

Paternal Affliction: Emotions and Masculinity among Eighteenth-Century Italian Jewish Merchants *

by *Francesca Bregoli*

Abstract

This essay focuses on the “rhetoric of paternal affliction” that late eighteenth-century Italian Jewish merchant patriarchs employed in letters and supplications addressing threats to their intertwined paternal and commercial authority, particularly when filial disobedience or apostasy was involved. I examine this rhetoric as an emotional style that illuminates Jewish merchant masculinity. Although the image of a suffering father seems to deviate from known early modern models of hegemonic masculinity, within the context of the eighteenth-century culture of sensibility this rhetoric emphasized Jewish patriarchs’ honesty and righteousness, beseeching male compassion and sympathy. By performing vulnerability vis-à-vis Jewish associates, as well as Jewish and state authorities, the vocal expression of paternal affliction was meant to reinforce threatened mercantile patriarchal power. This complicates our understanding of early modern fatherhood, demonstrating that a sentimental display of masculine helplessness went hand in hand with better-known notions of hegemonic paternal authority.

Affliction and Consolation

A Scandalous Brother

The Anxious Jewish Patriarch

The Threat of Conversion

Conclusions

* I am grateful to two anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions. For their comments on earlier drafts of this essay, I thank Umberto Grassi, the New York State Working Group on Jewish Women and Gender in Global Perspective, and members of the Jewish Studies Starr seminar at Harvard University.

The absolute power of fathers over their dependents is a well-established trope of Renaissance treatises of household government (*oeconomica*), one that has also influenced historiographical overviews of early modern fatherhood.¹ Still, recent studies have started questioning this and other enduring notions about the pre-modern patriarch.² This essay aims to contribute to a growing literature that nuances our understanding of early modern fathers and paternal masculinity by focusing on the figure of the Jewish merchant patriarch and the emotional style employed in relation to perceived threats to his family and business.³ Late eighteenth-century letters and supplications by Italian Jewish merchants articulated anxiety about family and business ruin in a way that, today, may strike us as counterintuitive in light of engrained notions of early modern patriarchal masculinity.⁴ Such a discourse, found both in personal and communal documents, vocally expressed the affliction of heads of households relative to threats to their intertwined paternal and commercial authority, particularly in the form of filial disobedience.⁵ The notion that filial disobedience, upending

¹ Daniela Frigo, *Il padre di famiglia. Governo della casa e governo civile nella tradizione dell' "economica" tra Cinque e Seicento* (Rome: Bulzoni editore, 1985). For an important survey on *patria potestas*, see Marco Cavina, *Il padre spodestato. L'autorità paterna dall'antichità ad oggi* (Rome: Laterza, 2007).

² For a study that probes the continued centrality of marriage and fatherhood to understand models of early modern manhood see Susan Broomhall and Jacqueline Van Gent, "Introduction," in *Governing Masculinities in the Early Modern Period: Regulating Selves and Others*, eds. Susan Broomhall and Jacqueline Van Gent (London - New York: Routledge, 2011), 1-22; Beatrice Zucca Micheletto, "Husbands, Masculinity, Male Work, and Household Economy in Eighteenth-Century Italy: The Case of Turin," *Gender & History* 27 (2015): 752-772, in turn, challenges one of early modern masculinity's cardinal ideas, namely the *pater familias* as main bread winner within the family economy.

³ On early modern Italian Jewish fathers see Cristina Galasso, "Diventare adulti, diventare padri. Paternità e patria potestà nella comunità ebraica di Livorno (secolo XVII)," in *Pater familias*, ed. Angiolina Arru (Rome: Biblink, 2002), 101-121; Luciano Allegra, "Né machos, né mammolette. La mascolinità degli ebrei italiani," *Genesis: Rivista della Società Italiana delle Storiche* 2, no. 2 (2003): 125-155; 145-148.

⁴ Scholars have devoted some attention to merchant masculinities in England, northern Europe, and the Atlantic world: Toby L. Ditz, "Shipwrecked, Or Masculinity Imperiled: Mercantile Representations of Failure and the Gendered Self in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia," *The Journal of American History* 81 (1994): 51-80; John Smail, "Coming of Age in Trade. Masculinity and Commerce in Eighteenth-Century England," in *The Self-Perception of Early Modern Capitalists*, eds. Margaret C. Jacob and Catherine Secretan (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 229-252; Martha Howell, "Merchant Masculinity in Early Modern Northern Europe," *Cultural and Social History* 18 (2021): 275-296.

⁵ On the emotional significance of order and disorder in premodern Europe, see Susan Broomhall, "Introduction: Destroying Order, Structuring Disorder: Gender and Emotions," in *Gender and*

paternal authority and the natural order of society, would result into both economic ruin and masculine affliction is common enough in the sources to warrant an inquiry. Why affliction, and not, say, anger or indignation?

For the purpose of this essay, I will focus on relations among older and younger men.⁶ The four case studies I consider below draw from sources produced by Jewish men who were either located in Mantua or had Mantuan cultural and familial connections. Methodologically, I approach these documents as strategic narratives. I do not try to reconstruct how these individuals “felt” about their supposedly rascal male relatives. Rather, I view their rhetoric of affliction as an *emotional style* which responded to specific needs of Jewish merchant fathers. Carol and Peter Stearns, who first introduced the notion of emotional styles, depicted them as “the attitudes or standards that a society, or a definable group within a society, maintains toward basic emotions and their appropriate expression.”⁷ According to Benno Gammerl, emotional styles are both “communally and spatially constituted” and still adaptable enough to allow for cross-cultural communication.⁸ These men’s emotional style was based on widely shared understandings of the necessity of familial quiet and religious virtue to uphold credit and protect the natural order of society—perduring values that were held dear by Christian and Jewish *patres familias* alike.

Honor, reputation, and credit formed the foundation of early modern merchant masculinity.⁹ A patriarch losing those crucial values risked being “unmanned.”¹⁰ However, I argue, the vocal expression of paternal affliction was not meant to feminize Jewish traders. Instead, within the context of the eighteenth-century culture of sensibility that regarded masculine tears as expressions of moral virtue, it emphasized suffering Jewish merchants’ honesty and righteousness, beseeching

Emotions in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Destroying Order, Structuring Disorder, ed. Susan Broomhall (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015), 1-13.

⁶ It goes without saying, however, that to fully understand the Jewish mercantile *pater familias* it is necessary to consider his bonds with *both* women and men.

⁷ Peter N. Stearns and Carol Z. Stearns, “Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards,” *The American Historical Review* 90 (1985): 813-836; 813. For Stearns and Stearns, emotional styles are to be investigated by “emotionology.” See also Katie Barclay, *The History of Emotions: A Student Guide to Methods and Sources* (London: Macmillan, 2020), 35-52.

⁸ Benno Gammerl, “Emotional Styles – Concepts and Challenges,” *Rethinking History* 16, no.2 (2012): 161-175; 166.

⁹ Howell, “Merchant Masculinity,” 281-282.

¹⁰ Ditz, “Shipwrecked, Or Masculinity Imperiled,” 66-72.

compassion and sympathy.¹¹ This rhetoric had restorative goals: it performed vulnerability vis-à-vis Jewish associates, as well as Jewish and state authorities, to reinforce threatened mercantile patriarchal power. The unfettered expression of affliction ultimately demonstrates that a sentimental display of helplessness went hand in hand with better-known notions of hegemonic paternal authority.

Affliction and Consolation

According to early modern ideal constructs of hegemonic masculinity, one of the goals of the *pater familias*, by which he also exerted his authority, was protecting the household from risks, attacks, and usurpations—including threats not only from outside but also from inside the family. The patriarch, Sandra Cavallo has claimed, “had to be able to control the behavior of his subordinates in terms [...] of their conduct too, assuring the domestic order that was the basis of order in the community.”¹² Within this framework, maintaining domestic order by controlling subordinates—one’s wife, children, servants—was paramount. As John Tosh noted, “domestic disorder, which later generations would regard as a personal predicament, was [...] seen as a serious blow to a man’s standing in the community.”¹³

For merchants, there was an additional factor: a businessman’s “standing in the community” reverberated on the perception of his credit and trustworthiness, and hence on the success of his affairs.¹⁴ The line separating “family” and “business”

¹¹ The bulk of scholarship on the culture of sensibility focuses on Britain and France; see G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Marco Menin, *La filosofia delle lacrime. Il pianto nella cultura francese da Cartesio a Sade* (Bologna: Il Mulino 2019). See also Katrina O’Loughlin, “Sensibility,” in *Early Modern Emotions: An Introduction*, ed. Susan Broomhall (London - New York: Routledge, 2017), 78-80.

¹² Sandra Cavallo, “Bachelorhood and Masculinity in Renaissance and Early Modern Italy,” *European History Quarterly* 38 (2008): 375-397; 378.

¹³ John Tosh, “Current Issues in the History of Masculinity,” in *La costruzione dell’identità maschile nell’età moderna e contemporanea*, ed. Angiolina Arru (Rome: Bink, 2001), 63-78, 71.

