord for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind,³⁷ because his grace has not left our people: and these are but the outer fringe of his works.³⁸ May the almighty be glorified and elevated / extraordinarily for what he has done for his people and his servants today because has joined us a man who is whole in all his deeds that enlightens the earth and

glorifies heaven. *May there be more like you in Israel,*³⁹ amen and so be God's blessing.⁴⁰

His act of death, dated 19 Adar II 5451, i.e. 20th March 1691, can be read at f. 24v. It is interesting to observe its structure: the scribe, probably to give greater importance to the deceased, has abandoned the usual scheme divided

into motto-poetry-story, and has preferred to compose, after the initial motto, a single text entirely in rhyme.

Here is his death act:

רוח אפינו משיח ה' נלכד בשחיתותם

הנה מטתו של שלמה: כי שלם הוא ושלם שמו: אב השלם שנפטר לעולמו: הדובר שלו' לכל עמו: ובכל הארץ גדול שמו: כמ"ש ותרב חכמת שלמה: ולפני שמש ינון שמו: יען הוא מגזע דוד ושלמה: שגדול מרבי ומרבן שמו: ויהי אלקיו עמו: והנה ד' כתרים עמו: כתרת תורת ה' לעמו: וכתרת כהונת ב"ב דוד ושלמה: וכתרת מלכי רבנן בעוצמו: וכתרת שם טוב עלה עמו: הלא הוא מגדולי עמו: החסיד כמהר"ר שלמה: יחייא שיחיה לעד בעולמו: זכר צדיק וקדוש לברכת תעצומו: ועל טוב יזכר שמו:

ויתברכו בו כל גוים יאשרוהו: ויאמרו ברוך ה' הוא: כי חוש של חסד יסובבוהו: ובכל חכמה ומדע יבוננוהו: וכאישון עין החכמה יצרוהו: לישא חן בעיני כל רואהו: יען כי משמח אלקים ואנשים הוא: וכמראה מלאך האלקים מראהו: ולכן מלאכו שלם לקראתו יצאו: ויאמרו לו שלם בואו: יען כי צדיק וישר הוא: גדל בכל מין שם טוב: וטוב שמו יותר משמן הטוב: כי בתוך קהל ועדה דרש בטוב: ולימד לכל למאוס ברע ולבחור בטוב: עד כי ותרא אותו שכינה כי טוב: ותצפנהו אצלה להריח מריחו הטוב: ביום ג' בשעת זירא אלקים את האור כי טוב: בחדש ואדר הנהדר בכל טוב: ב"ט בו שנת התנ"א למספר בבב"י [= במהרה בימינו בקרוב] טוב: שבו נבכה ונתאונן על בעדר רב טוב:

הוא סיני ועוקר הרים: שכל מכדול מעמו הרים: ודגלם בכחו היה מרים: חסיד ועניו ודובר משרים: באור זיוו היה מאיר לארץ ולדירים: עוסק בכל מצוה ומעשה לאחרים: ופזיר נתן לאבינונים ומרים: וגם שכל ימיו סבל כמה יסורין: לא זו מלהשכים בחצות לילה ללמד לאחרים: והיה ראשון לכל דבר מצוה: בהידורים: ועיקר וראש הועד וכל החרים: של כל החבורות וממנים וגזברים: חזן נעים היה ומרוצה: לכל העברים: גזבר וגבאי לכל א"י [= ארץ ישראל] ולדירים: ומוהל בקי שמל לק"ל [= לקהילות לישראל] נערים: תבר גיזי דברדא וטבל בטהרים:

חכם לב ומקובל בחכמות הניסתרם: ובסוד המילואים
וסוד שמות היקרים: ובמעשה בראשית ומרכבה העמיק
ביאורים:

מהויר בכל מיני כתב בבירורים: י"ר שתנוח נפשו [...]
בג"ע בהידורים: וזכותו יגן לנו ולכל יש' חברים:

English version

*The Lord's anointed, our very life breath,
was caught in their traps*⁴¹

*Look! It is Solomon's carriage,*⁴² / since it

was whole, as well as its name, exemplary father
who left for the eternal abode. / *He had words
of peace for all his people,*⁴³ / and his name was
great throughout the earth.

