Emotions and Business in a Trans-Mediterranean Jewish Household
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Introduction
These five excerpts come from two letter books that belonged to Joseph Franchetti (ca. 1720-ca. 1794), a successful Jewish merchant of Mantuan origins based in Tunis. At the time of the correspondence (1776-1790), Franchetti was a chief partner in the Salomone Enriches & Joseph Franchetti Company, a family-based trading firm with interests in Tunis, Livorno, and Smyrna. In the 1770s and 1780s, the core of Franchetti’s business was the sale of Tunisian chechias. These hats, made in Tunis with European wool acquired from Livorno, were highly sought after in the Ottoman Empire, with Smyrna serving as key distribution center. The strategic arrangement of the Enriches and Franchetti Company, with its presence on three Mediterranean coasts, placed these entrepreneurs at the forefront of the chechia trade in the last quarter of the eighteenth century.

The letter books do not preserve the official correspondence of the Salomone Enriches & Joseph Franchetti Company, which to the best of my knowledge has not survived and which would have dealt almost exclusively with commercial issues, but rather the private, unofficial exchanges between Franchetti and a number of partners and associates, among whom were his young sons and brother-in-law. While most extant business letters, as Francesca Trivellato has noticed, seldom “give us clues about the emotional lives of their authors and recipients” (at least when it comes to the Jewish, Mediterranean sphere), Franchetti’s correspondence constitutes an exception. These letters offer a glimpse into personal, often fraught exchanges between relatives who knew each other well and did business together, thus shedding light on a little studied, but common aspect of eighteenth-century Jewish life: the emotional relations and tensions between close relatives in transnational merchant families divided by great geographical distance.

After marrying Ester Baruch, Joseph had five children – four sons, Abraham (b. 1754), Reuben (b. 1757), Judah (b. 1760), and Isaac (b. 1763) – and a daughter, Sara (b. 1767). As with many Jewish family firms, male members of the immediate
household were dispatched abroad to secure the company’s commercial position in distant markets. Joseph’s eldest child, Abraham, remained with his father in Tunis, but his younger sons were sent to learn the trade not long after reaching the age of majority. Reuben left home in 1771, at 14, first for Livorno, and later for Smyrna, where he worked with his uncle Benjamin Baruch. Judah left for Smyrna in May 1778 (at 18) to become a clerk, the first step in his mercantile apprenticeship. Isaac, the youngest son, was sent to Livorno during the same year, at 15, to pursue the same education. Between 1771 and 1778, thus, Joseph Franchetti saw three sons leave the family home. While Judah occasionally returned to Tunis for short periods of time, Joseph did not see Reuben and Isaac for well over a decade – if ever again. In the impossibility of bridging the distance that kept them apart, letters allowed Franchetti to maintain contact with his children. Indeed, correspondence was one of the key avenues for families to teach shared values across space, reinforcing rights and stressing obligations and duties; as David Cressy put it in his now classic discussion of seventeenth-century transatlantic communication, letters provided “an emotional lifeline […] that stretched across the wide ocean to inform, comfort or persuade kinsmen and friends on the other side.” Between 1776 and 1790, Franchetti wrote over 360 letters in Italian and Hebrew addressed to his business associates. Of these, 78 (approximately 20%) were directed to his sons and brother-in-law. Although replies have not survived, it is possible to infer them based on Joseph’s reactions. The correspondence thus offers a rare entryway into Jewish familial relations as they evolved over the course of about fifteen years.

While the practices of diasporic merchants have been primarily studied by economic historians who concentrate on their business strategies, I will argue that we still need to fully understand the role that emotions played in shaping cross-cultural trade. There is a broad consensus that trans-regional family ties were crucial in ensuring the success of Jewish trading networks, both in the west and the east. But how were such ties maintained or challenged as family members dispersed, given the difficulty that geographical distance created in preserving affective bonds and reciprocal obligations? While family separation is often viewed as a natural ingredient of diasporic trade, with fathers sending sons abroad to man commercial outposts or marrying daughters off to cement alliances, it might be beneficial to emphasize “process” rather than “structure,” and consider these separations as emotionally fraught practices, rather than simply rational business choices. Although abundant evidence exists for certain mobile groups in the broader European and colonial societies of the eighteenth century – such as
English traders whose families were divided by the Atlantic Ocean – we still know very little about the emotional worlds and values of Jewish family members who lived distant from each other, often in different lands. What expectations and concerns did they harbor?