¹⁴ Peter Mathias, “Risk, Credit and Kinship in Early Modern Enterprise,” in *The Early Modern Atlantic Economy*, eds. John J. McCusker and Kenneth Morgan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 15-35; Luuc Kooijmans, “Risk and Reputation: On the Mentality of Merchants in the Early Modern Period,” in *Entrepreneurs and Entrepreneurship in Early Modern Times: Merchants and Industrialists within the Orbit of the Dutch Staple Market*, eds. Clé Lesger and Leo Noordegraaf (The Hague: Gegevens Koninklijke Bibliotheek, 1995), 25-34.

was blurred for early modern men of commerce.¹⁵ Prudential values of temperance and self-control informed their notions of success and failure. Over the course of the century, ruin and loss of credit were increasingly ascribed to moral shortcomings such as dishonesty, extravagance, irreligion, and sexual laxity, with the understanding that such assaults to family and business often came from within.¹⁶ *Pace* the still widespread notion that early modern fathers enjoyed complete rights of *patria potestas* over their dependents, their power was in fact more tempered than normative tracts suggest. Men in ostensibly hegemonic positions were routinely challenged by male figures occupying non-hegemonic masculine roles.¹⁷

The upholding of *patria potestas*—the legal authority of the male head of the domestic group—was therefore perceived as an urgent necessity for traders, because *patria potestas* and the socially recognized authority from which a family business derived its credit and reputation were deeply imbricated. Merchant fathers seem to have perceived their intertwined paternal and commercial *potestates* as easily prone to unraveling under the pressure of generational challenges. Protecting domestic order was tantamount to safeguarding one’s own reputation and creditworthiness, since a house in order reflected on a merchant’s business.

For Jewish merchants, even more than for their non-Jewish peers, threats to both forms of authority increased due to legal restrictions, anti-Jewish stereotypes, and radical changes in status, such as conversion. Prominent Jewish merchants were a minority committed to the increase of family patrimony and yet one also subjected to specific political and legal limitations.¹⁸ Cases of filial disobedience,

¹⁵ Frédéric Mauro, “Merchant Communities, 1350–1750,” in *The Rise of Merchant Empires: Long Distance Trade in the Early Modern World*, ed. James D. Tracy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 255–286; Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 132–152.

¹⁶ For an illuminating discussion of the English sphere see Margaret R. Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender, and the Family in England, 1680–1780* (Berkeley - Los Angeles - London: University of California Press, 1996), 34–40. For an eighteenth-century Italian example, see Carlo Goldoni, *La bancarotta, o sia il mercante fallito* (Bologna: Nella stamperia di S. Tommaso d’Aquino, 1766).

¹⁷ The four articulations of early modern manhood proposed by Alexandra Shepard, “From Anxious Patriarchs to Refined Gentlemen? Manhood in Britain, circa 1500–1700,” *Journal of British Studies* 44 (2005): 281–295; 291–292, can be applied to Italian realities as well.

¹⁸ Unlike the aristocracy and non-Jewish merchants, early modern Jewish traders could not invest heavily in land. By the late eighteenth century, however, with the relaxation of ghetto legislation in the most progressive Italian states, some wealthy Jewish merchants bought real estate and even large plots of land in the Po valley and the Tuscan countryside.

incompetence, and, above all, apostasy undermined the ideal order of the Jewish family and the position of the Jewish merchant patriarch, raising the specter of possible ruin.¹⁹ For this subset of traders, dangers to *Jewish* domestic stability conceptually overlapped with fears of business failure. In the regime of honor and reputation that formed the basis of early modern commerce, erosion of domestic order and religion was evoked with distress as causing the breakdown of Jewish households and finances.

One common risk envisioned by Jewish merchant patriarchs was the challenge of filial independence and the lack of direct paternal supervision engendered by the necessities of long-distance trade. Consider Joseph Franchetti (1721 or 1734-ca. 1794), a Tunis-based merchant of Mantuan origins who was a head partner in the *Salomone Enriches & Joseph Franchetti Company*, a firm that in the 1770s and 1780s specialized in the sale of *chechias* (Tunisian hats made with European wool that were especially popular in the Ottoman Empire) and had branches in Tunis, Livorno, and Smyrna.²⁰ Between 1776 and 1790, Franchetti wrote 397 letters in Italian to 65 business associates;²¹ among them were also two of Franchetti's sons, Reuben (b. 1757), stationed in Smyrna, and Isache (b. 1763), stationed in Livorno, whose mercantile education he endeavored to guide.²² Joseph's letters to Reuben

¹⁹ For important reflections on the effects of bankruptcy on Jewish merchants' status and reputation, see Cornelia Aust, "Daily Business or an Affair of Consequence? Credit, Reputation, and Bankruptcy among Jewish Merchants in Eighteenth-Century Central Europe," in *Purchasing Power: The Economics of Modern Jewish History*, eds. Rebecca Kobrin and Adam Teller (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 71-90.

²⁰ On Franchetti's business, see Jean-Pierre Filippini, "Gli ebrei e l'attività economica nell'area nord-africana," *Nuovi Studi Livornesi* 7 (1999): 131-149; Jean-Pierre Filippini, *Il porto di Livorno e la Toscana (1676-1814)*, vol. 2 (Naples: Edizioni scientifiche italiane, 1998), 259-261. More generally on the Franchetti family, see Mirella Scardozi, "Itinerari dell'integrazione: una grande famiglia ebrea tra la fine del Settecento e il primo Novecento," in *Leopoldo e Alice Franchetti e il loro tempo*, eds. Paolo Pezzino and Alvaro Tacchini (Città di Castello: Petrucci, 2002), 271-320; Mirella Scardozi, "Una storia di famiglia: i Franchetti dalle coste del Mediterraneo all'Italia liberale," *Quaderni storici* 38 (2003): 697-740.

²¹ Franchetti Family Archive, MS General 237 (henceforth 'MS237'), vols. 2:1 and 2:2, Columbia University Library, New York, NY, United States. Volume 1 is paginated with a number on the left side of two facing pages and volume 2 follows the traditional recto and verso pagination. References to volume 1 will be followed by "L" (left) and "R" (right), and to volume 2, by "1" and "v." For a description of the volumes see Amedeo Spagnoletto, "Nuove fonti sulla famiglia Franchetti a Tunisi, Smirne e Livorno fra XVIII e XIX S.," *La Rassegna mensile di Israel* 76 (2010): 95-113; 99-105 and Francesca Bregoli, "'Your Father's Interests': The Business of Kinship in a Trans-Mediterranean Jewish Merchant Family, 1776-1790," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 108, no. 2 (2018): 194-224; 195-196.

²² Bregoli, "Your Father's Interests"; Francesca Bregoli, "A Father's Consolation: Intracultural Ties and Religion in a Trans-Mediterranean Jewish Commercial Network," in *Jews and the*

and Isache occasionally chided them and their middle brother Jeudà (to whom no letter has survived) for the affliction caused by their disobedience.²³ Due to their physical separation, Franchetti had to rely on his business correspondents for precious information about the conduct of his children. When he received allegations of his sons' irreligion or profligate expenses, undermining the stability of his credit and fortune, Franchetti emotionally emphasized his own affliction, that of his wife and of his eldest son Abram, who stayed with him in Tunis, and even the suffering and tears of some business associates.

Writing to Reuben in 1782, for instance, he lamented the feared extravagant conduct of Isache and Jeudà, whose rumored disobedience had delivered him “such a sharp pickaxe [on his head] [...] that *has opened my head in two, and it's almost reached my brain has ve-shalom* (God forbid), and I'm beside myself and I no longer know what I'm doing.” He went on:

If I think about Isache, who if he continues *has ve-shalom* this life in Livorno spending time with comedians he may lose *has ve-shalom* his soul and body, I let you consider what sort of Pesach I will pass, *a man of my age and my toils*, and if your *mother* came to understand [what's going on], I am certain that both of [your brothers] would bury themselves alive; you will observe the copy of the letter that my close friend and a good Jew, Joseph Coen Tanugi, wrote me, who is the brother of this Caid Jeusuah. Yesterday when [...] Caid Jeusuah brought it to me, *he was crying like a baby*, telling me that he would have never thought he would hear this about your aforementioned brothers, *whom he loves like his own sons*.²⁴

Relying on the same emotional style, on similar occasions Franchetti hinted at the affliction of various members of the family, destined to an early grave because of such disobedient children. In 1783, he wrote Isache chastising him for his numerous expenses: “Don't mind [my ruin], I did not think that my Isache would have wasted in such a short time his father's capital, gained with sweat and blood [...] my dear Isache, *you have killed me* [...] your mother is *three-quarters dead*”

Mediterranean, eds. Matthias Lehmann and Jessica Marglin (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2020), 129-148; Francesca Bregoli, “Intimate Affairs: Family and Commerce in a Trans-Mediterranean Jewish Firm, 1776-1790,” in *Keeping Family in an Age of Long-Distance Trade, Imperial Expansion, Upheaval and Exile, 1550-1850*, ed. Heather Gaye Dalton (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020), 213-235.