As it is written, the wisdom of Solomon
had grown,⁴⁴ / *may his name endure forever;
may it continue as long as the sun,*⁴⁵ / because
it is of the lineage of David and Solomon; / *his
name was great among the rabbis, our teach-
ers,*⁴⁶ / may his God be with him.⁴⁷

And here the 4 crowns were on his head:
/ *the crown of the Lord's Torah* was on him / as

³⁸ Job 26,14.

³⁹ TB, *Nazir*, 4b.

⁴⁰ Ms. New York, JTS, 3960, f. 3r.

⁴¹ Lam. 4,20.

⁴² Song 3,7.

⁴³ Adaptation from Est. 10,3.

⁴⁴ See 1 Kings 5,10.

⁴⁵ Ps. 72,17.

⁴⁶ Adaptation from *Magen Avot* 1,1.

⁴⁷ Adaptation from Malbim on Isaiah 54,12;

well as *the crown of the priesthood* of the members of David and Solomon's family, / *the crown of the kings* of the masters crowned him / and *the crown of the good name* has grown with him.

Isn't he one of the great of his people? / The pious, our honored teacher, Rabbi Šelomoh / Yaḥyah, may he live forever in the eternal abode, / and may the memory of the righteous and the holy, / be the blessing of his splendor / and his name be remembered for good.

Then all nations will be blessed through him, and they will call him blessed,⁴⁸ / and they will say: «Blessed is the Lord», / because the feeling of mercy will surround them / and with all wisdom and science they will rebuild it, / and with the pupil the eye of science will mold.

To find grace in the eyes of all those who see him, / since he gave joy to the Lord and to mankind / *he looked like an angel of God*.⁴⁹

And therefore the angels of integrity will come out and they will say to him: «Whole man, come!». / Because he was righteous and honest.

Raised among all sorts of good names, / and his *name was better than fine perfume*,⁵⁰ / because in the community and in the assembly he preached in good / and taught everyone *to despise evil and to choose good*.⁵¹

Until *Šekinah*⁵² saw that it was good / and hid it to herself to taste its fragrant aroma, / on Tuesday,⁵³ at the time when *God saw that the light was good*⁵⁴ of Adar II, splendid in every good, / on 19th, of the year 5451 (= 1691) according to our calculation. Soon in our days, soon may comes good, / because we will cry and

mourn because of the loss of such a good teacher.

He was *Sinai*, extremely cultured, and *uprooted the mountains*,⁵⁵ / he removed every obstacle from his people, / and their banner was strong because of his strength; / he was pious and modest, and pronounced righteous things.

And in the light of its splendor it was resplendent for the earth and its inhabitants, / it took care of all the precepts and works for the others, / *he have freely scattered their gifts to the poor*,⁵⁶ and to those who were embittered.

And although in all the days of his life he endured some pains, / he never got tired of staying until midnight to teach others, / while he excelled in matters of precepts with elegance.

He was the foundation, the head of the Council and of all the members, / and of all the Confraternities, of the massari and the treasurers; / he was a splendid singer and happy with everyone.

Treasurer and head of every Jewish locality and its inhabitants, / he was an experienced circumciser who circumcised young people for communities and for Israel. / *He broke blocks of hail and immersed himself in the water to purify himself*.⁵⁷

He was a skilled person,⁵⁸ he was a Kabbalist in the wisdom of hidden things, / in the secret of melting of letters intended as an acrostic of words, (a system called) *milu'im*⁵⁹ and in the foundation of precious names. / In fact, he has deepened the explanations of the creation and the mysticism of the *Merkabah*.⁶⁰

[...] / May his soul rest in the garden of

Malbim on Jeremiah 2,8 *et al.*

⁴⁸ Ps. 72,17.

