The Calabrian Charlatan, 1598-1603:
Messianic Nationalism in Early Modern Europe

H. Eric R. Olsen
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Acknowledgments

One of the many concerns that humanists bring to their studies is the way texts should be read. Should a given text be read literally? Is the context important? What about structure? In looking over this manuscript and struggling to figure out what to say in my acknowledgments, I see that this text can be read as a catalog of debts, large and small.

In the overall structure and in the attempts to tease out the larger significance of my study, I can see my debt to my advisor Tom Safley. For the past seven years he has listened to my ideas in their least-polished forms, read bits and pieces of my drafts in their endless incarnations, and helped me sort it all out. He also generously put up with my tendency to put this project aside for several months at a stretch and concentrate on other matters. Over this time I have learned to appreciate Tom not only as a gifted advisor, but as a friend as well.

If there is any merit in the writing of this study, it is due to Len Rosenband. Slowly and patiently for the last decade or so, he has taken an engineer’s writing habits – which amounted to listing the relevant facts and leaving the rest up to the reader – and honed them into something that occasionally produces a semblance of readable prose. More than anyone else, Len has taught me to pay attention to the precise meanings of words, the way they sound, and how to link them together in purposeful phrases, sentences, and paragraphs. He too has become a great friend as well as teacher.

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Finally, the usual authorial disclaimer applies: I alone am responsible for ignoring, forgetting, or failing to understand much of the good advice concerning this book that I have received over the years from the people listed above.

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In 1580 King Philip II of Spain completed the 800-year-old dream of uniting the Iberian peninsula under one Christian ruler. With the addition of Portugal and its overseas empire to his domains, Philip ruled a vast expanse of territory that could only be measured in continents: the newly discovered Americas, coastal forts in Africa, outposts in Asia, and large sections of western Europe. His merchants spanned the globe, providing spices, sugar, slaves, silver, and gold to the growing European markets. Diplomats and scholars throughout Europe spoke Philip’s language – Castilian – and sported Spanish fashions, implicitly recognizing the super-power of the age.

All of the kingdoms and principalities of the Spains – Aragón, Catalonia, Castile, Navarre, and Portugal – may have been ruled by a single monarch, but in practically every other way they remained distinct and separate. Each kingdom maintained its own laws, customs, taxes, and its unique non-Spanish identity. At the center, both geographically and politically, was the Kingdom of Castile. It was from here that Philip ruled his far-flung empire; only rarely did the king grace his other kingdoms with his presence. As a result, the Castilian nobility supplied Philip with most of his officials, diplomats, and generals. The nobility from Spain’s other kingdoms naturally resented the preeminence of the Castilians, who enjoyed great advantages in securing prestigious and lucrative royal appointments.

The Portuguese were no exception. Once, with the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494, they had divided the world with the Castilians. But under Philip they found themselves in a less exalted, subordinate
position. The purported advantages of union with Spain had proven illusory. Instead of greater opportunities for trade and better protection for their outposts, the Portuguese found their empire under attack. Already strained to its limits, Spain did not have the military resources needed to defend Portugal’s overseas possessions. Still, most Portuguese nobles accommodated themselves to the new reality, for they knew that their kingdom had been irrevocably yoked to the Spanish monarchy. Then, shortly after King Philip II’s death on 13 September 1598, a strange turn of events rekindled Portuguese hopes for independence. In Lisbon a rumor surfaced, insisting that Portugal’s King Sebastian – last seen alive in 1578 – was making his way to Venice.\(^2\)

This report was not without substance. On 7 November 1598 the Spanish ambassador to Venice, Iñigo de Mendoza, wrote to King Philip III of Spain with the news that a man had appeared in the Serene Republic sometime earlier, claiming to be King Sebastian of Portugal. While Mendoza had initially ignored the matter – the man was obviously an impostor, his story was too absurd to be believed – with Philip II’s recent death and the rumor in Lisbon, the man’s claims had taken on new significance. Consequently, the ambassador appealed to the Venetian Senate to put an end to the affair.\(^3\)

Three weeks later Mendoza again wrote to the king. He reported that the Venetians had responded to his earlier demands by ordering the man claiming to be Sebastian to leave the Republic and all of its territories; otherwise, his life was forfeit. However, this order had not been obeyed, nor had it been enforced. Mendoza therefore had returned to the Senate and informed them that if, as a result of their negligence in ending the charade, Portugal were to suffer from unrest, then their Republic would be held responsible. This time the ambassador’s petition had a tangible effect: the man that the Spanish were to call “the Calabrian Charlatan” was arrested and jailed.\(^4\)

Mendoza’s reports gained the close attention of the Spanish Council of State for two reasons: first, Sebastian had been dead for twenty years; second, it was as a result of his death that Portugal had become one of the kingdoms ruled by the King of Spain. Over the next five years, the matter of the Calabrian Charlatan resurfaced periodically before the Council of State, for – as Iñigo de Mendoza feared – the man claiming to be King Sebastian of Portugal proved rather troublesome. Nevertheless, through their persistent diplo-
matic efforts and some good luck, the Spanish finally gained custody of the impostor, tried him, and, on 23 September 1603, hanged him.

If this five-year event were approached in Braudelian terms, it could be dismissed as merely one of the many “surface disturbances, crests of foam that the tides of history carry on their strong backs.” The effects of the Calabrian Charlatan’s claims were certainly ephemeral. He personally succeeded only in getting himself jailed and hanged; his supporters succeeded only in gaining the momentary attention of the Portuguese people and provoking the heavy-handed annoyance of the Spanish state. Yet, as successive generations of Portuguese historians have shown, this “surface disturbance” is but one example of a larger phenomenon they have called Sebastianismo – the hoped-for return of King Sebastian and the ensuing resolution of all of Portugal’s problems. From its roots in Sebastian’s death in 1578, Sebastianism lasted well into the nineteenth century. It even followed the Portuguese across the Atlantic, culminating in the 1890s with a millenarian peasant movement in northeastern Brazil. For at least three centuries successive crests of Sebastianism have washed over the shores of Portuguese society and culture. Each crest differed in detail, but all shared the popular millenarian hopes for an improvement in the condition – political, economic, and social – of the believers.

This book examines but one of the many incidents of Sebastianism: the one associated with the Calabrian Charlatan. While this incident is worthy of consideration in its own right, the investigation here serves a wider historiographical purpose. By focusing on the interplay of religious ideas and political hopes in Spanish-occupied Portugal, this study will explore the connection of both to early-seventeenth-century Portuguese nationalism. From this focus three key arguments will emerge. First, that nationalism is deeply rooted in history and not merely – as many students of modern nationalism would have it – the inexorable political consequence of an economic shift to an industrial mode of production; and, since nationalism is a historical phenomenon, it can only be understood through the close examination of the circumstances specific to a particular time and place. Second, that the important question to ask about the rise of modern nationalism is not when it emerges, but instead how, why, and from what it emerges. While a specific time helps set the context, it does little to tell us about the nature of nationalism and why it has been
such a potent political force in the modern world. Third, that (at least in western Europe) the roots of modern nationalism can be traced to medieval millenarianism. Changing beliefs about salvation, evolving notions of sovereignty, and shifting patterns of identity were the historical processes that led to the transformation of the one into the other. In all of this, the matter of the Calabrian Charlatan is the lens.

Note, however, that this is not one of the usual lenses of historical writing. What follows is not a conventional narrative relating the story of the Calabrian Charlatan from a single perspective, from beginning to end. Nor is it a theory-driven treatise, fitting historical details into a pre-conceived framework. Instead, it follows Isaiah Berlin’s notion of history as a “thick” enterprise in which the richness and complexity of the interwoven details leads to historical understanding. Each chapter – made up of events, context, and theory – takes up one or more facets of the Calabrian Charlatan’s story and provides the reader with a view from a limited angle. Chapter 1 introduces the reader to Sebastianism, describing both its origins in a disastrous sixteenth-century battle and its centuries-old millenarian context. Noting the apparently “nationalist” sentiments of some ardent Sebastianists, this chapter also briefly examines current theories of nationalism. It argues that these theories are mistaken in their dismissal of pre-industrial national sentiments, and sketches an alternative outline for a theory of nationalism based on identities of various scales interacting with historical circumstance. Chapter 2 considers the development of Portuguese identity from the foundation of Portugal to the late sixteenth century. Using the Portuguese epic poem *The Lusiads* as a framework, it lays out the main features of Portuguese identity from a perspective that would have been familiar to the Portuguese contemporaries of the Calabrian Charlatan. Chapter 3 begins the main narrative of events, concentrating on the death of Philip II (as seen from Lisbon) and the appearance of the Charlatan in Venice. This chapter explores, from a theoretical standpoint, the fragility of the early modern state, and thus why the Spanish considered the Charlatan’s appearance to be a threat. Chapter 4 examines the reaction in Lisbon to the events in Venice from the vantage point of the viceroy – a man Portuguese by birth and family but Spanish by education and career. With his convoluted and torn loyalties as a backdrop, this chapter follows
the viceroy’s attempts to determine exactly who was involved in spreading the news about the Calabrian Charlatan. Chapter 5 returns to Venice for the story of the supposed King Sebastian and an account of his Portuguese-exile supporters. It argues that the exiles’ motives were political and national, not based on genuine millenarian beliefs. Nevertheless, in order to obtain popular support in Portugal, the Charlatan’s supporters sought to establish him as a sanctified, holy king, a sort of Portuguese national messiah. Chapter 6 is the final section of narrative, detailing the Calabrian Charlatan’s departure from Venice, his capture in Florence, and subsequent trials in Naples and southern Spain. Using the evidence presented at these trials, it attempts to reconstruct the course of events from the viewpoint of the alleged impostor himself. On a more theoretical level, this chapter uses the Charlatan’s story as a way to look at the role of rumor in early modern statecraft. Finally, the Conclusion and the Epilogue draw all of these threads together into an impressionistic whole, arguing that the case of the Calabrian Charlatan represents a clear instance of early modern Portuguese nationalism. As the narrative progresses from one limited view to the next, the reader may occasionally note overlaps, inconsistencies, and contradictions in the material presented to that point. These are all part of the “thick” historical enterprise. They serve to remind us of the inherent complexity of the events and processes at hand.
1