²³ MS237, vol. 2:1, 47R (May 10, 1782), to Isache; vol. 2:2, 92r (December 20, 1782), to Reuben.

²⁴ MS237, vol. 2:2, 43v (March 22, 1782), to Reuben. Emphasis mine.

because of you, *bahabonot* (for my sins).”²⁵ To his horror, the same year he received word that Reuben had fallen in with a group of Christian “freemasons:” “My dear joy, hearing these rumors [...] for an *old father* like me, and your *religious brother* [Abram], *who is ill, you have sent us to our grave has ve-shalom.*”²⁶

On happier occasions, Franchetti praised Reuben and Isache for the consolation of their filial obedience;²⁷ as he put it to Reuben in 1787, “[k]nowing well how *obedient* my son Reuben is, I await your letter for my *consolation* and as an example for your brothers.”²⁸ An emphasis on the consolation that filial obedience and reports of good conduct brought Joseph appeared even more frequently in discussions about his sons that Franchetti included in letters sent to his closest business correspondents, particularly around the time 15-year-old Isache left Tunis to begin his apprenticeship in Livorno.²⁹ After leaving the parental household to begin their mercantile training, Jewish boys were placed into circuits of supervision made up of male Jewish business associates, envisioned as surrogate fathers and brothers.³⁰ Forms of “social parenthood” were not unique to the Jewish merchant world; they promoted reciprocity among long-distance traders from different cultures and ethnicities.³¹ In the case of Franchetti, his rhetoric suggests that he envisioned his business network as an extended Jewish family imbued in a culture not only of mercantile interdependency, but also of domestic sentimentality—one in which a show of paternal vulnerability was not out of place.

When Isache moved to Livorno in 1778, company member Abram Coen de Lara was tasked with living and working with the boy in Livorno. Turning to him in an emotional letter, Franchetti recommended Isache’s wellbeing to Coen de Lara,

²⁵ MS237, vol. 2:2, 133r (June 20, 1783), to Isache. Emphasis mine.

²⁶ MS237, vol. 2:2, 122v (July 15, 1783), to Reuben. Emphasis mine.

²⁷ MS237, vol. 2:2, 35r (March 18, 1782), to Reuben; 110v (January 30, 1783), to Isache; 144r (December 9, 1784), to Reuben.

²⁸ MS237, vol. 2:2, 156v, (June 24, 1787), to Reuben. Emphasis mine.

²⁹ MS237, vol. 2:1, 106R (May 5, 1777), to Abram Coen de Lara; 190L (January 28, 1779), to Samuele and Moisè Leon; 195L-R (May 20, 1779), to Jacob Bassano; 197L (May 19, 1779), to Paltiel Semach; 197R (May 19, 1779), to Samuele and Moisè Leon; 211L (July 23, 1779), to Samuele and Moisè Leon; 218R (September 24, 1779), to Samuele and Moisè Leon.

³⁰ This section offers new insights on themes first broached in Bregoli, “A Father’s Consolation,” 135-136.

³¹ Kooijmans, “Risk and Reputation,” 31-32; Daviken Studnicki-Gizbert, *A Nation upon the Ocean Sea: Portugal’s Atlantic Diaspora and the Crisis of the Spanish Empire, 1492–1640* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 81.

asking him to be like a father for the boy.³² Soon after, he wrote letters to all of his regular Jewish associates in the port, such as David de Montel, Samuele and Moisè Leon, and Paltiel Semach, asking them repeatedly to watch over Isache, fearing for his safety and his morals in the Tuscan hub.³³ A few months later, the Leon brothers informed Franchetti of Coen de Lara’s decision to return to Tunis, which would leave Isache without supervision. “I cannot express the agitation, which the point in your letter about my son Isache who lives there has caused me, that I can assure you it’s caused me enough agitation,” Franchetti lamented. Should Coen de Lara decide to leave without Isache, he begged the Leon brothers “not to withdraw [...] [their] affectionate vigilance” from his son, to protect Isache from the looming risk of ill behaviors:

In doing so you will *console an afflicted father*, that can only find repose in you Sirs for his own quiet, and then I will be even more certain of your great propensity towards me, and so *I plead with you from the bottom of my heart, and above all take it upon your hearts*, if you want to truly favor me, to prevent suspicious practices and [those] of people of inferior standing, which lead to the precipice. I am very much in your debt because of the kind precautionary notice that you give me about the matter, *but you have wounded my heart so much that I cannot be consoled* [...]. I place in you all my trust for the good education and salvation of my dear son.³⁴

Barbara Rosenwein’s notion of “emotional communities,” namely social groups that share the same emotional value system and practices, helps understand the phenomenon at play, which I call “rhetoric of paternal affliction.”³⁵ Within the emotional community of merchants to which Franchetti and his associates belonged, credit and trust were reinforced through social bonds articulated with the sentimental language of the late eighteenth-century household. Such language built on the assumption that menaces to Jewish paternal authority, construed as

³² MS237, 2:1, 169L (July 22, 1778), to Abram Coen de Lara.

³³ MS237, 2:1, 166R (July 17, 1778), to David de Montel; 173L (August 18, 1778), to David de Montel; 195L-R (May 20, 1779) to Jacob Bassano; 197L (May 19, 1779) to Paltiel Semach; 197R (May 19, 1779) to Samuele e Moisè Leon; 211L (July 23, 1779) to Samuele and Moisè Leon; 218R (September 24, 1779) to Samuele and Moisè Leon.

³⁴ MS237, 2:1, 190L (January 28, 1779), to Samuele and Moise Leon. Emphasis mine.

³⁵ Barbara Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 24-26. Emotional communities can be small or large, and one emotional community can partially overlap with another, making this heuristic tool particularly apt for nuanced historical studies.

leading to domestic disorder and business instability, generated masculine suffering. In practice, the rhetoric of affliction enabled Franchetti to create a moral and affective connection with like-minded business associates in the hope of better securing his position, threatened by the vagaries of long-distance trade, through the assistance of self-interested friends. He promised he would do the same for them.³⁶

Emotional language rooted in the pair “affliction-consolation” underscores the tangle of affection and interest that characterizes family business relations.³⁷ But these passages also alert us to the limits of unmediated paternal reach among transregional merchants. By calling on their associates with an emotional display of weakness, merchant patriarchs could access channels of in-person supervision and control for their distant sons and younger male relatives. In order to perform its communicative function effectively and as expected, summoning sympathy and compassion, such epistolary performance of affliction had to be based on a shared vocabulary of love and anxiety. This suggests that the notion of paternal affliction was not unusual, but rather a readily understandable emotional style among merchants. It won’t come as a surprise, then, that this emotional rhetoric was not only confined to personal letters. We find it also in Jewish supplications requesting intervention and legal resolution from Jewish and state authorities.

A Scandalous Brother

Turning to Mantua, a small Habsburg center in northern Italy, let’s consider the case of another, likely unrelated, Franchetti household. The bulk of Mantua’s wholesale and retail commerce, along with banking, was conducted by Jewish families, placing Mantuan Jewry, which constituted over 8 percent of the city’s total population in the 1770s and 1780s, at the heart of the local economy.³⁸ In

³⁶ MS237, 2:1, 166R (July 17, 1778), to David de Montel; 168R-169L (July 22, 1778), to Abram Coen de Lara; 182R (December 7, 1778), to Samuel and Moise Leon.

³⁷ For a classic reflection on the connection between emotion and interest in family life see Hans Medick and David Warren Sabean, “Interest and Emotion in Family and Kinship Studies: A Critique of Social history and Anthropology,” in *Interest and Emotion: Essays on the Study of Family and Kinship*, eds. Hans Medick and David Warren Sabean (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 9-27.

³⁸ Mantuan Jewry was composed of around 2100 souls in the 1770s and 1780s. For an overview, see Simona Mori, “Lo Stato e gli ebrei mantovani nell’età delle riforme,” in *La questione ebraica dall’Illuminismo all’Impero (1700-1815). Atti del convegno della Società italiana di studi sul secolo XVIII, Roma, 25-26 maggio 1992*, eds. Paolo Alatri and Silvia Grassi (Naples: Edizioni scientifiche

1770, Leone and Sansone Franchetti, who traded as *Ditta Laudadio Franchetti* in northern Italy and all the way to Lyon in France, emphatically petitioned both the Mantuan Habsburg authorities and the Jewish *massari* (lay leaders) on the occasion of a quarrel with their estranged brother, Laudadio. In their petitions, terms referring to disquiet and anxiety (*inquietudine, inquietarci, sturbare*) and harassment (*molesto, incomodato, molestie, agravi*) recurred in conjunction with the threat to family life and its economy posed by Laudadio. They were rhetorically contrasted to the ideal state of *quiete, sicurezza, and calma* (quiet, safety, calm) that Leone and Sansone wished to ensure to their households. Terms referring to affliction (*disgrazia, afflizione, dolore*) appeared strategically, as did *male* (ill) in various references to their brother's character and behavior. Laudadio wasn't just represented as an unreliable scoundrel, but as actively attempting to destabilize the domestic quiet of his two hard-working, dutiful brothers, as if animated by an evil impulse to spread chaos.