My presentation will focus on the emotional world of Joseph Franchetti, filled with anxiety, anger, and longing. Among other things, Franchetti’s correspondence illuminates the strategies with which he attempted to control and strengthen bonds with his young sons living far away, as well as to educate and socialize them, preparing them for life in foreign regions whose customs were perceived as not only alien, but also potentially dangerous for Jewish piety and, thus, business. Considering Franchetti’s engagement with allures of acculturation and risks of estrangement will additionally help us reinsert emotions into the study of Jewish merchant culture.

Short bibliography

- **On the Franchetti family:**

  Jean-Pierre Filippini, “Gli ebrei e l’attività economica nell’area nord-africana,” *Nuovi Studi Livornesi* 7 (1999), 131-149.


- **On early modern merchant culture and families:**


[...] I cannot express the agitation, which the point in your letter about my son Isaac who lives there has caused me, that I can assure you it’s caused me enough agitation; I have constantly encouraged Mr. Coen de Lara to never let [my son] take a single step without him being at [my son’s] side, and that in executing the project of coming back [to Tunis], which he has come up with, he should pay attention not to leave [my son] there, but bring him along back to me, as I absolutely do not want to leave [my son] to be free in such a dangerous land; I dare to beg you, relying on that goodness that you show me, that if you were willing to welcome him, in case the aforementioned Mr. Coen wanted to come back here [to Tunis], you would do me an unparalleled kindness [...] but in whatever shape it may happen, I beg you for God’s sake not to withdraw from my aforementioned son your affectionate vigilance concerning his behaviors, in order to break off any road [that leads to] bad practice. 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 then 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, if you think it opportune to call Mr. Coen and have a conversation with him about this important affair of mine please do what you think is necessary, while I place in you all my trust for the good education and salvation of my dear son, and I cannot tell you more. [...]
2) Dearest and Most Beloved Son, in Livorno. From Tunis, March 26, 1779

[..] I know very well that any Father ought to look for the interest of his sons, and it’s for this reason that I have worked during my life for 45 years until now, sufficiently to make you into men and be able to live according to your birth, but my dear wise Parisian, it is not mandatory for a young man of your age to remain there [in Livorno] to attend to a commercial firm in a land of freedom, far away from Barbary, although I know that thank God you have fear of God, and that you are a talmid of Rabbi Shlomo [sic] Alfasi, and that you are very capable to take care of our business just as a grown up could do it, so it is up to you to behave like a religious person and show me the evidence, and obey everybody, and then I will know what to do for my dear beloved Isaac, and your mother is crying all day long since she won’t see you at our table the evening of Pesach, which we wish will be most happy for you, and both your aforementioned [mother] and I only recommend to you [that you have] fear of heaven and that you go to the holy synagogue daily for shacharit, minchah and arvit, and every morning and evening in your yeshivot study with the sons of Mr. Recanati,¹ which is the essential thing, and don’t go all the time to see comedies, which is what ruins youth, [for] this world and the next, and you will receive all of these documents from your parents, who think highly of you and love you like our own liver; [..] and after Pesach either Nunez, or Isaac son of Salomon, or Rapahel Enriches with his two wives will go there, to stay there with you, and if the aforementioned Raphael went there [to be] with you then I will find my quiet, to leave your there handling the entire business; and I assure you that he is a good Jew and he would treat you like his own son, with his whole innocence, which is truly real; we are glad to hear that you are in perfect health and that you have returned [in perfect health] thank God, I pray the Most High that he may preserve you, [to enjoy] a long life and be a good Jew [..] Unfortunately not only did our little Ester pass away, but also our little Joseph because of smallpox, praying the Most High that those small innocents [who are now] in Paradise may pray God for us, and have left a long life to their parents and everybody in our family, that they may have long-lived male children amen. [..]

