

## JOFA JOURNAL

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**Kavod Hamet**  
**By Jennifer Breger**

While it is important to focus on new ways of including women in ritual, we can also look to our past for examples of how women have traditionally been involved in Jewish practice. In rituals surrounding death and burial, Jewish tradition has always emphasized the respect and veneration due to women. In the same way that the funeral of a scholar proceeds that of a layperson, the funeral of a woman proceeds that of a man. This law is founded upon respect for the modesty of a woman. The preparation of a woman's corpse for burial is always carried out by women for reasons of modesty. Certain communities enacted *takkanot* and fines against men who attended to female corpses, except in cases of dire emergency. Another mark of respect for women is the inscriptions on tombstones which describe the kindness and good deeds of the woman who is buried. Often women's tombstones have candles carved on the stone, and there are special symbols for women who died in childbirth. For example, tombstones from Italy provide us with a wealth of information about the women of the period and their contribution to the community and to larger society.

Another window into the lives of our mothers is the corpus of eulogies and elegies written by husbands and children in their honor. These *hespedim* give us a great deal of information about the women and show the high esteem in which they were held. Rabbi Eliezer of Worms, the author of the *Rokeach* (12th c.), wrote a beautiful elegy for his wife Dulcie who died a martyr's death together with her two daughters. In the eighteenth century, the *Noda Be'yehudah* wrote a moving elegy for his wife who is buried with him in Prague. There are many more examples of eulogies which attest to the important roles women played in their families and beyond.