When Laudadio Franchetti had moved to London in 1753, Leone wrote to the Habsburg authorities, “a change of sky” had not modified his behavior, “but rather continuing the scandalous conduct he had kept in Mantua, he was no less deleterious to the paternal home while he was far away than he had always been in his fatherland;” he had even taken up with an Anglican woman and fathered children with her. In 1760, their late father Vitale had given in to Laudadio's pressure and emancipated “his dissolute, incorrigible son” offering him “that portion [of his assets] which might at any time be owed to him from within the paternal patrimony,”³⁹ and duly registered the act with a Christian notary.⁴⁰ Despite Vitale's generosity, Leone claimed, Laudadio was on his way to Mantua “to *disquiet*” him. Concerned about the financial “*harassments* [...] that he can justly fear due to his [brother's] bad nature and to the poverty into which he often falls because of his gambling vice, on top of the burden of his English wife and the children he had with her,” Leone requested that the government void any monetary demand on Laudadio's part.⁴¹

italiane), 209-234; Paolo Bernardini, *La sfida dell'uguaglianza. Gli ebrei a Mantova nell'età della Rivoluzione francese* (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1996).

³⁹ This is a reference to the legitime, that share of the estate that in *jus commune* is forcibly set aside for the so-called “necessary heirs,” namely children or (in the absence of children) parents of the deceased. See below for a full discussion.

⁴⁰ On the ritual and legal implications of emancipation in early modern Italy see Angiolina Arru, “Padre di Famiglia libero ed assoluto Padrone della sua Persona’: Un’introduzione,” in *Pater familias*, ed. Arru, 7-21, and Sandra Cavallo, “O padre o figlio? Ruoli familiari maschili e legami tra uomini nel mondo artigiano in età moderna,” in *Pater familias*, ed. Arru, 59-100; 77-85.

⁴¹ Supplication of Leone Franchetti to the *Giunta di Vicegoverno* (June 1770), *Sezione antica*, filza 164, cart. 01, Archivio della Comunità Ebraica di Mantova, Mantua, Italy (henceforth ACEM).

Once he arrived in Mantua, Laudadio in turn appealed to the *massari*, asking that his requests over the family's patrimony be judged according to Jewish law (*din Israel*). On that occasion, Leone and Sansone too sent a long petition to the *massari*, depicting their brother, "born for [their] *disgrace and affliction* by common parents," as an unscrupulous rascal intent on disquieting and vexing them.⁴² Although born a Jew, Laudadio could no longer be considered one and enjoy the legal benefits of belonging to the community, they claimed. Laudadio's request to rely on *din Israel* was thus unsupported. Given his scandalous English marriage, "of the character of Jew," they stated, "it is evident that he only retains the *od*[sic, but *ot*] *berit kodesh* (sign of the Holy Covenant) unfortunately gravely profaned, and his name, purely out of interest."⁴³ Even after his move to London, Laudadio had "*inconvenienced* the paternal home due to his dissipating proclivity (*genio dissipatore*)" and kept "milking considerable sums out of his parents' affection, with the false promise of reforming his behavior."⁴⁴ The *massari's* "religion and prudence" ought to decide whether a man of such character could be still considered Jewish.

The Franchetti brothers' description of Vitale's attitude and emotional state at the time of Laudadio's emancipation opens a vista on normative models and hierarchies of masculinity available to late eighteenth-century Jewish *patres familias*, who appear perched precariously between patriarchal and paternalist impulses. "As [Laudadio] sought to separate himself from his family while our common father *alav ha-shalom* (peace be upon him) was still living," the petition claimed, "the latter felt torn between the desire of pleasing his ill-intentioned son [...] and the *sorrow* of losing his paternal authority and, by dismembering his possessions, of undermining our interest as his other sons, who were obediently acquiescing to him and succumbing under the yoke of the business through our personal efforts." Even after Laudadio's emancipation, "*harassments and burdens*" on the family did not stop. A steady stream of cash filled Laudadio's

Emphasis mine. The authorities ruled equivocally, deputizing bureaucrat Francesco Antonio Tamburini to "recognize the merit of [Laudadio Franchetti's] pretensions against the petitioner," but also "to provide an economical expedient as required by said Laudadio's behavior, for the sake of the petitioner's redress." On the juridical role of the *Giunta di Vicegoverno* (Council of Vice-Government) (1750-1775) see Emanuele Pagano, "*Questa turba infame a comun danno unita*". *Delinquenti, marginali, magistrati nel Mantovano asburgico (1750-1800)* (Milan: Franco Angeli 2014), 22, 42.

⁴² Memorandum of Leone and Sansone Franchetti to the *massari* (undated, but 1770), ACEM, *Sezione antica*, filza 164, cart. 01. Emphasis mine.

⁴³ Namely, his circumcision. The expression is in Hebrew in the otherwise Italian text. The spelling of *ot* with a final *dalet* mimics the pronunciation of the word among Italian Jews.

⁴⁴ Memorandum of Leone and Sansone Franchetti, ACEM, *Sezione antica*, *ibid*. Emphasis mine.

pockets; he had collected an additional bequest from his father's will after Vitale's death, and the previous year, when Leone and Laudadio had met in Lyon, "persuaded by the requests and the affected, *insidious tears* of this *ill-affectionate* brother," Leone had given him 100 lire, "under the most sacred promise that [Laudadio] would give a public demonstration of his behavior's reformation." Instead, their unrepentant brother had now arrived in Mantua, "moved by turbid thoughts and *overly eager to disquiet us*."

In conclusion, Leone and Sansone Franchetti emphasized their "need to provide for their own *quiet and safety*, both of [our] possessions and of the persons of our numerous family" against Laudadio's "squandering proclivity," his "obscure religion," his ability to "take advantage of the kindness of his parents," and his "turbulent spirit, ready to *disturb familial quiet*." The division of his father's possessions; the bequest Laudadio had received after Vitale's death; the subsidies his brothers had continued giving him, despite their being "heads of numerous children, whom God *barukh hu* (blessed be He) may preserve *la-avodato it'aleh* (for His service, may He be exalted)"—none of those measures had been enough to stop Laudadio's "unjust *desire to disquiet us*," they concluded, appealing to the *massari's* "clearest understanding" to receive a favorable decision on the case.⁴⁵

The Franchetti brothers' petitions strategically deployed a vision of domestic quiet and commercial productivity maliciously assaulted by one disorderly relative, warm familial affection having been equally upended. For it to be effective, a supplication followed mutually intelligible formal and rhetorical conventions. Rhetorical choices were tailored to the supplicants' goals, displaying their political competences.⁴⁶ In any early modern petition, a particular linguistic register specific to the circumstances was utilized to lend greater legitimacy to demands and "to resonate with official expectations."⁴⁷ Their father Vitale was thus portrayed as a kindly patriarch torn between his duties and paternal fondness, just as Leone and Sansone had for a long time given in to Laudadio's demands out of their brotherly love. The reliance on emotional language was a deliberate tool in the supplicants' arsenal. The Franchetti brothers' display of sorrow served as a testament to the sincerity of their claims.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Memorandum of Leone and Sansone Franchetti, ACEM, *ibid.* Emphasis mine.

⁴⁶ Simona Cerutti and Massimo Vallerani, "Suppliques. Lois et cas dans la normativité de l'époque moderne – Introduction," *L'Atelier du Centre de recherches historiques* 13 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.4000/acrh.6545>.

⁴⁷ Zucca Micheletto, "Husbands, Masculinity, Male Work, and Household Economy," 759.

⁴⁸ This performance of "weakness" can also be compared to the strategic performance of "poverty" studied by Massimo Vallerani for late-medieval Bologna and Simona Cerutti for eighteenth-century Turin: Massimo Vallerani, "La pauvreté et la citoyenneté dans les suppliques

We do not know whether Laudadio was able to see his pretensions recognized. But should we take Leone and Sansone's claims about Laudadio's character entirely at face value? One intriguing element is the fact that Laudadio was an emancipated son. Emancipation formally released a son—often an adult son with children of his own—from *patria potestas*, which was absolute and in theory perpetual in early modern Italian states where Roman law was applied.⁴⁹ Once a son left his paternal home and cohabitation stopped, in practice a father's control had many limitations.⁵⁰ Still, sons whose fathers were still alive, even if they lived independently, were not fully in control of their property and earnings, unless their fathers legally allowed them to; they could not make a will unless they underwent emancipation.