Sebastianism, Millenarianism, and Nationalism

The old religious idiom has been replaced by a secular one, and this tends to obscure what otherwise would be obvious. For it is the simple truth that, stripped of their original supernatural sanction, revolutionary millenarianism and mystical anarchism are with us still. Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*¹

More than four centuries ago – on the plains of Morocco, between the foothills of the Rif Mountains and the waters of the Atlantic Ocean – a Moorish army annihilated its Portuguese foe. This battle, known as the Battle of Alcazar, was one of those events that twists the future of an entire people in an unexpected direction. Had they won, the Portuguese might well have become the masters of Morocco, poised to extend Christendom throughout North Africa. Instead they lost both the battle and control of their own fate.² In conjunction with the dynastic politics of the time, this defeat reduced the Portuguese from the imperial masters of half the world to a mere Spanish province. For many Portuguese this turn of events proved unfathomable. Forcibly linked to Spain and its interests, Portugal no longer commanded the resources it needed to carry out its divine mission of fighting Islam and taking Christian civilization to the rest of the world.³ Seeking a way to reconcile events with their beliefs about Portugal’s place in the world, many Portuguese embraced Sebastianism: a complex of millenarian beliefs which promised the arrival of a warrior hero who would rescue Portugal from a grave crisis, restore its former glory, and return it to its proper path.
In the years following Alcazar, Sebastianism became deeply embedded in Portuguese culture, periodically reemerging in times of political or social crisis.\textsuperscript{4} During such times the belief was reborn and adapted to explain the current circumstances, drawing the faithful along the path to salvation. However, Sebastianism and the dreams it offered turned on earthly hopes. This was not the salvation of the soul mediated by the priests – promised in every sermon, but not of this world.\textsuperscript{5} Indeed, Sebastianism was more akin to the practice of local religion, in which participating in community processions, venerating local patron saints, and making individual offerings were expected to bring rain for the crops, good weather for the harvest, relief from the plague, protection from bandits, or victory in disputes with neighbors. At this level, salvation was day-to-day and season-to-season, not eternal.\textsuperscript{6} Sebastianism emerged from this world. It was, in a sense, another facet of local religion, one focused on an external realm of princely politics that – like inclement weather or the plague – could disrupt everyday life suddenly, capriciously, and often disastrously. Spanish rule in Portugal intruded on this local world by bringing with it Spain’s European ambitions and entanglements, increased demands for men and money, and the unwelcome attentions of Spain’s enemies. Thus, for the Sebastianists, deliverance became political and national: the expulsion of the Spanish and the restoration of Portuguese independence.

During this period the millenarian and the national were intertwined. Was Sebastianism some kind of national millenarianism, messianic nationalism, or something else? This question is the focus of this work. By examining the context and events surrounding the Sebastianist movement in support of the Calabrian Charlatan, we will explore the connection between millenarianism and nationalism in the transition from the former to the latter.\textsuperscript{7} As we shall see, these two kinds of popular political movements are so closely related that one might think of modern nationalism as a millenarian movement in which “the nation” has become messiah, and salvation is achieved when “the nation” becomes politically sovereign. The case of the Calabrian Charlatan is of interest since it represents a stark mixture of the two.

**Sebastianism**

Sebastianism, an intermingling of ancient beliefs and modern loyalties, was born of tragedy. On 4 August 1578, near Ksar-el-Kebir – a
8

The Calabrian Charlatan, 1598-1603

Figure 1  Morocco circa 1578: the Portuguese route to the Battle of Alcazar
small town of no military, economic, religious, or political importance — the Battle of Alcazar was fought. Had the Portuguese been wisely led, the battle would not have taken place, nor would they have been in the Moroccan interior. But in the year 1578 it was Portugal’s fate to be ruled by Sebastian, a youth of twenty-four years brought up with tales of virtuous Christian knights ringing in his ears. His only ambition, it would seem, was to rival the glories of his ancestors by completing Portugal’s conquest of Morocco and claiming it for Christendom. After two long years of preparations for his crusade (and a lifetime of dreaming about it), King Sebastian and his army set sail from Lisbon on 25 June. Nearly three weeks later, on 12 July, they landed at Arzila, one of the Portuguese forts on the Moroccan coast. There the Portuguese waited, hoping that the Moors would venture to attack. Instead, the Sharif of Morocco, Abd el-Malek, wrote Sebastian a conciliatory letter in which he promised to cede to Portugal the coastal town of his choice and a ten-mile buffer zone around all of the Portuguese forts in Morocco; in exchange, the Portuguese king was expected to withdraw. Sebastian rejected the offer. As it provided neither glory in battle nor a significant increase in empire, it did not fit his dreams. In fact, he probably viewed the sharif’s wish to avoid battle as a weakness to exploit. On 29 July, eager for action and ignoring the advice of more experienced men who thought it wiser to proceed by sea, Sebastian led his army of about 16,000 men (not counting the thousands of camp followers) into the hills south and east of Arzila, bound for the Moorish port of Larache. For six days they marched in the heat of the North African summer, headed inland for Ksar-el-Kebir. There they expected to ford the Loukkos River and turn south and west back toward the coast and their goal. On 4 August the day dawned with the exhausted Portuguese army still north of the Loukkos, facing a Moorish force of some 44,000 men.

Sebastian and his officers spent the morning discussing their strategy, while the Moroccan army waited patiently for the invaders to make their move. This finally came shortly before noon when Sebastian ordered his army to advance. During the six hottest hours of the day the two armies fought. From the beginning the Portuguese found themselves surrounded, badly outnumbered, and poorly led. Their only chance came when, while directing his forces from his tent, Abd el-Malek died. Had this news become common knowledge, the
Moorish army would probably have fragmented into the antagonistic tribal groups from which it was formed. However, the sharif’s advisers kept his death a secret and the Moroccan army continued to press the steadily shrinking enemy force. After the Portuguese defense finally collapsed and the remaining defenders fled or surrendered, the victorious Moorish soldiers turned to securing their share of booty and prisoners from the battlefield, sometimes fighting one another for their chosen prize.

The greatest prize of all, a living King Sebastian, was nowhere to be found. Throughout the battle Sebastian had darted on horseback to wherever the fighting was heaviest, trying to rally his men to ever greater efforts. He was last seen charging his horse into the thick of the battle, in a desperate attempt to break the Moorish onslaught. No one who survived, Christian or Moor, witnessed the king’s fate. After the Portuguese defeat, Abd el-Malek’s brother and successor – Ahmed el-Mansur – sent two of Sebastian’s servants (now his prisoners) in search of the king’s body, promising them their liberty should they find it. On the second day after the battle, they returned with a stripped corpse slung across a horse. Some of the captured Portuguese noblemen identified the body as Sebastian’s, even offering Ahmed el-Mansur 10,000 ducats for it. He refused, probably hoping for a higher ransom.

As the victorious Moorish soldiers searched and stripped the rapidly decomposing bodies of the dead of anything of value, the various Portuguese who eluded capture – fewer than one hundred of the approximately 26,000 soldiers and camp followers who marched to Ksar-el-Kebir – made their way back to the coastal forts held by their compatriots. A couple of days after their defeat, one group of survivors straggled out of the Moroccan interior near Tangier, reaching the Portuguese fortress there after dark. When challenged by a sentry, a wounded nobleman among them claimed to be King Sebastian and demanded to be let in.

Modern historians have depicted the nobleman’s claim as a ruse, blaming it for the rumors that swept through Portugal following the Battle of Alcazar. These rumors assured the Portuguese that their king had survived his defeat and was making his way back home. The failure to recover the body identified as Sebastian’s from the Moors until December only reinforced the desperate hope that the disastrous news from Africa was not true. What had begun as a glorious
Sebastianism, Millenarianism, and Nationalism  11

adventure led by a Portuguese Alexander the Great, had become instead a personal tragedy for thousands of families.\(^{13}\) Many of these families remained unsure for months or years whether a father, husband, or son had been killed or captured. Lacking information about their soldiers’ fates, most people did not know whether to mourn their dead or to begin collecting the ransom that would release a loved one from captivity.\(^{14}\) Such personal uncertainties probably reinforced the national uncertainties about Sebastian’s fate. Some may have clung to the rumors that the king had survived, hoping that he would soon return with a loved one as one of his companions.