3) Most Beloved Son Reuben, in Smyrna. From Tunis, March 22, 1782

¹ The wealthy Recanati family ran of the most prosperous firms in Livorno. They were the first Italian Jews to join the primarily Sephardic government of the community in 1715, when the Grand Duke allowed Italian Jews to be selected for leadership positions.
My dear joy, after having told you what’s happening with this cicor\(^2\), which I’m certain I will be avenged of it by you, now again I have received such a sharp pickaxe [on my head], again, that has opened my head in two, and it’s almost arrived to my brain has ve-shalom, and I’m beside myself and I no longer know what I’m doing, while all my efforts and sweating blood, which I suffer because of this cicor, I suffer everything for my family, with honor, and it’s not little […] and all those efforts, with divine assistance [are meant] to leave you with some sufficient capital for a long life, may I have it, so that you can be merchants, like thank God you are, but that your two brothers, namely Isaac and Judah, ought to be the ruin of two precious joys like you and Abraham your brother, I will not let it happen, and if they will continue has ve-shalom with this life, I assure you and I swear to you that I will write a will to leave them 100 pezze each and disown them from being my sons. If I think about Isaac, 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 them 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 his brother 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 […] you’ll see what I have done to discover all this […] I asked my brothers in Mantua to write their Livornese correspondents to endeavor to find out my sons’ behaviors in Livorno, because our cousin Yechiel Franchetti from Mantua is a correspondent of the noble Franco house of Livorno, and I swear to God that their best [representatives] reply to him in this paragraph: “[To] Mantua, Mr. Franchetti, I acknowledge receipt of your dear [letter], and in answering I tell you that, in so far as I had my ministers, persons of excellent religion [and] honesty, research the behaviors of the two Franchetti youth who reside here, I was able to discover something, and it turns out that truly, in a certain way, they let themselves be conducted to entertainments that are not so laudable, hence you can assure their father in Tunis that everything that was written to him about their condition is not entirely true, but at least there is something true […] I was assured that the elder is

\(^2\) Franchetti refers repeatedly to an unknown enemy with this expression, from the Hebrew \textit{shikor}, drunkard.
rather generous in spending, but to give them the praise they deserve, they are both attentive during the hours of business; if then you let their father in Tunis affect them with his paternal fear to avoid any disorder, that you may be able to perceive, I will make sure that the aforementioned ministers keep an eye on them, and with my dearest greetings…” You will keep secret this confidence of the worthy Franco house of Livorno […] and I trust in God, that they will do their teshuvah, otherwise I swear I will do what I said before, [as long as] despite all this they don’t put me six feet under. […]

4) Dearest Son Reuben in Smyrna. From Tunis [no date, but August 1782]
2:2, 79v-80r [excerpt]

[…] My dear precious joy, I have already written you […] that since you do not want to get married with your cousin […] I gladly sacrifice everything not to give you any disgust, not even in the smallest matter, and the consolation I have in this world is when I receive your letters, and in case there were no ships making passage from there to here in a short time, I beg you for God’s sake to write them [send them] by way of Livorno, Marseille, Genoa, now that we’re entering the winter season please send us two lines […] your decision not to marry with your cousin I approve of it just like you, and I have already told you that I have no other consolation in this world but when I see your illustrious characters, however, speaking like a true and beloved father, now your letters give us such hypochondria, both to me and even more to your poor mother, as you tell us that we should not torment you by telling you that you should get married, since we have already decided the matter of your cousin, but this way of yours of writing that you do not feel like getting married with anybody gives us a hundred thousand vane thoughts, which, as your parents, we cannot understand any more; if you will explain yourself better, and tell us that you do not feel like getting married here [in Tunis], but you would feel like getting married in Livorno, or in Holland, to your liking, this we gladly concede to you, but every time you will confirm to us that you do not want has ve-shalom to get married, you will make us ever more melancholy, you should [?] never fear to keep a father and a mother worried throughout his [their] life, so it is up to you to console us, as God will console you, in all and every matter, amen. […]