Research on emancipation in Italy suggests that this practice, though relatively unusual, had a particularly high incidence in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries among the artisan and commercial classes when a capable minor son was able to create business networks of his own and wanted to branch out.⁵¹ Once freed from his father's *patria potestas*, a man became a completely independent entity for partners and associates, released not just from his family's support, but also from obligations towards them. Emancipation therefore helped distinguish a father's careers and affairs from those of his son, leading to clear patrimonial divisions and the assumption of separate responsibilities, which could reassure business associates as well as creditors.⁵²

Had this possibly been the case with Vitale and Laudadio—was Laudadio more business savvy than his brothers let it understand, or was his emancipation stemming only from his greedy insistence, as Leone and Sansone accused? Certainly, Laudadio Franchetti's continued financial dependence on Vitale first, and later on Leone and Sansone, muddled the orderly separation of familial and business destinies that the process of emancipation was meant to enable. It destabilized the “domestic tranquility” much sought after by the Franchetti brothers, as the good name and credit of the Franchetti family were jeopardized by

du xiv^e siècle,” *L'Atelier du Centre de recherches historiques* 13 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.4000/acrh.6547>; Simona Cerutti, “‘The Poor’s Justice.’ Jurisdiction & Debt-Credit Relationships (paper circulated at the Harvard Legal History Workshop, October 19, 2020). I thank Simona Cerutti for allowing me to cite this forthcoming article.

⁴⁹ Cavallo, “Bachelorhood and Masculinity,” 380. Among these states were the Kingdom of Savoy, Habsburg Lombardy, and the Habsburg-Lorraine Grand-Duchy of Tuscany.

⁵⁰ On the history of emancipation more broadly see Cavina, *Il padre spodestato*, 93-97.

⁵¹ Sandra Cavallo, “O padre o figlio?,” 77-85.

⁵² Arru, “‘Padre di Famiglia’,” 11.

the immoral behavior of Laudadio, legally no longer a member of the domestic group, and yet still very much part of it.⁵³

The Anxious Jewish Patriarch

In Jewish merchant patriarchs like Joseph Franchetti and Leone and Sansone Franchetti we see traces of what Kathleen Brown has dubbed the “anxious patriarch.” Brown was writing about the heads of households in colonial Virginia, whose anxious masculinity, she claims, was due to their marginal position vis-à-vis metropolitan English models and unmet expectations about hegemonic power over their wives, children, and slaves.⁵⁴ If hegemonic authority was the ideal model to which early modern *patres familias* aspired, it was unreachable in practice well beyond colonial Virginia.⁵⁵ On the one hand, paternal ambitions to absolute power might be routinely challenged by any disobedient member of the household, as so many civil and criminal court cases show; on the other, fathers embraced several identities along the benevolent-repressive spectrum throughout their existence, often simultaneously, depending on the occasion and necessity, as well as their age and status.⁵⁶

⁵³ In theory, an ungrateful emancipated son could fall back under paternal authority if his father was still alive: Cavina, *Il padre spodestato*, 96.

⁵⁴ Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 319-366.

⁵⁵ The formulation of the concept of “hegemonic masculinity” as the “normative [...] most honored way to be a man [...] [requiring] all other men to position themselves in relation to it” can be traced to R.W. Connell’s studies on Australian masculinity in the 1980s: R.W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,” *Gender & Society* 19 (2005): 829-859; 832. In this formulation, hegemonic masculinity works above all to ensure and institutionalize men’s dominance over women.

⁵⁶ In the second half of the eighteenth century, for instance, Italian Jewish merchants were committed to affectionate relationships with teenage and adult sons. They wished to please them whenever possible and were actively concerned about their proper rearing as men, Jews, and traders. Similar behaviors were common also among Italian non-Jewish merchant fathers: Elena Puccinelli, “Il carteggio privato dei Greppi. Spunti per un’analisi delle relazioni familiari e intime tra i membri della casa,” *Acme. Annali della Facoltà di lettere e filosofia dell’Università statale degli studi di Milano L* (1997), 93-116; Puccinelli, “Tra privato e pubblico: affari, politica, e famiglia nel carteggio di Antonio Greppi,” in *“Dolce dono graditissimo”: La lettera privata dal settecento al novecento*, eds. Maria Luisa Betri and Daniela Maldini Chiarito (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2000), 38-61. See also Stefano Levati e Giovanni Liva, eds., *Viaggio di quasi tutta l’Europa colle viste del commercio dell’istruzione e della salute* (Milan: Camera di Commercio e Archivio di Stato, 2006).

Although paternal claims to hegemonic authority remain at the center of scholarly attention, cracks in the authority of the *pater familias* are alluded to in both Italian literary and archival sources from the eighteenth century. Carlo Goldoni's 1750 play, *Il padre di famiglia*, a long-lived piece that was translated into multiple European languages and inspired Diderot's *Le père de famille* (1758), provides one of the most effective treatments of the ideal "father of the family" beleaguered by a sudden challenge to the domestic quiet, his good name, and credit, brought about not by one single threat, but by a trifecta of disasters—a dishonest tutor, an imprudent wife, and a reprobate son.⁵⁷ Goldoni's protagonist, honest merchant Pancrazio, is led to believe that his loyal son Lelio stole from him, due to the machinations of his sons' tutor and the irresponsible behavior of his younger child Florindo, mollycoddled by his foolish second wife. Pancrazio's masculine authority revolves around the preservation of reputation and honor, but he openly shares his sorrows with his good friend and fellow father, Geronio, who in turns faces a challenge of his own when one of his two daughters absconds with Florindo. "Poor fathers of families! So much fatigue, so much pains [sic], so much toil, so much attention, in educating children properly; and yet all will not do," Pancrazio exclaims once the thick plot of misdeeds comes to light.⁵⁸ His anguished cry captures the anxiety of the eighteenth-century patriarch.

Turning from literature to real life, another protracted and dramatic case from Mantua, between Salomon and Abram Vita Bassani, highlights the concerns a Jewish merchant father could harbor regarding the ruin of his name and firm and the dissipation of his fortune. The clash between Salomon and Abram Vita can be understood in light of "anxious masculinity"—at once authoritarian and moralizing, balancing love and discipline, yet always alarmed by generational difference—to explore how Jewish paternal rights were challenged, what limited strategies "afflicted fathers" had at their disposal to contain such challenges, and how the intervention of non-Jewish authorities could resolve or precipitate them. In March 1775, Salomon Bassani, one of the wealthiest merchants in Mantua, turned to the local government to ask for help with his son, Abram Vita.⁵⁹ The "disorders and debauchery of his dissolute son" had reached such an excess, Salomon wrote, that he was forced to "reveal them *with much embarrassment*, in order to implore the most efficacious and rapid intervention before they became

⁵⁷ Carlo Goldoni, *Il padre di famiglia*, ed. Anna Scannapieco (Venice: Marsilio, 1996) includes three significantly different versions of the play (1751, 1754, and 1764). An English translation appeared in 1757: Goldoni, *The Father of a Family* (London: J. Nourse, 1757).

⁵⁸ Goldoni, *The Father of a Family*, Act III, scene XVII, 177.

⁵⁹ The last name recurs as either Bassano or Bassani in documents produced by the same individual or organization. I have chosen to use Bassani throughout.

irreparable.”⁶⁰ Salomon accused his son of “most intemperately straying from his own Laws, honesty, and moderation,” dissipating “the paternal substances” and engaging in several fraudulent behaviors, as well in “unendurable, contemptuous behaviors” against his parents and in “mean and bitter threats” against his wife, Ricca Sullam.⁶¹ His father’s “reiterated corrections, friendly admonishments, gifts, favors, and promises” had not sorted any effect. With “*tears in his eyes*,” therefore, Salomon Bassani requested the government to “correct and restore to a good behavior” “a son who had become the ruin of his family, hated by his relatives, and despised by his Nation.” Despite bringing the matter from the relative privacy of his home to the knowledge of government authorities, he asked for a discreet intervention to avoid negative repercussions on his credit (“without that publicity that might cause harm to his name or to the concept of family”). Ideally, Abram Vita ought to account for all his expenses, return the stolen goods, respect his wife and parents, stay with his family, and observe “the divine and human laws.”⁶²

This supplication’s rhetoric is in line with examples surveyed above. Based on widely shared understandings of the necessity of familial quiet to uphold credit and protect the natural order of society, it featured the by-now familiar rhetoric of paternal affliction that emphasized sincerity through the display of one’s heart of hearts, to win the sympathy of the authorities. Yet, by asking for direct governmental intervention to reform a son’s behavior, there is a qualitative difference. According to the Aristotelian understanding of the management of the household (*oikonomia*), which had a long medieval and early modern legacy, the family unit mirrored the *polis*. Within the hierarchy of the household, the head of the domestic group was the absolute sovereign and organizing authority, in the same way as the sovereign was the organizing principle and absolute head of the state.⁶³ Does Bassani’s involvement of the local Habsburg authorities signal an actual weakening of the head of the household—an abdication of his (theoretical)

⁶⁰ Petition of Salomon Bassani (March 1775), *Culto, parte antica*, filza 2163, busta 4, Archivio di Stato di Milano, Milan, Italy (henceforth ASMi), 184. See also Shlomo Simonsohn, *History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua* (Jerusalem: Ktav, 1977), 154.