Dynastic politics fueled the rumors even more. With the apparent death of the childless Sebastian, his sixty-six-year-old grand-uncle Cardinal Henry ascended the Portuguese throne. Still, Henry was only an interim solution to the dynastic problem. In January 1580, before he could secure a papal dispensation releasing him from his vow of celibacy so that he could marry, Henry died. In the ensuing dynastic struggle for Portugal, King Philip II of Spain advanced his claim to the Portuguese throne by invading.\(^{15}\) By the fall of 1580 Portugal was effectively a Spanish province. Since Philip claimed to be Sebastian’s heir, only the return of a living Sebastian could peacefully restore Portuguese independence. The rumor of Sebastian’s survival and Portugal’s political circumstances combined to give rise to the core tenet of Sebastianism: the belief that Sebastian had survived the Battle of Alcazar and would return to Portugal to save his people from the Spanish yoke.\(^{16}\) Those who fail to share the beliefs of Sebastianism, especially non-Portuguese, have long dismissed it as a peculiarly Portuguese aberration which defied all rationality. For the Spanish viceroy in Lisbon from 1600 to 1603, the tenacious popular belief that Sebastian had survived and reappeared proved a continual source of frustration and embarrassment.\(^{17}\) In the eighteenth century a peer of the English House of Lords was reputed to have remarked: “What can one possibly do with a nation, one half of which expects the Messiah, and the other half their King, Don Sebastian, who has been dead two hundred years.”\(^{18}\) Edward Bovill, an English historian writing in the mid-twentieth century, regarded Sebastianism as a “strange sect” worthy of only brief mention in his account of the fateful events at Ksar-el-Kebir.\(^{19}\) Most outsiders viewed Sebastianism with bemused
incomprehension, noticing it only when it intruded upon their world.

In contrast, Portuguese historians since at least the nineteenth century have studied Sebastianism with great interest. João Lúcio de Azevedo, in his classic *A evolução do Sebastianismo* (*The Evolution of Sebastianism*), writes: ‘‘Born of suffering, nourished on hope, [Sebastianism] is for history what yearning is for poetry, an inseparable part of the Portuguese soul.’’ Although not a Sebastianist himself, Azevedo saw Sebastianism as an integral part of Portuguese culture, an expression of the collective hopes of the Portuguese people from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. In Portuguese historiography this open-minded interest is the beginning point for discussions of Sebastianism. Debate in the late twentieth century has centered on the origins of Sebastianism, not its importance to Portuguese culture. At one end of the analytical spectrum is Joel Serrão (writing in 1983) who considers Sebastianism as an expression of the economic, social, and political conditions of ancien-régime Portugal. He argues that, initially, Sebastianism was an anti-seignorial popular movement which appealed primarily to poor and powerless peasants. During the period of Spanish rule (1580–1640), the Portuguese aristocracy – the very people to whom Sebastianism was initially opposed – partially co-opted the movement to pursue their anti-Spanish political goals. With the successful restoration of Portuguese independence in 1640, Sebastianism lost its appeal as a political tool of the nobility and returned to its popular roots. According to Serrão, Sebastianism only began to die out in the nineteenth century as the Portuguese ancien régime began to break down. At the opposite end is António Belard da Fonseca (writing 1978–79) who believes that King Sebastian indeed survived the Battle of Alcazar and that first his uncle, King Phillip II of Spain, and then his cousin, King Phillip III of Spain, conspired to prevent Sebastian from reclaiming his throne. For Fonseca, Sebastianism as a mystical movement begins after the possible lifetime of a surviving Sebastian and is of no immediate interest. Between these two poles, it seems that almost every serious Portuguese historian has written something on Sebastianism. Although interpretations differ, most of this Portuguese historiography generally agrees that Sebastianism can be divided – roughly along the lines defined by Joel Serrão – into three basic phases: *Encubertismo* (before 1580), political Sebastianism (1580–1640; the
period of Spanish rule in Portugal), and popular Sebastianism (after 1640).\textsuperscript{27}

The story of the Calabrian Charlatan (1598–1603) exemplifies political Sebastianism. In the movement that formed around the Charlatan, aristocratic efforts to liberate Portugal from Spanish rule and popular belief in Sebastianism converged. In essence, an aristocratic political superstructure overlaid a foundation of popular millenarianism.\textsuperscript{28} Anti-Spanish rebels mined Sebastianism for the words and ideas that, they hoped, would inspire the Portuguese to revolt. By invoking Sebastian – the absent messianic soul of the people – these revolutionaries expected to rouse the Portuguese to action from their political sleep.

\textbf{Millenarianism}

It might be tempting to dismiss Sebastianism and other similar early modern European popular movements as some kind of temporary mass hysteria, born of desperation coupled with superstition and ignorance.\textsuperscript{29} Perhaps such movements should simply be considered anachronisms, historical leftovers from medieval times which had little bearing on the development of the modern era. After all, few accomplished their goals, or had any easily discernible lasting effects outside of popular mythology. Yet some of these movements did not simply disappear. Some continued to influence the nature of popular politics for decades, and even centuries, after their original force had petered out. The popular movement of interest here, Sebastianism, was a particularly long-lived case, lasting well into the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{30} The very fact that such movements survived in a hostile era – one devoted to the scientific, the rational, and the secular – makes them worthy of interest and investigation; and just as important is the fact that people entrusted their economic, political, and social destinies to such movements, desperately hoping to change their world for the better.\textsuperscript{31}

In \textit{Religion and the Decline of Magic}, Keith Thomas notes that the myth of the “sleeping hero” was, in the cultures of pre-industrial Europe, universal. Particularly during times of war or famine, stories were told of a legendary hero who would return and free his people from their troubles. For instance, in Celtic areas many awaited the return of King Arthur, who was expected to re-establish his northern
European kingdom and thus inaugurate a new era of peace and prosperity. Among the Germans and Italians there were those who believed the return of Frederick Barbarossa would bring similar benefits. For the Russians during the Time of Troubles – the first dozen years of the seventeenth century – it was the false Dmitris who, by restoring the rightful line of the Tsars, promised to end an era of famine and social upheaval. Social, political, and economic crises of all sorts inspired mass movements, religious reformers, political manipulators, and subverters of the established order. As part of their attempts to do this, they all turned to divine revelation, political prophecies, and other forms of ancient wisdom.

In each case, those involved idealized the past – mythic or historical – and cast it into the near future. Knowledge of the past, combined with prophecy, became their guide for that future. Properly interpreted, ancient prophecies foretold exactly when the sleeping hero would return and the changes this would bring. Nevertheless, time after time the hero failed to return when expected. Despite these failures, those who believed did not lose their faith; instead, they pushed their interpretations and expectations once again into the future. Among the poor and oppressed to whom these stories appealed, this malleability ensured continuing relevance. By keeping their hopes alive and assuring them that they were on the brink of a peaceful and prosperous future, their beliefs helped them traverse a present in which scarcity, famine, and disease, soldiers, taxes, and tithes were the only things in abundance. Fully aware of these popular beliefs, those who ruled (or wanted to rule) sometimes tried to mobilize them for their own political purposes. By claiming to be the fulfillment of the prophecies surrounding the sleeping hero, the elites of early modern Europe sometimes sought to consolidate their own political legitimacy and undermine that of their opponents.

Like most sleeping-hero stories, Sebastianism rested on an ancient foundation of myth and prophecy. In this foundation, the apocalyptic traditions of Christianity formed the most influential elements. One Portuguese historian, José Veiga Torres, has traced the roots of Sebastianism back to the twelfth-century writings of the Calabrian Abbott Joachim of Fiore. These writings reflected Joachim’s belief that he lived at the brink of the final age of the world. He and his followers expected the existing social order and all its injustices to be swept away and replaced by one in which justice would rule.
argues that the millenarian beliefs embedded in Joachimism were the antecedents for many similar beliefs associated with Sebastianism. Of these, the most important was the idea of historical progress. Instead of an essentially unchanging and endless cycle of days or seasons, history was a movement through time in which things could change and which had a definite beginning and an ultimate goal. In its simplest terms, history was the story of human civilization groping towards an age of perfection, what Joachim called the Age of the Spirit. However, this history was orchestrated by God, not man. Thus, mere human efforts could not alter the course of events. Only when the God-appointed time came would He provide the warrior messiah who would transform the world, bringing about the Age of the Spirit.

By the early sixteenth century, the Age of the Spirit was still in the future and the identity of the warrior messiah was still unknown. Nevertheless, Joachim’s ideas flourished. Periodically reinterpreted to fit local traditions and conditions, they formed the nucleus of a swirling, ever-evolving complex of millenarian beliefs and hopes. In Spain and Portugal, prophetic writings attributed to Merlin and to St. Isidore became a principal part of the millenarian mix. One of the more important Isidorean prophecies foretold the arrival of a hero called El Encubierto (the Hidden One). Current events fed the mix as well, for those who studied such prophecies kept a careful watch for their fulfillment. For instance, in 1522 a man claiming to be the son (long dead) of Ferdinand and Isabella and calling himself El Encubierto led a rebellion in Valencia; and in 1525 a Jewish adventurer – David Rubeni – arrived in Portugal, claiming to be the precursor of the Messiah. Such events heightened millenarian expectations, for the Spanish and Portuguese knew that the End would be accompanied by “wars and rumours of wars” and “false prophets.”

In Portugal this apocalyptic atmosphere coalesced into a series of prophetic poems known as the Trovas. These were composed in the 1530s by a prosperous shoemaker in the village of Trancoso. Gonçalo Anes, or Bandarra as the cobbler-poet was called, was a well-known figure in the surrounding region. Apparently, his prodigious memory and the fact that he had memorized much of the Bible made him into a popular local authority on religious matters. Reportedly, his New Christian neighbors relied on him to settle scriptural disputes and to interpret prophecies. His verses, written in a popular
style and drawing on the Bible and various prophetic texts for their themes, came to be regarded as prophetic as well. For example, one of the Trovas predicted the arrival of a great king (the Lion) who would conquer Africa:

A great Lion will arise,
And will give great bellows,
His roars will be heard,
And will terrify all;
He will run, and bite
And do great damage,
And in the African Kingdoms
He will conquer all.\(^52\)

From a modern perspective (and in a rather literal translation), this verse is not in any way compelling; yet in early sixteenth-century Portugal it augured well for a young empire, expanding rapidly in both Africa and Asia.\(^53\) In the year this verse was written and in those that closely followed, the news of the day confirmed some of the prophetic truths embedded in the Trovas, lending credence to those prophecies not yet come to pass. With the circulation of his poems in manuscript, Bandarra’s fame spread to the rest of Portugal and even into royal circles. In 1540 his growing popularity attracted the attention of the Inquisition, which arrested and tried him for heresy. Although the shoemaker was released in 1541, the Trovas were banned and he was forced to abjure them. Thereafter, Gonçalo Anes quietly disappeared; however, the Trovas – Bandarra’s distillation of Portuguese millenarianism into verse – became all the more popular for having been forbidden.

