A NEW LOOK INTO JUDAH MOSCATO’S LIFE: 
HIS RECENTLY DISCOVERED LAST WILL AND 
TESTAMENT FROM THE STATE ARCHIVES OF MANTUA

Gianfranco Miletto

Despite his literary fame, the figure of Mantuan Rabbi Yehuda (Leone) ben Yoseph Moscato (1533–1590) still demands historical investigation. During my research in the State Archives of Mantua, I was able to locate a series of documents which provide substantial information about Moscato’s life and personality, and which will be published soon in a monograph. Among these documents is also Moscato’s last will and testament. It was drawn up by the notary Alessandro Pia on September 4, 1575 and registered by the notary Sinforiano de Fortis on March 14, 1576.

Moscato was born in 1533, as his death certificate attests. At the time when this testament was written, Moscato was 42 years old. He was married to Hester, who gave birth to four children, the daughters Anna and Judith, and the sons Angelo (i.e. Elchanan in Hebrew) and Isaac. Anna was already married, namely to Yaacob Finzi. It seems that Moscato’s relationship to his son-in-law was not good. Moscato explicitly orders that the 50 scudi in gold which he leaves as a legacy to Anna must be her exclusive property. Her husband should never (“ullo unquam tempore”) be in control of this money or have any advantage over it. He cannot inherit it, even in case his wife dies: the sum shall be given to her children in equal portions.

Moscato is more generous towards his other daughter Judith. He bequeaths her the sum of 300 scudi in gold, which she will receive upon her marriage. Additionally, she inherits the right to receive 200 scudi in gold from the heirs of Salvatore (Yehoshua in Hebrew)

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1 The project “Knowledge transfer in Renaissance Sytle: The Nefutzot Yehudah of Moscato,” funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG), plans to edit and translate the sermons of Judah Moscato under the supervision of Giuseppe Veltri and Gianfranco Miletto, offering new insight into his life and scholarship.

Berettaro, Moscato’s father-in-law, who left this sum as a legacy to Moscato in his will.

Moscato’s relationship with his son Angelo (Elchanan) was likewise difficult. Moscato disinherits him: he shall only receive the legitimate portion. Moscato does not explicitly state the reasons for this decision. Angelo was not only utterly disobedient (“inobedientissimum sibi patri mandatis paternis exhibuit ac exhibet”) and contemptuous of the love of his father, but, far worse, he dared to speak evil of him in public (“palam obloqui nominique et famae illius detrahere ausus fuit”).

The other son, Isaac, is the universal heir. He seems to be younger than Angelo, because he is not married and still lives with his mother Hester. However, as long as the mother is alive and does not remarry, Isaac cannot have any advantage over the patrimony, of which Hester is designated as usufructuary. She alone has the right to manage all the patrimony (“usufructuariam et massariam omnium et quorumcumque bonorum ipsius domini testatoris”) which remains after the deduction of the various bequests. She has to take care of and maintain her son Isaac with his future family, for as long as he lives together with his mother. Hester shall be free from this obligation, if Isaac decides not to live together with his mother after his marriage.

In addition, Moscato bequeaths 5 soldi to the Hospital of Mantua, as was customary, and 10 scudi in gold to the sick and poor of the Jewish Community.

During the course of Moscato’s life, his relationship to his son Angelo never improved. Two years before his death, Moscato issued an official document certified by the notary Magistri Battista, stating that his son Isaac shall be the universal heir.

The last will and testament serves to prove that Moscato was a native of Osimo (province of Ancona) but it is not said when he went to Mantua. However, in 1575 he was a Mantuan citizen and a wealthy member of the Jewish Community.

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4 Archivio di Stato di Mantova, Atti notarili S 417 ter and Registrazioni notarili anno 1587 378v–379r.