⁶¹ The sufferings of Ricca Sullam, who petitioned for divorce after her husband’s conversion, are detailed extensively in ASMi, *Culto, parte antica*, filza 2163, busta 5; ACEM, *Sezione antica*, filza 193, cart. 41 (*Relation on the divorce lawsuit brought by Mrs. Ricca Sullam against the Neophyte Ferdinando Bassani, her husband*). My book in progress investigates these records along with legal pamphlets published on the occasion of the lawsuit.

⁶² Petition of Salomon Bassani (March 1775), *Culto, parte antica*, filza 2163, busta 4, ASMi, 184. Emphasis mine.

⁶³ Otto Brunner, *Per una nuova storia costituzionale e sociale* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1977), 133-164; 147; Frigo, *Il padre di famiglia*; Cavina, *Il padre spodestato*, 47-51.

absolute authority in favor of the authority of the prince, implored to step in to reorder the family—which anticipates governmental ambitions to discipline family matters through legislation, as we see in late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century legal codes? Or was this yet another iteration of the strategic performance of paternal vulnerability, meant to stress the supplicant’s noble morality and elicit a redress of perceived injustice, leading to the ultimate strengthening of the head of the household? Both phenomena seem to be at play simultaneously, as the rest of Bassani’s story demonstrates.

The Habsburg government concurred that the situation warranted their involvement. After the appointment of a mediator, father and son Bassani registered an agreement in September 1775, defining their mutual responsibilities. In exchange for the reformation of Abram Vita’s ways and the removal of his son, seven-year-old Israel, from Mantua to Tuscany, where he would join the Livornese branch of the family business, Salomon promised a monthly stipend to Abram Vita, two new suits every other year, daily meals “at the family table,” as well as full and generous upkeep for Abram Vita’s wife. To show his generosity and good will, Salomon even agreed to pay a considerable portion of his son’s debts.⁶⁴

For three years, father and son must have found ways to coexist. It’s possible that Salomon harbored genuine hopes for Abram Vita’s reformation. Goldoni’s fictional Pancrazio, mulling over the theft allegedly committed by his son Lelio, had philosophized over the consolation that a son’s repentance could offer a father: “If he has robbed me, he may repent, and mend; therefore, either from his innocence, or from his repentance and amendment I expect that *consolation*, which is much to be desired by a father, who loves his children, his family (*casa*), and his reputation.”⁶⁵ Unlike Pancrazio, Salomon was not to receive solace. The Bassani family crisis came to a head in 1778, as Salomon submitted yet another petition to the Habsburg authorities detailing his son’s grave transgressions.

In spite of his efforts “to receive the *consolation* of seeing his only son directed on a path leading to moderation [...], subordination under his parents, and respect for divine and human laws,” Salomon had been repeatedly disappointed, his “loving paternal corrections” having been in vain. Even after “despairingly” turning to the government’s authority to curb his son’s excesses, and in spite of their duly certified agreements, Abram Vita had continued in his dissolute behaviors.⁶⁶ Salomon feared for the reputation of his business and the destruction of its substances, all the more so that his “subject firm” (*suddita casa*)

⁶⁴ Clauses defining the Bassani affair (25 September 1775), ASMi, *Culto, parte antica*, filza 2163, busta 4, 185.

⁶⁵ Goldoni, *A Father of a Family*, Act III, scene II, 149.

⁶⁶ Petition of Salomon Bassani (undated, 1778), ASMi, *Culto, parte antica*, filza 2163, busta 4, 180.

“ha[d] always cultivated a decorous commerce to the advantage of the population.” The “ungrateful son,” Salomon insisted, “with *significant affliction of his most inconsolable father*” was “immersed in gambling vices, frequenting Christian women with public scandal, [engaged] in many other disorderly behaviors, unrestrained in his contempt against his parents and in the terrible treatment of his wife.”

This “unhappy father” had even obtained a warrant for his son’s arrest, without ultimately executing it. Despite all this, Salomone complained, Abram Vita carried on as usual: “Alien to any principle of family love and of respect for his parents, [he] persever[es] in his usual debauchery with total indifference and licentiousness, because he’s not governed by any religion, and for this he is so despised by the dominant one, as he is detested by his own, squandering everything that he can get his hands on.”⁶⁷ Similarly to Leone and Sansone Franchetti’s supplication, Salomon Bassani’s petition relied on the language of affliction to emphasize the vast damages caused by a son’s disorderly conduct and irreligion, which upended the “natural order” of household government and with it the familial economy. Despite its employment of established tropes, the petition remained unanswered—but not because of Habsburg lack of interest. Enticed by Mantua’s authorities with the promise that conversion to Christianity would grant him authority over his son Israel and the full extent of his material interests from the Bassani estate, Abram Vita decided to become a Christian in July 1778, with the new name of Ferdinando Amalia Bassani.⁶⁸ This conversion triggered a sustained legal assault against Salomon’s *patria potestas* and commercial authority, which is best left for a separate discussion.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Petition of Salomon Bassani (undated, 1778), ASMi, *Culto, parte antica*, filza 2163, busta 4, 183.

⁶⁸ See Letter of Giorgio de Waters in Mantua to Carlo Giuseppe de Firmian in Milan (26 May 1778), ASMi, *Culto, parte antica*, filza 2163, busta 4, 178. For good measure de Waters also suggested that Abram Vita reform his behavior. He was baptized on July 27, 1778. His godparents were Duke Ferdinand of Parma and the *Infanta* Duchess Amalia, a daughter of Empress Maria Theresia of Austria. Letter of Giorgio de Waters in Mantua to Carlo Giuseppe de Firmian in Milan (30 July 1778), ASMi, *Culto, parte antica*, filza 2163, busta 4, 164. This conversion was surveyed in Bernardini, *La sfida dell’uguaglianza, 167-170*, who did not have access to some key sources on the affair. On Mantua’s house of neophytes, see Sara Campana, “La casa dei catecumeni e la legislazione sulla conversione degli ebrei a Mantova a nel mantovano fra XVI e XIX secolo,” *Materia Giudaica* 19 (2014): 157-167.

⁶⁹ On September 1 of the same year, Ferdinando Amalia began a lawsuit against his father, which would drag on until 1785, demanding the return of young Israel to Mantua and the largest possible portion of his father’s estate: Archivio di Stato di Mantova (ASMa), *Senato e Supremo Consiglio di Giustizia*, busta 6863, Causa Ferdinando Amalia Bassani. See Francesca Bregoli, “Conversion, *Patria Potestas*, and Capital Devolution in Eighteenth-Century Livorno and Mantua,” in *Jews in*

The Threat of Conversion

The rhetoric of paternal affliction, finally, appears in communal Jewish supplications. Returning to Leone and Sansone Franchetti, in the 1780s their family experienced three conversions to Christianity.⁷⁰ Conversions had both emotional and financial reverberations for early modern Jewish households; in fact, not only did neophytes retain property rights to those goods they had owned as Jews but they also enjoyed the exceptional right to collect the portion of their parents' estate that they would have been entitled to as heirs according to *jus commune* (namely the *legitima*, or legitime, the share of the estate that is set aside for all "necessary heirs"), immediately after becoming Christians and while their parents were still alive (*parentibus viventibus*).⁷¹ This canon law norm, accepted by most Italian rulers, could lead to the untimely break-up of family capital.⁷² This is the context for the supplications that the Mantuan Jewish *massari* sent to the *Regio Imperial Consiglio di Governo* in August 1787, in connection to the then still threatened conversion of Jacob Franchetti, Sansone's 23-year-old son.⁷³ There, the *massari* presented conversion and its economic effect in sentimental tones as a menace to domestic tranquility, undermining the fabric of family life as well as a Jewish family's reputation and, consequently, its credit.⁷⁴

Early Modern Italy: Religious, Cultural, and Social Identities, eds. Martin Borýsek and Davide Liberatoscioli (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2024), forthcoming.

⁷⁰ This section offers new insights on themes first presented in Bregoli, "Intimate Affairs," 225-227.

⁷¹ This right was granted by Pope Paul III in an apostolic constitution dated 21 March 1542. Ubaldo Giraldi, *Expositio juris pontificii: juxta recentiore ecclesiae disciplinam*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Rome: Apud Dominicum Ercole, 1829), 616-617. On this question see also Kenneth Stow, "Neofiti and Their Families: or, Perhaps, the Good of the State," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 47, no. 1 (2002): 105-113.

⁷² Duke Guglielmo Gonzaga (1538-1587) ordered the observance of Paul III's decree in the Mantuan territory, where it was still valid in the late eighteenth century. The "necessary heirs" are the children and the children of a deceased child, or, in the absence of children, the parents of the deceased. In countries using civil law systems, spouses are today included in the reckoning of the legitime; they were not in the eighteenth century, when they received the usufruct of a portion of the estate but did not usually inherit. The share is reckoned according to different systems at different times, depending also on the number of necessary heirs.

⁷³ Between 1786 and 1791, the *Regio Imperial Consiglio di Governo* (Royal Imperial Council of Government) functioned as the central administrative organ in Habsburg Lombardy. The colorful process of conversion of Jacob Franchetti, who was baptized by a solicitous maid after collapsing and most likely feigning his sickness, is surveyed in Bernardini, *La sfida dell'uguaglianza*, 170-173.