For the Portuguese millenarians, the crucial question left unanswered by the Trovas was the identity of the great king. Although the poems provided this figure with several impressive titles – the Lion, *O Desejado* (the Hoped-for One), *O Encuberto* (the Hidden One) – and told of the great deeds he would accomplish, they were distinctly vague when it came to his name or exactly when he would appear. Nonetheless, in early 1554 this problem was resolved for many of those who waited. On 2 January the untimely death of the heir to Portugal thrust the kingdom into crisis. With Prince João’s demise the Portuguese throne – as dictated by an earlier marriage
treaty – would pass to Spain unless João’s pregnant wife, Juana, gave birth to a son. For nearly three weeks the Portuguese waited, hoping that a miracle would save them from Spanish domination. When on St. Sebastian’s day, Juana gave birth to a son, all Portugal rejoiced.\textsuperscript{54} Sebastian – \textit{O Desejado} – had saved his people from their fate. Having rescued his kingdom once, it was thus hoped that the future King of Portugal would restore and expand its glory, that he would fulfill more prophecies.

Sebastian’s death at Ksar-el-Kebir in 1578 completed the transformation of Portuguese millenarianism into Sebastianism. Those who believed the rumors of the king’s survival identified their missing ruler as \textit{O Encuberto} and studied Bandarra’s \textit{Trovas}, hoping to discover when he was going to return. João de Castro – a major figure in the case of the Calabrian Charlatan – even reinterpreted the events surrounding Sebastian’s birth in light of the millenarian expectations: “… [A]t the same hour that [the Lord] gave [the Portuguese] His only Son to save them from the Devil’s bondage, He gave them a Prince to save them from that of Castile.”\textsuperscript{55} In effect, Sebastian became Portugal’s messiah.\textsuperscript{56}

\textbf{Nationalism}

João de Castro cast Sebastian in the role of Portuguese messiah in his \textit{Discurso da Vida de El Rey Dom Sebastiam de Portugal}.\textsuperscript{57} Published in 1602 and addressed to the “three Estates of the Kingdom of Portugal” – nobles, clergy, and commoners – it called on all Portuguese to believe the news of Sebastian’s return.\textsuperscript{58} The \textit{Discurso} was a complete history of the Portuguese king, ranging from Sebastian’s birth, through the Battle of Alcazar and the Spanish invasion, to the king’s imprisonment in Venice. It demonstrated for all doubters that the king had survived at Ksar-el-Kebir and had recently returned from a purifying holy pilgrimage. To bolster his arguments, Castro showed how prophecy had predicted the events recorded in his history. For instance, he referred to a twelfth-century letter purportedly written by St. Bernard of Clairvaux which promised that Portugal would never lack for a Portuguese king, but might be punished up to thirty years for its sins. (In 1602 Portugal had been occupied by Spain for twenty-two years).\textsuperscript{59} Running throughout the \textit{Discurso}, supplementing prophecy and history, was a thread of Portuguese patriotism. This
culminated in Castro’s reminder to his readers of their love of *Patria* and their duty to preserve Portugal’s ‘patrimony.’ Finally, in the penultimate paragraph of the final chapter, he appealed to them directly: “... you Sirs are Portuguese; take a Portuguese resolution with a Portuguese King. Remember well that a King, who must be invincible, cannot make use of those who are not also invincible.” This was a call to arms. No longer were the Portuguese enslaved by a Spanish king and kingdom: Sebastian’s return restored to them their freedom.62

Embedded in this mix of prophecy and patriotism was the accumulation of nearly two decades of João de Castro’s steadfast opposition to Spanish rule. In the years prior to the publication of the *Discurso* Castro had seen little, if any, active popular support for the political struggle for Portuguese independence. Although intended to place the native Portuguese claimant – Dom António, the Prior of Crato – on the throne, even the English invasion of Portugal in 1589 inspired only a handful of anti-Spanish rebels.63 During this period only two events briefly roused the Portuguese people: the appearance of two men claiming to be King Sebastian, the first in 1584 and the second in 1585.64 Although both men were quickly arrested, tried, and condemned before anything could come of their claims, they certainly brought to the attention of Castro and other Portuguese rebels the political possibilities contained in the rumor of Sebastian’s survival.65 By 1586 Castro was thinking about Sebastianism and studying the related prophecies.66 Two years later he wrote a document (never published) in which he set down his intention “... to devote all of [his] ability and life to awaken[ing] Portugal by some means, [to] opening its eyes.”67

Castro’s involvement with the Calabrian Charlatan and his *Discurso* were the culmination of this intention. For Sebastianists who read the book (or heard the news it contained), the *Discurso* vindicated their beliefs and informed them that the time for waiting was over, that their king needed their active support. For others, it clothed anti-Spanish sentiments and interests in the convenient guise of a prophecy come to pass. While many of Castro’s contemporaries might have doubted his interpretations, they would not have questioned the idea that prophecies could, and sometimes did, foretell the future. Thus it was perfectly reasonable for early modern Europeans to use (or appear to use) prophecy as a guide for their
actions. João de Castro’s purpose in writing and publishing the *Discurso* was to give the Portuguese people, whether steeped in millenarian beliefs or simply disgruntled with Spanish rule, a reason to act, to attempt to restore Portugal’s independence. In essence, he was trying to push them into the world of nationalism.

At this point we need to consider what is meant by the terms “nation,” “nationalist,” and “nationalism.” (After this brief excursion into theories of nationalism, we will examine Sebastianism in light of these theories.) For nineteenth-century scholars – including the Portuguese historians of the period – these terms were not difficult to understand. In the case at hand they could easily be defined by enumeration: the people of Portugal were the nation, João de Castro was an example of a Portuguese nationalistic of the period, and political Sebastianism was an early manifestation of Portuguese nationalism. For early-twenty-first-century scholars things are not so easy. As students of nationalism moved away from narrative descriptions and purely political concerns, they began to ask questions about class, culture, economics, ethnicity, gender, identity, language, race, and religion. In their attempts to provide a general explanatory framework, they generated a dense thicket of theory. Penetrating this undergrowth is an exercise for the adventurous, or the foolhardy, for even the definitions of basic terms like “nation” and “nationalism” are contested and often not clearly articulated.

Consider, for example, the theories of Ernest Gellner and Liah Greenfeld, in particular their explanations for the origins of nationalism. In *Nations and Nationalism*, Gellner defines nationalism as:

> ... a theory of political legitimacy, which requires that ethnic boundaries should not cut across political ones, and, in particular, that ethnic boundaries within a given state – a contingency already formally excluded by the principle in its general formulation – should not separate the power-holders from the rest.

Gellner narrows this definition to cover only nineteenth- and twentieth-century states, arguing that the origins of nationalism lie in the novel economic conditions created by the Industrial Revolution. With the transfer of work to the factory and skill to the machine, the mobility and adaptability conferred by literacy in a national language and culture became a worker’s most important assets. As a
result, for the first time, an investment in education was economically advantageous for the majority of a state’s population, as well as for the state itself. The advent of widespread education in a national high culture and the economic forces driving the need for that education engulfed and displaced traditional forms of identity, establishing a new form: nationalism. Unlike previous forms of identity, nationalism had no formal internal barriers; all members of the nation were theoretically interchangeable, sharing a common culture and loyalty to the group. Thus, Gellner argues, while nationalism is a “species of patriotism,” it is distinct from the “cultural chauvinism” of the pre-industrial world.

Unlike Gellner, Liah Greenfeld places the origin of nationalism in the pre-industrial world, in sixteenth-century England. In this place and time a variety of circumstances – the weakening of the old feudal hierarchy, a new-found social mobility based on education, the alliance of the Tudor monarchy with Parliament, and the Protestant Reformation – transformed the nature of English society. Social divisions weakened and the population grew increasingly homogeneous. Privilege gave way to law; rank gave way to ability. As a result, more and more Englishmen began to feel that they had a stake in England and its government. Subjects had become citizens. By the beginning of the seventeenth century the English were a “people” which was “... the source of individual identity ... the bearer of sovereignty, the central object of loyalty, and the basis of collective solidarity.” For Greenfeld, this conception of a “people” is the central idea of nationalism. In its native environment in late-sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century England, it reflected over a hundred years of social change taken root; transplanted elsewhere, it became instead an agent for change.