⁴⁹ Judg. 13,6.

⁵⁰ Eccles. 7,1.

⁵¹ Malbim on Isaiah 7,15; Raši on Isaiah 7,15 *et al.*

⁵² Within the Jewish biblical and theological tradition it indicates the real presence of God, the divine presence. See *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Keter Publishing House, Jerusalem 1971, vol. XVIII, pp. 440-444.

⁵³ In Hebrew, tuesday is indicated with ך which is also number 3. In this case it refers to the third day of creation, that is when *God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness* (Gen. 1,4).

⁵⁴ Gen. 1,4.

⁵⁵ TB, *Berakot* 64a.

⁵⁶ Ps. 112,9.

⁵⁷ Adaptation from *Berakot* 18b.

⁵⁸ Ex. 35,10; Ex. 36,1 *et al.*

⁵⁹ The term refers to the Hebrew numerology system of *Gematria* which studies the words written in Hebrew and assigns them numerical values; in *Qabalah* is used an additional *Gematria* system called *milu'im*: «The absolute or normative value of a word is calculated by treating each letter as a word and then adding up all of the numerical equivalencies of these letter-words. This system is called *milu'i* or *milu'im*. Since some letters can be spelled differently as words, different numerical equivalencies can be achieved for a single word». See: *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Keter Publishing House, Jerusalem 1971, vol. VII, p. 424.

⁶⁰ One of the most ancient currents of Jewish mysticism.

Eden, in the honors / of his merit. May he protect us and all the brothers of Israel.

The results which it is intended to show in this study are nothing more than one of the products of an important research phase that the historiography of Italian Judaism has been taken for several years waking up to the relevance of the archive records and documents coming from the heart of Jewish communities. Complementarity of the sources is today an essential criterion to be adopted to reduce the risk of arbitrariness of the conclusions, as well as to increase the degree of knowledge of the object of historical reconstruction. The internal sources are a faithfully reflection of the internal Jewish life, because they are generated by the concrete implementation of the activities of government, administration and regulation of daily economic activities: in them are the same Jews who, gathered in their organs, talk about themselves, facing their problems, discussing and solve them. These documents, often still in Hebrew, but from the middle of the 17th centu-

ry mostly written in Italian, illustrate the routine of everyday life and the objective situation of the Jewish group, with its real behaviors, presenting a wider range of nuances that only an inside look of the community makes it perceptible, within a more articulated Jewish world in its facets. Ultimately, what appears is nothing but an ability of members of the ghetto to adapt and find their own space within the Christian majority community, showing their cultural and religious perspectives structuring in a systematic way, giving themselves statutes and electing councils that guide them. These documents also highlight the cultural and social wealth of community life, examples of which are the organization of various confraternities, whose purpose was to create moments of socializing and sharing within the ghettos.

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SUMMARY

This article deals with the *Hevrat Gemilut ḥasadim* (Good Works or Mercy Society) of Jewish community of Lugo. This association handled the burial of each member of the community and its activities specifically consisted in looking after the family members of the dying preparing the body before the burial; organizing the funeral procession and ceremony; cemetery maintenance; assisting mourners; saying ritual prayers; distributing provisions and medicine for sick people. It was instituted on 16 Hešwan 5418, i.e. 23rd October 1657, and its statutes can be found on the front pages of the manuscript containing the Book of the Dead of the Jewish Community of Lugo. The text of the statutes shows a very interesting insight of religious and social welfare life of the Jews of Lugo. It was considered very prestigious to be a member of the Brotherhood. This is clearly apparent not only from the analysis of the statute, but also from the passages taken from the death records of some of the most illustrious members, such as the rabbis Mika'el Avraham Dawid and Šelomoh Yaḥyah.

KEYWORDS: Jewish community of Lugo; Internal sources; Book of the Dead; Good Works Society.