5) My Dearest Son Reuben, in Smyrna. From Tunis, July 15, 1783.
2:2, 120v-124v [excerpt]
Mr. Jacob Enriches, after having become like a madman and doing the siman pasul [unfit sign – sign of the cross?] before eating and after eating, now however discloses with our company that you have become a freemason, and he with you, and that you do know what Judaism means, and you say neither tefillah, nor mincha, nor arvit, and you don't wash your hands before eating and you don’t say the berakhah, but only that all day long the harelim [uncircumcised] freemasons greet you with the sign of the cross [selem] has ve-shalom, and all the Enriches swear that this is more than true, while they are all crazy and believe the words of crazy Jacob; although I share your opinion that he is more evil than crazy, and finds himself in criminal suits with his brothers, unbelievable things […]; but my dear joy hearing these things from the mouth of a madman, for an elderly Father like me and an ill, religious brother, you have sent us has ve-shalom to our grave […]. Jacob Enriches swears that it’s because of Bondi and Mercado who you were reduced to a has ve-shalom freemason, that your brother Abraham swears that if has ve-shalom this were true he would never acknowledge your as his brother […]
Non posso esprimervi l’agitazione che mi ha cagionato l’articolo della vostra lettera riguardante mio figlio Isache di costì, che vi assicuro mi è stato di bastante agitazione; io ho incaminato costantemente il Signor Coen de Lara di non farli mai fare un passo solo senza condurselo al fianco, e che eseguendo il progetto, che si è formato di qua ritornare avverta bene di non lasciarlo costì, ma di ricondurmeo qui in sua compagnia, non volendo asolutamente lasciarlo in sua libertà in paese così pericoloso; io ardisco pregarvi affidato da quella bontà che mi dimostrate che volendolo voi accogliere presso di voi Signori nel caso che il citato Sig.r Coen se ne volesse qua ritornare mi fareste una finezza senza pari [...] ; ma in qualunque forma che sia per succedere vi prego per amor di Dio di non abbandonare il detto mio figlio della vostra affettuosa vigilanza a suoi andamenti, alfine di troncarle ogni strada di cattiva pratica, che in tal guisa consolerete un padre afflitto che altri che in voi Padroni non riposa per la sua quiete, ed allora maggiormente conoscerò la grande vostra propensione a mio riguardo, a così dunque mi raccomando col più vivo del cuore e soprattutto vi stia a cuore, se mi volete favorir da davero d’impedire le pratiche sospette e di persone d’inferior condizione, che poi conducono al precipizio. Io vi sono molto tenuto del gentil avviso di prevenzione me ne date; ma mi avete ferito il cuore assegnio di non io darmi pace se stimate opportuno di mandare a chiamare il Sig.r Coen con lui tener proposito di questo mio importante affare fate ciò, che stimerete esser necessario, mentre in voi ripongo ogni mia fiducia per la buona educazione e salvezza del caro mio figlio ne di più posso dirvi. [...]

Words abbreviated in the original letters have been unabbreviated in the transcriptions below for convenience.
2) Livorno Carissimo et Amatissimo Figlio Tunis a 26
Marzo 1779
2:1, 193 right-194 left [excerpt]