Now consider political Sebastianism and João de Castro in light of these theories. Gellner’s basic definition of nationalism as a theory of political legitimacy requiring congruence between political and ethnic boundaries seems to apply. Although expressed in millenarian terms, political Sebastianism certainly sought politico-ethnic congruence in that it promised the Portuguese salvation from their Spanish oppressors through the return of Sebastian, their native king. However, early modern Portugal was neither industrialized nor industrializing; therefore, by theoretical fiat, any popular political movement in this setting could not be nationalism. If this is the
case, how then do we explain someone like João de Castro who, in his efforts “to awaken” his people, echoes the hopes, goals, and language of modern nationalists? Gellner’s theory provides no answer.\textsuperscript{79}

In contrast, Greenfeld’s theory raises an interesting possibility. Although Greenfeld fails to mention it, one of the great events of early English nationalism – if it indeed existed – would have been the execution of Mary Queen of Scots. From her arrival and virtual imprisonment in England in 1568, Mary’s claim to the English throne, staunch Catholicism, and taste for intrigue imperiled the fragile stability of the kingdom.\textsuperscript{80} As Queen Elizabeth’s legal heir, Mary as Queen of England was only a matter of time. For many Englishmen, particularly Londoners, this was unacceptable. Rule by the Scottish Queen represented a return to a past which threatened to destroy the new English social order.\textsuperscript{81} By 1586, opposition to Mary had grown into unrelenting public pressure on Elizabeth to have her executed. On the morning of 18 February 1587, Mary was beheaded. That evening the people of London celebrated. João de Castro, who spent the fourteen months from March 1586 to May 1587 in London, must have heard the news and seen the celebrations.\textsuperscript{82} Although his writings leave little trace of his time in England, one wonders how closely he observed English politics while he was there. Did Castro watch the public pressure mount on Elizabeth and her advisors until it culminated in the order for execution? Did Castro see the keen interest with which most Londoners, even commoners, followed political events? Did Castro sense the power of English national sentiment? Perhaps Castro observed all of these things and realized that, to achieve his ends, he needed to inspire the Portuguese with a similar love of nation. If Greenfeld’s theory of the English origins of nationalism is correct, this could help explain João de Castro’s nationalist hopes, goals, and language. The timing was certainly right, for Castro wrote of his intention “to awaken Portugal” in 1588.\textsuperscript{83} Although suggestive, Greenfeld’s theory fails to explain fully the nationalist dimension of political Sebastianism. As we shall see in Chapter 2, Portuguese national sentiment – especially in its anti-Spanish form – predates Castro by several decades, if not centuries. Like other early modern Europeans, the Portuguese were not without love for their country.\textsuperscript{84}

Unfortunately, this brief sortie into theory has left us with no clear-cut definitions. Nor do we have an adequate explanation of João de
Castro’s nationalist language and aspirations. Part of the problem seems to be that most modern theories of nationalism seek to establish a fairly precise time and place for the origin of nationalism. In doing so, they inevitably raise the difficulty of explaining exactly why an apparent episode of nationalism in a previous time or different place is not, in fact, nationalism. The case of the Calabrian Charlatan and other episodes of pre-modern “patriotism” suggest that the theoretical insistence on the novelty and modernity of nationalism creates an unjustifiable and unnecessary breach with the past. We need a different approach.

In his study on the formation of the modern border between Spain and France (and implicitly on the formation of their national identities), Peter Sahlins notes that most modern studies on nation-building and nationalism have concentrated on “how the nation was imposed and built from the center outward.” These works described the growth and spread of nationalism as a process of replacing local identities with national ones. For Sahlins this model is simplistic. He argues that the process of shaping nations and national identities was a two-way interaction between central and local interests.\textsuperscript{85} Furthermore,

\[\ldots\] national identity \ldots appeared on the periphery before it was built there by the center. It appeared less as a result of state intentions than from the local process of adopting and appropriating the nation without abandoning local interests, a local sense of place, or a local identity. At once opposing and using the state for its own ends, local society brought the nation into the village.\textsuperscript{86}

Sahlins describes national identity as one of several disjointed layers of territorial identities (for example, village, county, region, nation), in which there was no fixed hierarchy of importance. Instead, each person or group emphasized a particular layer of identity where and when it proved useful to meet specific ends. Local issues aroused local identities; larger issues invoked the identities of the appropriate scale. Sahlins’s observations on national identity suggest that the basis of nationalism is nothing new, that modern nationalism itself is a manifestation of age-old social patterns.

While Sahlins’s work says a great deal about the ways in which local and national identities evolved and played off each other, it says little
about the development of nationalism itself. Still, by returning the
discussion of national and other identities to the scale of individuals
and local communities, it provides a useful starting point. After all,
nationalism became significant at the level of state politics only after
a significant portion of a state’s population adopted the beliefs and
sentiments of the nationalist, and, as nationalists, either acted in
determined opposition to the state or became its most ardent defend-
ers. Sebastianism was no different.

Identities, if examined at an individual scale, might be described as
an entangling web. Spun from the strands of community and per-
sonal relationships into sometimes reinforcing, sometimes opposing
patterns, this web forms the substructure of identity. Within the web
some strands are weak, easy to break or ignore. Others are sturdy.
Strengthened by culture, social pressure, or personal interest, such
strands bind people together through common loyalty to the rel-
ationship connecting them. Which loyalties exert the strongest influ-
ence is a function of time, place, and the legacy of an individual’s
choices when resolving often conflicting pulls. In any given society,
a few forms of identity gain dominance. Whether based on family,
ethnicity, religion, village, or nation, these dominant forms are those
that prove most useful for living in that society. Note that none of
these forms of identity is fundamentally any different from the
others; each defines a person’s place in the world, each guides be-
havior, each can engender intense loyalties. Nationalism is no excep-
tion. Territorially based and linked to the state, it reflects and
reinforces the political and social structures of the sundry times and
places where it is found. Explaining the rise of nationalism is not a
question of explaining the origins of a new phenomenon; instead, it
is a question of explaining shifting patterns of identity, of discovering
how and why some relationships were strengthened and others
weakened.

Messianic nationalism

If nationalism is not a fundamentally new phenomenon, if its rise
can be explained as a result of changing circumstances and the
resulting shifts in patterns of identity, then can we find something
akin to modern nationalism in the pre-modern era? One of the
central arguments of this study is that we can, that nationalism
emerges out of millenarianism. More specifically, this study argues that Sebastianism in Portugal marked a local, transitional mid-point between the two. If so, this indicates that all of these movements are inherently related, that they actually describe different stretches of the same historical continuum. What then was the nature of the transition from millenarianism to nationalism? What remained the same? What changed? As described below, the continuities and differences were such that it is convenient to call this transition messianic nationalism.

As Benedict Anderson has termed it, the modern nation is an “imagined community.” It is a community in which people who have no direct contact with most of their fellow nationals nonetheless share similar experiences, outlooks, and therefore a sense of solidarity. Anderson argues that this sense of solidarity forms the foundation of what we call nationalism.90 Yet by itself, the imagining of community is nothing new. To name only a few of the many possible examples, the ancient Greeks, the Jews of the diaspora, and the early modern Irish all had a sense of community that was in some way imagined; culture, religion, and ethnicity have long been nuclei around which otherwise anonymous people have grouped themselves. If this is so, then were these past communities some sort of nation, imbued with a sense of nationalism? As already noted, most students of nationalism deny that label to anything pre-dating the Industrial Revolution. This may be more a consequence of narrow scholarly specializations and surviving historical sources than historical reality. After all, most scholars studying nationalism have focused almost exclusively on modern history, the period in which their field of study became a particularly visible, potent, and therefore interesting political force. In addition, as one reaches further into the past, the record of the common man’s life – and his feelings of community and solidarity – grows ever scarcer, leaving scholars with the (false) sense that politics and political action were a monopoly of the elites.91 Still, casting these quibbles aside, modern nationalism does seem somehow different from what we know of its predecessors. But, is it different in its essence or merely in its accidents? What is essential – the sense of cultural solidarity, the imagining of community, the willingness to die for that community – is a human trait reenacted and recreated in each generation from time immemorial; the accidental circumstances of historical development and the context of time and place determine how that solidarity is
manifested, the scale at which it operates, how it is imagined. While circumstance and context are what distinguish the various historical forms of community solidarity from one another, in the cases of medieval millenarianism and modern nationalism even these elements are closely linked. Aside from the obvious continuities of historical development in western Europe, one might say that both types of movement share a peculiar kind of imagining. In what follows, this shared imagining will be explored in three of its facets: “chosenness,” salvation, and sovereignty.

However, before proceeding, note that while feelings of patriotism (”love of nation”) or millenarian beliefs may be widespread or even universal in a given community, that does not mean that the entire community is composed of ardent nationalists or fervent millenarians. At most times these kinds of movements remain latent, with the more virulent and visible aspects active only among a disaffected minority. It is some kind of crisis that gives voice to the more aggressive and vocal members of the community, helping them rouse other people to their cause. This is when nationalist and millenarian movements emerge, become most visible, and demonstrate their potential as a political force – a force to be feared, appropriated, or manipulated. However, sooner or later the crisis subsides. The radical elements in these movements rarely prove able to sustain their force and become latent in the community once again. Nonetheless, since it is the ardent nationalists and the fervent millenarians who have the most tangible influence on politics, the discussion of the continuities (and differences) between nationalism and millenarianism will focus on these more aggressive elements.

When expressed in religious forms, the notion of a “chosen” people is so familiar as to be unremarkable. Yet the assertion of “chosenness” is extraordinary. As a group, the chosen people claims to have been raised by God to a special status and to have been taught the Truth about the nature of the world. Consequently they have a divine duty to carry out the precepts of that Truth, the will of God. Thus, the chosen become the protagonists of God’s narrative on Earth, the agents for the unfolding of His plan. Every success – whether the abundance of a harvest, or the defeat of an enemy – is attributed to divine favor and, where necessary, justified by it. Failures are invariably interpreted as a means of purifying the people, reminding them of their elect status and their mission.
As various scholars have noted, the idea of being chosen is not limited to religious movements; it is endemic (although often latent) in nationalist movements as well.\textsuperscript{95} Every nation sees itself as elect, as possessing an inherent superiority over all other nations. And, as a consequence, every nation has a mission to fulfill, whether self-rule, or the expansion of an empire, culture, or way of life. In nineteenth-century Great Britain, for instance, national chosenness took the form of an expanding empire and the “white man’s burden”: the British, by dint of their industrious nature, scientific and technical achievements, and enlightened form of government, had the right and the duty to take the benefits of their civilization to less fortunate parts of the world.\textsuperscript{96} Whether manifest in an ancient religious tradition or a modern political force, chosenness provides meaning and purpose to otherwise random events; it also provides priests, politicians, and other seekers of power with a means of inspiring and mobilizing the people to do their bidding. That nationalism shares this feature with millenarianism and other religious movements is not a matter of coincidence. Instead, nationalism is the direct descendant of those earlier movements, adapted to fit modern circumstances. In its essence, modern nationalism is not new.