⁷⁴ The better-known supplication that the *massari* handed to Joseph II during his 1784 visit to Mantua anticipates some of these themes: Bernardini, *La sfida dell'uguaglianza*, 163. In response to this petition, in 1786 Joseph II extended to Mantua's Jewry a protective Habsburg decree first

First, they lingered on the perils of growing up in a transregional mercantile family, distant from paternal control. The family business of the Franchetti brothers, the *massari* claimed, required “that their sons be now in one, now in another place far away from the paternal eye, put[ting] them in danger of getting embroiled in *contemptible and unhealthy loves*.” They continued:

One of them after the *most ruinous dissipations* turned his back on his family and took up residence in France, taking with him what remained of his share in the business. A second one, having fallen in love with the daughter of an innkeeper, fled to Ferrara and there despite all valid dispositions managed to get baptized, so as to be able to pursue his *ill-conceived passion*, and to torment his poor Father, obliging him to give him a share of his assets; and a third one following in the footsteps of the others is about to do the same.⁷⁵

This was young Jacob, who had fled his paternal home with a non-Jewish dancer, Assunta Scanzi from Milan, taking “some quantities of money, two gold watches, clothes, and linen” for good measure.⁷⁶

Conversion was presented as a significant hazard not only for the fabric of family life, but also for the family’s reputation and, by extension, its credit. Ultimately, the *massari* aimed to persuade the authorities to introduce a “penal sanction” restricting would-be converts from collecting any economic benefits, to prevent abuses.⁷⁷ To avoid unsubstantiated conversions generated not by sincere faith but by domestic discord or “contemptible and unhealthy loves,” the Habsburg government ought to remove financial incentives such as the neophyte’s ability to inherit his portion of the family’s estate, the *massari* argued. Not only would this be “the most opportune way to keep children (*figli*) in that dependence that they

issued to the Jews of Gorizia in 1782. According to it, Jews could not be baptized unless it was proved that their decision to become Catholic stemmed from genuine “religious illumination” and was not caused by animosity against their families, fear, passion, or other utilitarian reasons. The text is reproduced in Mauro Perani, “Conversioni a Mantova e nel mantovano fra Sette e Ottocento. Il caso del neofito Moisè Aron Sacerdoti di Revere del 1786,” *Materia Giudaica* XIX (2014): 145-153; 146.

⁷⁵ Supplication of Mantua’s *massari* (8 August 1787), HM5192, Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, Jerusalem, Israel (henceforth CAHJP). Emphasis mine.

⁷⁶ Letter from *Auditore Criminale* Gioseffantonio Sozzi in Parma to *Regio Capitano di Giustizia* Giuseppe Guaita in Mantua (22 July 1787), *Culto, parte antica*, filza 2163, busta 7, ASMi, 3.

⁷⁷ The 1786 Habsburg decree that ostensibly protected Mantuan Jewry from conversions motivated by family resentment or other unreligious passions did not include a specific clause regarding the converts’ patrimonial rights.

try to shake by threatening their fathers with a conversion that always turns out to be advantageous to the former and gravely prejudicial to the latter.”⁷⁸ It would also serve, they claimed, as “a way to hinder that loss of credit that merchant families suffer as a result of the spread of rumors and the break-up of their status.” Ultimately, the measure would not only benefit the “good order of families” and the “decorum and purity of religion,” but also the “wellbeing and [...] prosperity of the state.”⁷⁹

The *massari* reiterated their request to introduce a block on converts’ patrimonial claims in October 1787; by that point, Jacob Franchetti had converted to Catholicism.⁸⁰ Again, they justified it appealing to a sentimental vision of domestic peace and concord intertwined with successful business. A targeted governmental intervention would protect “the *inner tranquility of families*, the necessary education and subordination of children (*figli*) to parents, the credit and backbone of Jewish commerce, and finally the very subsistence of the [Jewish] Nation.” The supplication presented the economy of the household and, for that matter, of the entire Jewish community, as depending on unbroken, serene family life, unmarred by disorderly passions. Familial bonds and credit, and by extension the survival of Mantuan Jewry itself, were instead “undermined and *hurt* by the *disquiets, financial break-ups, and discredit* that ordinarily result from that kind of change in religion which originates from the *license* of young men who *give themselves over to libertinism*.”⁸¹ This was a risk amplified by the demands of mercantile life, they implied. In their petitions, the Mantuan *massari* depicted a son’s conversion to Christianity as the ultimate personal and economic disaster for Jewish families. Family break-up due to conversion was portrayed as a status of undesirable disorder thrust upon merchant fathers by children presented as scoundrels and troublemakers unable to control their passions, a most unwelcome outcome of the absence of parental supervision for distant sons and the freedom apprehensively associated with long-distance travel.

Communal supplications were one of the genres most frequently used by the semi-corporate early modern Jewish community in beseeching access to the sovereign’s

⁷⁸ *Figli* could be intended as children in general or sons more specifically.

⁷⁹ Supplication of Mantua’s *massari* (8 August 1787), CAHJP HM5192. Emphasis mine.

⁸⁰ In the 1787 census, Sansone is listed as having only one younger son, Vidale Abramo, and three daughters, Regina, Stella, and Consola. I thank Michaël Gasperoni for sharing this information. Under the new name of Giuseppe Maria Borelli, Jacob married Assunta Scanzi in 1788 and went on to have a successful business career in Milan during the Napoleonic period: Bernardini, *La sfida dell’uguaglianza*, 173.

⁸¹ Further supplication of Mantua’s *massari* (15 October 1787), CAHJP HM5192; see also ASMi, *Culto, parte antica*, filza 2163, busta 7, 88-91. Emphasis mine.

power and *ad hoc* concessions.⁸² In this case, and similarly to the merchant householders we have encountered above, the *massari* too relied on an emotional style informed by parental anxieties, with the understanding that it would be possible to foster a cross-cultural bridge with the Habsburg authorities based on the shared belief that a disorderly home and radical filial disobedience, upending the authority of the *pater familias* and the natural order of society, resulted into economic ruin and paternal affliction.

Conclusions

Focusing on the emotional style that Jewish merchant patriarchs employed in letters and supplications in relation to family businesses and perceived threats to their survival helps us reevaluate the affective components of trade and credit, moving our attention to the role of “family” within the “family business,” often overlooked by business historians.⁸³ In his seminal study on the early modern English culture of credit, Craig Muldrew emphasized that families interpreted economic trust, a relational phenomenon, in emotional terms.⁸⁴ Credit relations, facilitated by a “competitive piety in which the virtue of a household and its members gave it credit so that it could be trusted and thus profitable,” were always “interpersonal and emotive.”⁸⁵ This argument should be extended to merchant households well beyond England. An analytical emphasis on emotions further brings into focus the imbrication of domestic and commercial spheres in merchants’ experiences.

The emotional style I surveyed above often revolves around a generational tension: on the one hand, a son whose irreligion and wicked mores are dreaded, rumored, or confronted; on the other, the sorrow of a father wounded in his authority and fearing for his credit and fortune. This rhetoric may be seen as a companion piece to those alarmed depictions of bachelors found in the prescriptive literature of early modern Jewish communities, where they were

⁸² On petitions and supplications in early modern Italy see Cecilia Nubola, “La ‘via supplicationis’ negli stati italiani della prima età moderna (secoli XV-XVIII),” in *Suppliche e “gravamina”: politica, amministrazione, giustizia in Europa (secoli XIV-XVIII)*, eds. Cecilia Nubola and Andreas Würzler (Bologna: Il Mulino 2002), 21-63; see also Cerutti and Vallerani, “Supplices.”

⁸³ Robin Holt and Andrew Popp, “Emotion, succession, and the family firm: Josiah Wedgwood & Sons,” *Business History* 55 (2013): 892-909; 892-893.

⁸⁴ Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation: The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), 5. The concept recurs throughout Muldrew’s book.

⁸⁵ Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation*, 195, 3.

associated with sinful behavior such as sexual looseness or group violence.⁸⁶ As Roni Weinstein has emphasized, rabbinic scholars depicted young people as “frivolous, sinful, violent, and inclined to unbridled behavior.”⁸⁷ In addition to normative Jewish views, Jewish traders internalized ideas of youth common within a broader mercantile culture. Young men were expected to develop into mature traders through education and example, but anxieties abounded. In England, for instance, “the erring son” had become “a stock character in trading life” by the eighteenth century and this was accompanied by widespread fear about parental inability to properly raise children and about the temptations of youth, a time associated with lack of self-discipline.⁸⁸ Among the English “middling sort,” great efforts were directed to shape young men into creditworthy, reliable, honest businessmen.⁸⁹

Similarly, Jewish merchants hoped that young men would learn to behave according to their status and develop into full-fledged traders through education and example, upholding the good name of the family and ensuring the continuation of its business.⁹⁰ The “rhetoric of paternal affliction,” then, may have signaled the feared failure of the paternal project to raise good men, good traders, and good Jews. This emotional language can be understood as a way to articulate reactions to potential or actual disorder, and ideally exert some control over such instability.⁹¹ In its attempt to elicit sympathy for suffering Jewish fathers, who, in line with notions of sensibility displayed their emotions and vulnerability in a show of great sincerity, it also importantly underscores a defense of Jewish commerce as a fundamentally moral and socially virtuous pursuit.

