attention, in educating children properly; et yet all will not do,” Pancrazio exclaims once the thick plot of misdeeds comes to light.52 His anguished outcry captures the anxiety of the eighteenth-century patriarch.

Turning from literature to archival documents, another protracted and dramatic case from Mantua, between Salomon and Abram Vita Bassani, highlights not only the very concrete concerns a Jewish merchant father could harbor regarding the ruin of his name and firm and the dissipation of his fortune, but also the legal options that were open to him and the harsh financial consequences of familial breakup. We can read the clash between Salomon and Abram Vita in light of “anxious masculinity” – at once authoritarian and moralizing, balancing love and discipline, yet always alarmed by generational difference – to explore how paternal rights were challenged by disobedient children, what limited strategies “afflicted fathers” had at their disposal to contain such challenges, and, within the community of Jewish merchants, how the intervention of non-Jewish authorities could resolve or precipitate them. The case underscores that the lines between legal patria potestas and socially sanctioned commercial authority (what I called potestas mercatoria before) were profoundly blurred.

In March 1775, Salomon Bassani, one of the wealthiest merchants in Mantua, turned to the local government to ask for help with his scandalous son, Abram Vita.53 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 irreparable.”54 Salomon accused his son of “most intemperately

53 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.
54 Petition of Salomon Bassani (March 1775), Culto, parte antica, filza 2163, busta 4, ASMi, 184. The case was surveyed in Bernardini, La sfida dell’uguaglianza, 167-170, who however did not have access to key sources on the affair. See also Shlomo Simonsohn, History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua (Jerusalem: Ktav, 1977), 154.