The reward proffered to those who faithfully pursue the mission of the chosen is salvation. Again, the religious form is the more familiar. By preparing themselves and the world for the arrival of the messiah, millenarian groups hope to usher in an age of peace, prosperity, and justice. In short, they seek a worldly and day-to-day salvation for their entire community and, in some cases, the world. However, the path of the chosen is beset by hardships and by enemies who seek to divert the faithful from their goal. In overcoming these obstacles, some members of the community will inevitably perish; while they will not share in the eventual communal salvation, they are promised the individual, other-worldly salvation of the martyr. Modern nationalism makes the same promise. Whether the construction of a national state, the independence of a colony, or the expansion of an empire, the pursuit of the national enterprise is a search for salvation. Communally, the political, economic, and social ills afflicting a people are expected to disappear when the nation achieves its goal; and the individuals who sacrifice themselves – perhaps inadvertently – for the nationalist cause will be remembered with the respect due to the nation’s martyrs.
While similar, the salvation of the millenarian is subtly different from that of the nationalist. Since a millenarian group is following God’s preordained plan, the hoped-for change in the world must be wrought by God’s hand, by His external agent; thus, communal salvation necessarily awaits the arrival of the messiah. As a consequence, millenarian movements have a tendency to be passive, to spend their energies in preparations for the coming of the millenium, to await the unfolding of inevitable events. Modern nationalism is not constrained in this way. Nationalists and their followers are free to plot their own course through history and to attempt actively to fulfill their nationalist dreams. This is the main difference between messianic nationalism and modern nationalism. In the specific case of late-sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century Portugal, the incipient nationalism of the Portuguese was encumbered by the need to await the return of Sebastian. Without the messiah, nothing could really change.

A changed notion of sovereignty is what made possible the shift from the millenarian’s nearly passive hopes for salvation to the nationalist’s active efforts to create salvation now. In this shift, exactly who holds sovereignty over a given people is key. In post-Roman western Europe there was a transition in sovereignty from God (medieval Christendom), to Kings (early modern empires, kingdoms, and principalities), to peoples (modern nation-states and their various minority groups). Moreover, at each historical moment, only he who held sovereignty – or could legitimately seize it – could succeed politically for more than a short time. Once the people became sovereign unto themselves, they became a nation and gained the ability to act politically without the mediation of God, messiah, or kings. They therefore began to take upon themselves the trappings and institutions of sovereignty, to create their own nation-state. And as nationalists, they began to seek their own salvation in the genesis of that nation-state.

Thus, modern nationalism is in essence a secularized millenarian movement in which belief in the nation has replaced faith in God and the nation itself has become the central focus of identity. Furthermore, messianic nationalism is an early stage in the development of nationalism in which the only substantive difference is that sovereignty has not yet been fully vested in the people. As a consequence, for this earlier type of nationalism to take root and blossom into a
nationalist revolt, a messianic figure embodying that sovereignty is needed. In Portugal during the period under consideration, that sovereignty resided in the figure of the youthful king tragically lost on the dusty plains of Morocco, at the Battle of Alcazar on 4 August 1578.

In 1580, the Spanish annexation of Portugal brought crisis to the Lusitanian kingdom. Existing webs of loyalty – and therefore identity – were disrupted. Over the subsequent years some Portuguese, mostly aristocrats and merchants, adapted to the new situation, developing their ties to Spain and adopting Spanish loyalties. Others could not. As the following chapters will show, Sebastianism was one element that helped bind such people together, whether nobleman, cleric, or commoner. Was this nationalism? Yes, in every important respect.\textsuperscript{101} Hope for King Sebastian’s return – whether as messianic savior or national leader – provided a symbol around which an inherently anti-Spanish Portuguese national consciousness coalesced. Portuguese rebels like João de Castro, seeing or sensing the political possibilities of a people unified for a national purpose, hoped to ignite these national sentiments in Portugal. People like Castro were certainly nationalists and Sebastianism was at least a nascent form of Portuguese nationalism.
2
The New Chosen People

For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all nations that are upon the earth.

Deuteronomy 14:2

It is my will to build upon you and upon your descendants, an Empire dedicated unto me, so that my name will be spread to foreign peoples.

João de Castro, *Discurso da vida do Rey Dom Sebastiam*¹

What was it that made the Portuguese of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries ready, if not eager, to believe in the claims of the four false Sebastians?² After all, those claims were hardly credible. As Íñigo de Mendoza, the Spanish ambassador to Venice, concluded in the matter of the Calabrian Charlatan (the fourth false Sebastian): “there has never been a more foolish charlatan.”³ The man’s claim to be King Sebastian of Portugal was absurd; not only had the Portuguese king died twenty years earlier at Ksar-el-Kebir, but the Charlatan looked nothing like Sebastian, nor did he speak a word of Portuguese. Yet the ambassador found that he could not ignore the situation, for not everyone so easily dismissed the man and his story.⁴ In this case, as in the previous three, many Portuguese rejected the merely rational and instead embraced the idea of Sebastian’s return, for it represented hopes and aspirations deeply embedded in centuries of Portuguese history and culture.
In the decades before its annexation by Spain in 1580, Portugal’s empire reached its apex. Goa, Ceylon, Macao, Brazil, the islands of the Atlantic, and the forts of Africa were all subject to the Lusitanian kingdom. The chain of coastal forts and trading posts in Africa and Asia enabled Portugal to compete favorably in the lucrative eastern-spice and luxury trade which had made Venice so prosperous and so powerful. Even the trade from the new Brazilian colonies flourished; brazilwood and sugar made their way to eager and growing European markets. Such imperial ventures built not only Portuguese fortunes, but also Portuguese confidence in their divinely appointed place in the world. In the minds of many Portuguese, God had obviously selected them as his new chosen people, the Christian heirs to the covenant with Abraham. Divine election brought empire and its material fruits to Portugal; it also brought the spiritual duty of taking Christianity and its benefits to the world.

Of the many sights that attract modern tourists in Portugal, perhaps Lisbon’s Monument to the Discoveries – erected in 1960 for the 500th anniversary of the death of Prince Henry the Navigator – best captures the spirit of Portugal’s divine election. Carved in stone of pure white, a ship rises from the bank of the Tagus, ready to set sail. The ship, a caravel, is sculpted in simple geometric shapes: the prow a tilted pyramid, the body a rectangular base, the masts a towering wall, the billowing sails three curved walls rising up on each side of the masts. Sweeping back, the sails and the masts form a giant cross at the ship’s stern. Together, these shapes draw the viewer’s gaze forward and down to the prow and gunwales crowded with realistic, larger-than-life people. At the prow stands Henry the Navigator, confidently looking off into the imperial future of his people. Behind him, crowding both sides, other heroic figures press forward: soldier, nobleman, and navigator; chronicler, priest, and friar. Each gazes forward with a grim determination to embrace the divinely ordained destiny of his people and conquer whatever obstacles may lie in his path. On the eastern side three men struggle to plant one of the stone pillars, capped by Christian cross and royal shield, with which the Portuguese marked their new territories. On the western side stands Luis de Camoens holding a verse from his epic poem The Lusiads:

Madmen that you are, thirsting in your blindness for the blood of your own! But here at least, in this small land of Portugal, there
will not lack those who will do and dare for Christendom. In Africa they already hold coastal bases; in Asia none can dispute their sovereignty; in the New World they are ploughing the fields. Were there more lands still to discover they would be there too.\(^8\)

Towards the rear, a crowned woman kneels in prayer, perhaps yearning for the safe return of one of the sons of Lusus. These are the servants of God, chosen to undertake a divine mission and ready to suffer its purifying consequences.

This heroic vision of Portugal – a nation chosen by God to spread Christianity to the far corners of the world – drew its inspiration from the kingdom’s half-millennium of conquest and exploration. It is this history that provides the key to understanding the persistence of Sebastianist beliefs among the Portuguese and, more specifically, the events surrounding the appearance of the Calabrian Charlatan in 1598. As a result we need to examine Portugal’s history from its birth to the last half of the sixteenth century. However, since each generation interprets the past through its own beliefs and experience, a purely twentieth-century version of that history will not serve.\(^9\) Only from a vantage point approaching that of the sixteenth-century Portuguese can we begin to understand how they saw their own history. For them, the past was more than the remembrance of people long since crumbled into dust. History, like scripture, revealed God’s purposes.\(^10\) At key points one could see the signs of God’s intervention guiding His creation along His chosen path. Assisted by faith and inspiration, a careful examination of the past could chart history’s general course and thus serve as a map for both present and future. History was prophecy.\(^11\) Therefore, what follows is in no way a complete or modern history of Portugal. Instead, it is a selection of key people and events infused with meaning and metaphor for a Portuguese person of the late sixteenth century.