[...] So molto bene che ogni Padre deve cercare l’interesse de suoi figli, che per questa ragione che da 45 anni sino ora ò fatticato la mia vita abbastantemente per farvi uomini e per poter campare secondo la vostra nascita, ma caro mio parigino savio non è dovere che un giovine della vostra età resti costi ad attendere a una casa di commercio in paese di libertà, dispiccato della Barberia benché sò che avete grazia a Dio timore di Dio, e che siete talmid di R. Selomò Elfesi [sic], e che siete capacissimo d’accudire al nostro negozio quanto lo può eseguire un grande di età sicché tocca a voi adeportarvi di religioso e farmene vedere le prove ed essere ubbidiente a tutto il mondo, che io allora io saprò come fare per il mio caro diletto Isache, che la vostra madre non fa altro che piangere per non vedervi a lla nostra tavola la sera di Pesah, che ve lo auguriamo felicissimo e tanto la suddetta vostra che io, non vi raccomandiamo altro che le irat shamayim e andare alla Santa Scola a chahrit minhà e arbit cotedianamente e ogni mattina e sera alli vostri esibot meldare con li figli delli Signori Reccanati che quello è il esenziale, e non andare continuamente alle comedie, che quello perda la gioventù, questo mondo e l’altro, che tutti questi documenti li riceverete dei vostri genitori, che vi stimono e vi aminino come il nostro proprio fecato; [...] e doppo Pesah si porterà costi Nunez o Isache di Salamon o sia Raffael Enriches con le sue due mogli per restare costi con voi che quando si portasse costi il suddetto Raffael con voi allora resterò riposato a lasciarvi costi con tutto il maneggio in vostri mani; assicurandovi che è un buon jodi e che vi terrebbe come suo proprio figlio con tutta la sua innocenza veramente reale, ci rallegramo nel udire che siete di perfetta salute e che siete tornato grazia a Dio che prego l’Altissimo vi conservi per lunga vita e buon jodi [...] purtroppo che non che non [sic] mancò solo la nostra Esterina ma ancora il nostro piccolo Joseph del vajolo pregando l’altissimo che quelli innocenti del Paradiso pregano Iddio per noi, e che lunga vitta abbo.o lasciato al nostro genitori e a tutti di nostra famiglia, e che li conceda banim zecharim [sic] di lunga vita amen [...]
Mia gioia preziosa, doppo d'avervi avvisato quello mi passa con questo cicor che sono certo da voi riceverne la mia vendetta ora di nuovo mi venne una piccozza così bene amolata di nuovo che mi spartì il capo in due, e quasi arrivatomi has veshalom nei cervelli miei, che sono fuori da me e non so più quello mi faccio, mentre tutte le mie fatiche fatte e sudori di sangue, che passo con questo cicor tutti li soffro per sostenere la mia famiglia, con onore, che non fo poco [...]; e tutte quelle mie fatiche con l’assistenza divina però con lasciarvi, con qualche capitale sufficiente a lunga vita, ch’io abbia per potere essere mercanti, come grazie iddio siete, ma che li 2 vostri fratelli cioè Isache e Jeudà abbian d’essere la rovina de 2 gioie preziose come voi ed Abram il vostro fratello no per certo e se loro seguiteranno has veshalom questa loro vita, v’assicuro e vi giuro, che farò un testamento di lasciargli 100 pezze a ognuno e diseredarli da miei figli, mentre penso per Isache che se seguita has veshalom questa vita in un Livorno d’attendere a commedianti può perdere has veshalom anima, e corpo, che vi lascio considerare che Pesah fo di un uomo, di età e fatica come me, che se la vostra madre venisse a penetrare questo sono certo, che si intererebbero li dua vivi; osserverete la copia di lettera che mi scrisse quel mio intrinseco amico e buon jod ì di Josef Coen Tanugi fratello di questo Caid Jeusuah, che ieri quando questo suo fratello Caid Jeusuah me la consegnò piangeva come una creatura, dicendomi che giammai pensava di udire questo dai suddetti vostri fratelli, che li ama come suoi propri figli [...] vedete cosa ho fatto io per scoprire il tutto [...] ho fatto che i miei fratelli di Mantova scrivono ai loro corrispondenti di Livorno che procurono di scoprire li andameneti de miei figli di Livorno, che un nostro cugino Ihiel Franchetti di Mantova è corrispondente della nobile casa Franco di Livorno giurandovi in Iddio che il meglio di loro li rispondono in questo paragrafo: “Mantova Sig.e Franchetti ricevo la cara vostra, rispondendo col dirvi, che per quanto io abbia fatto fare da miei ministri persone di buonissima religione onestà [...] ricerca dei andamenti dei 2 giovini Franchetti residenti qui, ne ho fatto qualche scoperta, e si trova, che veramente si lasciono in certa maniera condurre a divertimenti poco laudabili si che potete assicurare al loro genitore di Tunisì che tutto quello li fu scritto della loro sistema non è tutto vero, qualche cosa almeno vi è di certo [...] mi si assicura, che il maggiore sia alquanto generoso ne lo spendere, ma per farli poi le lodi, che meritono sono tutte due attenti alle ore del negozio; se dunque facciate che il loro genitore di Tunisì li faccia il timore paterno per evitare ogni disordine, che voi potete penetrare, e io non mancherò che li suddetti ministri l’abbino li occhi
addosso e salutandovi caramente ...” Terrete segreto questa confidenza della degna casa Franco di Livorno [...] e spero in Iddio, che faranno le loro tecìubà [sic] in difetto di giuro di fare quello dettovi di sopra, con tutto questo non mi pongono sottoterra [...]