This emotional style raises additional questions about continuities and change in the history of the early modern Jewish family. Yosef Kaplan and Shmuel Feiner,

⁸⁶ Elliott Horowitz, “The Worlds of Jewish Youth in Europe, 1300-1800,” in *A History of Young People in the West*, vol. 1, *Ancient and Medieval Rites of Passage*, eds. Giovanni Levi and Jean Claude Schmitt (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 83-119; 93-97; Roni Weinstein, “‘Thus Will *Giovani* Do:’ Jewish Youth Sub-Culture in Early Modern Italy,” in *The Premodern Teenager. Youth in Society, 1150-1650*, ed. Konrad Eisenbichler (Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies: Toronto, 2002), 51-74; Roni Weinstein, “Between Liberty and Control: Jewish Juveniles in Early Modern Italy,” *Zemanim: A Historical Quarterly* 102 (2008), 30-37 [Hebrew].

⁸⁷ Weinstein, “‘Thus will *Giovani* Do,’” 58.

⁸⁸ Margaret R. Hunt, *The Middling Sort. Commerce, Gender, and the Family in England, 1680-1780* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1996), 50-51.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 46-72.

⁹⁰ For the Ashkenazi environment see Natalie Zemon Davis, “Religion and Capitalism Once Again? Jewish Merchant Culture in the Seventeenth Century,” *Representations* 59 (1997), 56-84; 68-69.

⁹¹ Broomhall, “Introduction: Destroying Order, Structuring Disorder,” 6-7.

looking at communal regulations in Western Sephardic communities and rabbinic writings in northern and central Europe, have emphasized a growing preoccupation with familial and sexual morality among eighteenth-century Jewish lay and religious leaders.⁹² This has been taken as proof of a secularizing Jewish society, increasingly unwilling to adhere to the traditional standards of Jewish observance. I suggest that we might also read it as the mounting discomfort of Jewish *patres familias* and lay leaders with changes in conceptions of patriarchal power that seemed to disrupt the Jewish family's "natural order." Towards the end of the Ancien Régime, some historians argue, the position of the head of the household had indeed become more vulnerable; filial disobedience and "domestic pathologies" became subject to police intervention in European states such as Tuscany, the Republic of Venice, and France.⁹³ The authority of the father was undermined then not only by new models of filial behavior, but also by the increasing interference of the state and its laws into domestic matters. Every story of household government in the early modern period is a story with political reverberations: considering the ways in which the rhetoric of paternal affliction was employed in individual and communal petitions allows us to read the relations between Jews and the Enlightened Absolutist state from a fresh perspective. Finally, thinking with "affliction" helps probe further notions of eighteenth-century patriarchal power, by assessing the boundaries between the private and the public and between notions of feminine and masculine. The sentimental declarations of paternal affliction employed in the semi-public arena of merchant correspondence and in official supplications show, if we needed any further proof, that the lines between the domestic and the public sphere remained profoundly blurred well into the late eighteenth century. At face value, the emotional style I described carries elements considered "feminine" rather than masculine, as public displays of sorrow and vulnerability could be heavily coded as female in the

⁹² Yosef Kaplan, *An Alternative Path to Modernity: The Sephardi Diaspora in Western Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2000); Shmuel Feiner, *The Origins of Jewish Secularization in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, tr. Chaya Naor (Philadelphia: Penn Press, 2011), 52-63.

⁹³ Cavina, *Il padre spodestato*, 90-93; Arlette Farge and Michel Foucault, *Le Désordre des familles: Lettres de cachet des Archives de la Bastille au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982). Work on Venetian petitions to "correct children" (and children's reactions to what was perceived as paternal tyranny) argues that the number of requests for governmental intervention increased exponentially after 1750: Tiziana Plebani, "Se l'obbedienza non è più una virtù. Voci di figli a Venezia (XVII-XVIII secolo)," *Cheiron* 49 (2008): 159-178; 171; Tiziana Plebani, *Un secolo di sentimenti: amori e conflitti generazionali nella Venezia del Settecento* (Venice: Istituto Veneto di Science, Lettere ed Arti, 2012).

eighteenth century.⁹⁴ Long-standing anti-Jewish tropes, moreover, mocked the alleged effeminacy of Jewish men, who were believed to menstruate and share other “womanly” traits.⁹⁵ Was the rhetoric of paternal affliction a result of the feminization of the Jewish merchant patriarch, a mercantile variant of Daniel Boyarin’s “Jewish male sissy”?⁹⁶

Despite their accent on vulnerability, emphatic displays of affliction did not unreservedly feminize the Jewish merchants who embraced such emotional style.⁹⁷ To be sure, the letters and supplications surveyed above underscored that merchant patriarchs were constantly at risk of losing their masculine hegemonic position. Any younger male relative whose behavior was understood to threaten the *pater familias*’ credit, honor, and fortune undermined his masculine authority, implicitly “unmanning” him. Expressions of affliction might be understood as feminized declarations of victimhood. And yet, the nature of the texts in which paternal affliction was articulated—merchant letters and supplications—suggests that this rhetoric in fact served to reinforce merchant masculinity. With the emergence of the culture of sensibility around the middle of the century, new notions spread about the permissibility and desirability of masculine displays of sorrow as examples of moral virtue and superiority of spirit.⁹⁸ An emotional style emphasizing the outpouring of affliction situated Jewish merchant patriarchs within the stream of noble masculine ethics.

A rhetoric that highlights the vulnerability of the head of the household, challenged by a younger male dependent who threatens to undermine or does indeed destabilize the “paternal home”—by eluding paternal supervision through sheer geographical distance, like Reuben, Jeudà, and Isache Franchetti; through an incomplete emancipation, as in the case of Laudadio Franchetti; or due to thefts and conversion, like Abram Vita Bassani and Jacob Franchetti—is certainly a far cry from ideal notions of heroic masculinity and absolute power of the *pater familias* that constituted the best-known ideological model available to early

⁹⁴ For feminized expressions of mercantile sorrow, see Ditz, “Shipwrecked, Or Masculinity Imperiled,” 58-72. On gender and public crying see Mario Menin, “«Le sexe des larmes»: emozione e genere tra fisiologia e moralità nel Settecento francese,” in *Femminile e maschile nel Settecento*, eds. Cristina Passetti and Lucio Tufano (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2018), 201-214.

⁹⁵ Sander Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 74-5.

⁹⁶ Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley - Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), xxi.

⁹⁷ For other instances of mercantile feminization, see Ditz, “Shipwrecked, Or Masculinity Imperiled,” 58-72.

⁹⁸ Menin, “«Le sexe des larmes»,” 208-209.

modern patriarchs. The Franchetti and Bassani patriarchs did not hesitate to present themselves as suffering, on the brink of ruin and even death. However, masculine affliction played a restorative role within the strategic narratives surveyed above. Within the genre of merchant letters, paternal vulnerability was invoked to bring children to obedience and to bolster bonds of interdependency in the commercial network as an emotional community. In turn, within the economy of petitions, Jewish patriarchs and their collective representatives, the *massari*, depicted paternal weakness to elicit a redress of perceived injustice and reaffirm threatened rights. Ultimately, through an emphasis on weakness and sorrow, this emotional style was meant to strengthen the patriarch's position. Virtuous domesticity, the good order of society, and the morality of Jewish commerce all came to rest on the tears of a father.

Francesca Bregoli holds the Joseph and Oro Halegua Chair in Greek and Sephardic Jewish Studies and is Associate Professor of History at Queens College and the Graduate Center, City University of New York. Her research focuses on eighteenth-century Italian and Sephardic Jewish history. She is the author of “Mediterranean Enlightenment: Livornese Jews, Tuscan Culture, and Eighteenth-Century Reform” (Stanford University Press, 2014) and co-editor of “Connecting Histories: Jews and Their Others in Early Modern Europe” (Penn Press, 2019) and “Italian Jewish Networks from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Centuries: Bridging Europe and the Mediterranean” (Palgrave, 2018). Her current project, influenced by the history of the family and the history of emotions, investigates overlaps between affective and business ties in transregional Jewish merchant families.

Keywords: Masculinity, emotions, *patria potestas*, Jewish merchants, conversion

How to quote this article:

Francesca Bregoli, “Paternal Affliction: Emotions and Masculinity among Eighteenth-Century Italian Jewish Merchants,” in “Jewish Masculinities, 1200-1800,” ed. Francesca Bregoli, *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of the Fondazione CDEC* 24, no. 2 (2023), DOI: [10.48248/issn.2037-741X/14445](https://doi.org/10.48248/issn.2037-741X/14445)