Our guide for this history will be *The Lusiads*.\(^12\) Aside from its historical content, this poem provides an appropriate entry into our sixteenth-century frame of reference for two main reasons. First, since it was published just before Spain annexed Portugal, it captures a Portuguese view of their history not yet tainted by the need to explain the union. This is important to see the nature of the past that many Portuguese hoped to regain by throwing off Spanish rule. Second, the poem was written in Portuguese and cast in a popular
literary form; it was an epic meant to be performed in public.\textsuperscript{13} Since Camoens’s intended audience was not limited to scholarly or noble circles, his narrative themes concentrated on events and legends well known to the Portuguese people and, likely chosen to reflect public opinion.\textsuperscript{14} As a result, we can with some certainty conclude that the view of Portugal presented in \textit{The Lusiads} resonated with Portuguese culture and society. Note that this is not to say that Camoens’s version of Portuguese history was the only sixteenth-century interpretation. Nonetheless, it did contain many of the strands present in sixteenth-century Portuguese identities, ones often exploited and reinforced by anti-Spanish activists during the period of Spanish rule.\textsuperscript{15}

The history of Portugal that follows, as presented through \textit{The Lusiads} and supplemented with modern studies and analysis, will trace the development of a Portuguese identity with pronounced Christian, imperial, and anti-Castilian elements. The central tenet of this identity was that God had set the Portuguese apart as his chosen people and had cast them to play a key role in the future.\textsuperscript{16} Thus, many Portuguese found it difficult to accept Portugal’s loss of independence in 1580 and its new status as merely one of the several constituent kingdoms of Philip II’s Spain. History, which confirmed the separate identity and destiny of the people of Portugal, had yoked them to someone else’s fate. This tension between political realities and national expectations permeated Portuguese society and culture in the final decades of the sixteenth century. It was this tension that gave rise to Sebastianism and exacerbated the troubling news emanating from Venice.

\textbf{Reconquista}

Although Camoens began his narrative history of Portugal some four centuries after the beginning of the \textit{Reconquista}, those years were nevertheless embedded in his story of the never-ending conflict between Christian and Moor.\textsuperscript{17} Therefore, we need our history to include that period so that we can examine the sources of that conflict and its legacy in the Christian Iberians, especially the Portuguese.

In the year 711 an Arab army crossed the Strait of Gibraltar. Building upon a century of victories in Christian North Africa, the apparently invincible forces of Islam swept away the defenders of Visigothic
Figure 2  Portugal circa 1580: Regions in the western part of the Iberian peninsula
Spain. From there the invaders pressed on into the heart of Carolingian France. Initially it appeared that they would conquer that kingdom as well, but at the Battle of Poitiers in 732 they were turned back.\textsuperscript{18} By 751 the Franks had pushed the Arabs back behind the Pyrenees.

Unable to overcome the Franks and push further into Europe, the new masters of Spain turned their attention to consolidating their rule in the Iberian peninsula. By then, however, it was already too late. Even before the Muslim leaders started building the lasting institutions of what would become al-Andalus – the independent Islamic Kingdom of Spain – the seeds of the militaristic Christian society that would eventually destroy Muslim rule in the peninsula had begun to grow in northern Spain. Legend has it that a man named Pelayo, the son of a Visi\-got\-thic duke, led a group of Christians in Asturias in revolt against Muslim rule.\textsuperscript{19} At Covadonga, in 718, the rebels successfully defeated the force sent to punish them. Having survived, this rebellion slowly grew into the Kingdom of Asturias. By 911, the Asturians had conquered the northern fifth of Spain. As the self-proclaimed heirs of Iberia’s Visigothic rulers they established the basic ideology of the \textit{Reconquista}: the recovery of the entire peninsula and the reestablishment of Christian rule.\textsuperscript{20}

As an ideology the \textit{Reconquista} was very successful. By making Christianity the central element of their identities, it brought together groups as disparate as Galicians, Asturians, Basques, and Catalans. In spite of their many internal differences – in language, ethnicity, legal code, history – as Christians they had a common cause and a common enemy. Some of those internal differences even subsided over time. For instance, in the case of language, all of the groups save one – the Basques – spoke Romance dialects that, although distinct, were mutually intelligible. Instead of reinforcing the differences between them, they lumped them all together as “\textit{cristiano}”: the language spoken by Christians. Where language conflict did exist, it was \textit{vis-à-vis} Arabic.\textsuperscript{21} Although \textit{cristiano} never really became a single language and the various groups of northern Spain never became a single people, they were all, first and foremost, Christians.

For our purposes most of the details of the ensuing struggle between Christians and Muslims for mastery in Iberia are of little interest. Basically, the Christians inexorably reduced, in fits and
starts, the area of Islamic rule. What is of more interest is that, even as they expanded, the Christians failed to maintain a unified state. Although Christianity – and the resulting conflict with Islam – dictated the main historical course taken by the peoples of northern Spain, it did not determine everything. In the tenth century, factional politics fractured the Kingdom of Asturias into three kingdoms which were almost as likely to fight each other as continue with the Reconquista. These states would coalesce as the result of marriage or battle, then fragment yet again, only to regroup later in yet another configuration. By the end of the eleventh century the Kingdom of León was the dominant Christian power. Over the previous hundred years it had unified the various Christian kingdoms of Spain into a fragile empire temporarily refocused on expanding south at the expense of the Moors.

During the Reconquista, as the Christians pushed the frontier zone between them and the Muslims further south, they actively colonized the newly conquered lands. Colonization served two main purposes. First, it rewarded those who had fought successfully against the Moors and taken their territory. Second, and more important, it established permanent control over the expanding frontier. Thus, the colonized areas gained loyal Christian populations and became integrated into the political and military structures of the conquering kingdom. The Kingdom of Galicia, a sub-kingdom of the Leonese empire, had conquered and colonized the area between the Minho and Douro rivers – the region that would become the northern end of Portugal. Early in the eleventh century the Galicians had pushed on towards the Tagus, extending their rule even further south. However, in 1094, responding to the Galician loss of Lisbon and other areas south of the Douro, the king of León detached the area south of the Minho from Galicia, creating the County of Portugal. His intent was to create local Portuguese interests, independent of Galician ones, which would increase the incentive to fight the Moors. For the new Portuguese nobility the loss of their territories meant not just the disappearance of one source of income, but extinction. Increased independence was dangerous, however, for almost as soon as the Portuguese were free of their Galician overlords, they began to test the strength of their bonds to León.

Political bonds might be broken, but cultural ones could not. By the time Portugal was born, Christian Spain had fought Islam for
nearly five hundred years. In that time the religious beliefs that had originally been invoked to justify and fuel the Reconquista became the foundations upon which Iberian culture and society were built.\textsuperscript{24} The Portuguese might have questioned their loyalty to the king of León, but would have found it impossible to question their loyalty to Christ. Above all else, they were Christians. Around this central fact, everything else revolved: religious belief was the unmovable and immovable center. Other things, such as political allegiance, could and sometimes did move. As a cultural trait, the militant Christianity of the Reconquista was so firmly embedded in the Portuguese that four centuries later, long after the Moors had been driven from Iberia, they still yearned to fight the infidel.

\textbf{Guimarães, 1127–28}

Unable to ignore Portuguese moves toward independence any longer, the king of León invaded Portugal in 1127 to secure oaths of allegiance from the two Portuguese factions: one led by Countess Teresa of Portugal, the other led by her son, Afonso Henriques. The Leonese fought their way to Guimarães, the county seat loyal to Afonso, and put the castle there under siege. Badly outnumbered and seeing the futility of resistance, the defenders agreed – in Afonso’s name – to recognize the sovereign rights of the king of León. To seal the bargain one of the defenders, Egas Moniz, pledged his own life as a guarantee that Afonso would submit to royal authority. The siege was raised. Satisfied with the son, the king of León turned to the mother and, six weeks after the invasion had begun, forced her submission as well. With this, the Leonese troops withdrew to Galicia. However, the Portuguese themselves were not finished with the matter. The next year, on 24 July, armies led by Teresa and Afonso fought each other near Guimarães, at São Mamede. There Afonso defeated his mother and expelled her from Portugal. Having consolidated his hold on Portugal, Afonso could turn to severing his ties to León and to forgetting the promise made at Guimarães.  

Afonso Henriques may have forgotten, but Egas Moniz did not. When he realized that his lord had no intention of submitting to Leonese authority, Moniz – accompanied by his wife and children – made the difficult journey to the Leonese court. There, barefoot and with a rope around his neck, Egas Moniz redeemed his pledge. His life
and the lives of his family were meekly delivered into the hands of the enraged king of León. Nevertheless, the king despite his anger did not exact his due. Recognizing great integrity and loyalty, he released Moniz from his oath.\footnote{25} Still, he could not forget the treachery of Afonso Henriques. Because more pressing concerns demanded his immediate attention, however, there was little he could do at the time to force his recalcitrant subject into submission.