4) Smirne Carissimo Figlio Reuben
Tunis [n.d.]
2:2, 79v-80r [excerpt]

[…] Cara mia gioia preziosa io di già vi scrissi [...] che giacché non avete il genio di casarvi, con vostra cugina [...] tutto sacrifìcio volentieri pure per non disgustarvi, in qualche minimo affare, e il consolo che tengo in questo mondo è quando ricevo le vostre lettere, che caso di costi per qui non vi fusse passaggi in brevi tempi, vi prego Lemahan Asciem [sic] scriverne per la via di Livorno, e per tutte le vie possibili, in tutti li passaggi, che passano a costì per Livorno, Marsiglia, Genova, ora che entriamo nell’inverno dateci due righe [...] sicché giacché così il vostro genio di non ammogliarvi con la suddetta vostra cugina io l’approvo quanto voi, e di già vi dico che altro consolo [non] ho in questo mondo, che quando vedo i vostri illustri carìtteri, ma parlandovi da vero e amato vostro padre, ora le vostre lettere ci pongono un ipicondria tanto a me e più alla povera vostra madre incredibile mentre ci dite che non tormentiamo nel dirvi di ammogliarvi, che per la vostra cugina di già vi abbiamo deliberato, ma questo modo del vostro scrivere, che non volete ammogliarvi con niuno ci fa entrare cento mille vanì pensieri, che come vostri genitori non ci potiamo di più spiegarci; se vi spiegherete meglio, e che ci direte che non avete il genio di ammogliarvi qui, e che avreste il genio di ammogliarvi in Livorno, ho in Olanda a vostro piacimento questo volentieri ve lo accordiamo, ma ogni qualvolta ci confermerete il termine di non volervi has veshalom ammogliarvi ci terrete sempre più malinconichi, che mai avete timore di tenere padre e madre inquieti per eterno di sua vita, sicché tocca a voi a consolarci cosi Iddio vi consolerà, a voi in tutto, e per tutto amen. […]

5) Smirne Carissimo Mio Figlio Reuben
Tunis a 15 Luglio 1783
2:2, 120v-124v [excerpt]
[…] Il Signor Iacob [Enriches] doppo d’aversi fatto da pazzo e farsi il siman
pazzul [sic] avanti da mangiare doppo mangiare, ora divulga colla nostra
compagnia però, che voi siete tornato fermassan e lui con voi, e che non sapete
quello vuol dire Iodud nè che dite ne tefillà ne minhà ne arbit, nè che vi lavate le
mani avanti di mangiare nè che dite berahà, e solo che tutto il giorno li harelim
fermassoni vi salutano col segno dello selem has ve-shalom e tutti li Enriches
giurano che è più che verissimo, mentre loro sono tutti pazzi e credono alle parole
del pazzo Iacob; benché io sono della vostra opinione che sia più maligno che
pazzo e sta in liti criminali con i suoi fratelli, cose incredibili […] ma cara mia gioia
audire queste cose di bocca di un pazzo a un Padre di età come me, e a un fratello
religioso ammallato ci avete posto has ve-shalom nella fossa […] Iacob Enriches
giura che Bondi e Mercado sono quelli che v’hanno ridotto has ve-shalom
fermasson, che il vostro fratello Abram giura che se has ve-shalom fusse questo
che giamment vi conoscerrebbe più per fratello […]