Camoens recounts basically the same history; however, his details and emphasis show his sixteenth-century sensibilities. For instance, the poet cast Castile in the place of León. This distorted the twelfth-century political scene: after all Castile was at the time a part of León and – like Portugal – on the verge of independence. Still, in the continual twists and turns of Spain's medieval Christian kingdoms, Castile later grew in power, gained independence, and eventually absorbed León. As a result, from a sixteenth-century perspective, the Castilians had inherited both the Leonese claims to Portugal and the status of Portugal's long-standing Christian enemy.\footnote{26}

Another major difference in the account from The Lusiads lies in a revised chronology. According to Camoens the battle between Teresa and Afonso occurred first and was then followed by the "Castilian" invasion. This changed the apparent motivation of Castile: instead of invading to extract an oath of allegiance from both factions, the poet depicted the Castilians as fighting to support the unjust claims of Teresa after her defeat. In Camoën's version, Castile was taking advantage of an internal Portuguese conflict in the hope of adding Portugal to its territory. Furthermore, instead of being hard pressed to defend themselves, the Portuguese easily trounced the Castilian armies. The one exception to this pattern of constant Portuguese victory in battle occurred at Guimarães. Here Afonso was caught unprepared, for the Castilians – having learned from their earlier humiliations – attacked with a larger army than before; however, with his pledge to the Castilian king, Egas Moniz prevented a costly defeat and secured the enemy's withdrawal. Because of this, in spite of Castile's best efforts, Portugal survived. Obviously, Camoens concluded, God had assisted the Portuguese in their victories.\footnote{27}

This version of events leaves it clear that, for the sixteenth-century Portuguese, the Castilians were the greatest threat to Portuguese independence. From the very origins of Portugal, Castile had been
trying to conquer the kingdom, but had failed. Any anti-Castilian sentiments harbored by a sixteenth-century Portuguese had the imprimatur of this long – although inaccurate – history of antagonism as outlined in *The Lusiads*. Furthermore, that God had supported the Portuguese in battle was an early indication of the special destiny reserved for them.\(^{28}\)

**Ourique, 1139**

For over a decade after Guimarães, Afonso Henriques continued to spar with the Leonese. Several times he raided across the Minho into Galicia, trying to push his jurisdiction north of the river. In spite of his attempts to expand Portugal at the expense of his nominal overlord, he continued to style himself Count of Portugal, not having declared his independence. In 1139, however, he began to use the title of king. Legend attributes this change to a miracle which occurred on 25 July, just before a battle with the Moors at Ourique.

Camoens recounts that Afonso had turned his military efforts to driving the Muslims from the lands south of the Tagus. During one of his campaigns, when he reached Ourique he encountered five Moorish kings leading an army that outnumbered the Portuguese a hundred to one. Instead of withdrawing, as a more prudent man might have done, the count placed his trust in God and remained.

The next day at dawn, presumably while praying to prepare for the coming fight, Afonso beheld a vision of Christ on the cross.\(^{29}\) News of this miracle so heartened his men that they immediately acclaimed him king. Following their now divinely appointed leader, Afonso’s soldiers marched into battle. The Portuguese army fell upon the infidels and routed them. With God as ‘midwife’ the Kingdom of Portugal was born.\(^{30}\)

Modern historians tell a different story. Searching twelfth-century documents for accounts of this miraculous battle has proven fruitless. Scholars have found only brief mention of a skirmish with the Moors in July of 1139, perhaps the result of a large Portuguese raid. Nor have historians been able to identify, without controversy, the location where the battle was supposed to have taken place. Although the chronicle that notes the skirmish places it at an “Ourique,” it is difficult to accept that this is the same location now associated with the legend. Today’s Ourique is in extreme southern Portugal, deep in
the Muslim-ruled territory of Afonso’s day (and about as far away from the original County of Portugal as one can get and still remain within the boundaries of what became the Kingdom of Portugal). In fact, as far as historians can tell, the legendary version of the battle comes from a chronicle written in 1419, nearly three centuries after the event. At this time the relations between Portugal and Castile were, to say the least, tense. For the past three or four decades the Kingdom of Castile had been actively trying to add Portugal to its domains. As part of this effort, the Castilians claimed divine sanction to lead the *Reconquista* and all the Christian kingdoms of Iberia. They based their claim upon the story that St. James and an army of angels had established Castile by assisting its founder in battle against the Moors. To undercut this Castilian propaganda and legitimize the independence of Portugal, the Portuguese probably concocted the legendary Battle of Ourique. The competition of origin stories was such that the fourteenth-century Portuguese probably chose the skirmish at Ourique as their founding event since it occurred on or near the feast day of St. James (25 July) and would, they hoped, overshadow it. Although the Castilians might have the support of St. James, the Portuguese had the support of Christ himself.

Nonetheless, to a sixteenth-century audience in Portugal the miracle at Ourique was real. Before the battle, with God’s blessing, Afonso Henriques had become king of Portugal and gone on to win. To commemorate the miracle and his victory, Afonso proudly adorned his white buckler with the design of five shields in bright blue, signifying the five kings he had vanquished. And within the five shields, disposed in the form of a cross, he commemorated further the divine help he had been vouchsafed by depicting in a different colour the thirty pieces of silver for which Christ was betrayed, five in each shield, the shield in the centre counting twice.

Afonso and his successors took this design for Portugal’s royal coat-of-arms. The symbolism reminded the Portuguese of the divine origins of their independence and of their relationship with God. As long as Portugal remained steadfast in the Christian faith, they could be sure of God’s support. By the sixteenth century the symbolism had been pushed even deeper: “... [the royal] coat-of-arms, recalling [Christ’s]
appearance on the victorious field of Ourique, when he bestowed as [Portugal’s] escutcheon the five wounds he suffered on the cross.35 Not only did the Portuguese have divine favor, they were marked by the honor reserved for the most holy of the saints: the stigmata. Obviously the Portuguese had been chosen by God for some divine purpose.

Even more than the events at Guimarães, the miracle at Ourique established the principle of Portuguese independence for Camoens and his sixteenth-century compatriots.36 Afonso’s vision and victory had sealed a pact with God that provided the Portuguese with
a heavenly charter for their kingdom. This could not be forgotten, for the Portuguese royal coat-of-arms carried the sign of this covenant for all to see.

**Portuguese Reconquista, 1139–1249**

After Ourique, whatever the real nature of this battle, King Afonso I continued to press the Moors. Even as he did this he had to resolve two unrelated, but major, problems. First, the dispute with León over the status of Portugal – subject county or independent kingdom – remained unsettled and left him surrounded by enemies on all borders. Needing some sort of external political support, Afonso turned to distant Rome in 1143 and offered the Pope his fealty, a continuing *Reconquista*, and an annual tribute in gold. His offer was accepted. The Portuguese king had helped consolidate Portugal’s independence by taking Christ’s vicar as his liege lord and thereby legitimizing what he had won by force. Even better, recognizing the constant demands of the wars with the Muslims, the Pope absolved Afonso of his feudal duty to appear at court in Rome. A conveniently distant overlord, one who could not meddle easily in local affairs, was exactly what the first king of Portugal wanted.

With the political future of Portugal assured, Afonso turned to his second problem: securing the future of his dynasty. Visigothic Spain had left a legacy of elective monarchy in which, theoretically, the nobles chose the king’s successor. In practice however, the monarchy was usually hereditary. When his eldest son came of age, a Visigothic king usually began to involve him in the business of governing the kingdom. As the king-to-be gained experience he received more responsibilities. This training eased him into court life, giving him time to practice the art of governance as well as to learn the intricacies of managing the noble factions. When the king died, the son usually moved right into place, skilled enough to secure his right to the succession. Following the Visigothic practice, Afonso declared in 1173 that his son Sancho would rule jointly with him. In this way Afonso and his heirs succeeded in establishing a basically hereditary dynastic principle for Portugal. Still, whenever a succession was in doubt, the Visigothic legal tradition was revived.

With both his independence secured and the dynastic problem addressed, Afonso Henriques and his successors, as faithful sons of
the Church, put most of their efforts into the Reconstituta. By 1249 the modern limits of Portugal had been established and the Islamic rulers had been expelled. The Portuguese Reconstituta had ended after little more than a century. Again, the details of this process are of little interest here. Suffice it to say that Camoens neglected to describe its fitful nature. Instead, he related a heroic account of the constant struggle against the infidel, showing yet again the continued fervor for religious conflict some three hundred years after Islam no longer threatened Portuguese soil. What does matter for our purposes is that the Reconstituta left the Portuguese without an open frontier into which to expand. The only available directions for expansion by land led north and east into Castile (which by this time had replaced León as the dominant Christian power in Iberia). Following the dictates of piety, geography, and the strength of the Castilians, the Portuguese eventually turned to the sea, and set their sights on Muslim Morocco. First, however, they had to fend off an aggressive Castile.

Aljubarrota, 1385

While not the first conflict between Portugal and Castile prior to the sixteenth century, the Battle of Aljubarrota probably came closest to ending Portuguese independence. When King Fernando of Portugal died on 22 October 1383, the future of his country seemed set. A year before, Fernando’s only surviving child, Princess Beatriz, had been betrothed to King Juan I of Castile as part of a peace treaty between the two kingdoms. Knowing that his health was failing, Fernando had stipulated in the marriage agreement the various complexities of who would inherit Portugal and under what conditions. When the Portuguese king died leaving no heir but the twelve-year-old Beatriz, one thing was absolutely clear: Castile and Portugal would be united. Nevertheless, united they were not. Divine will, or quite possibly human agency, intervened in the form of a heavenly portent: “It happened in Evora, where a baby girl, suddenly endowed with speech, raised itself in its cradle and, hand in air, proclaimed: ‘Portugal, Portugal, behold your new king, Dom João!’” Ignoring the possibility that the infant’s proclamation referred to King Juan of Castile (for Juan is simply the Castilian form of João) and invoking the Visigothic tradition of elective monarchy, Fernando’s
bastard cousin João de Avis answered the call backed by widespread popular support. The result, as The Lusiads recounts, was war.

From Camoens’s sixteenth-century perspective, this war was not merely a clash of elites vying for supremacy; it was a fight for Portuguese independence and freedom. This being the case, the entire nation mobilized. Even the commoners – normally the hapless victims of medieval armies – rallied to João’s cause:

[W]hile some [commoners] were voicing the general approval of the war in defence of the homeland, others set about polishing and refurbishing their arms that the years of peace had coated with rust, lining headpieces, testing breastplates, each man fitting himself out as best he could.\(^{42}\)

Naturally the nobles also joined in, for the common people did not hold a monopoly on patriotism. Nevertheless, in contrast to the poet’s depiction of the commoners’ unwavering support, he related that a group of nobles expressed their doubts when João sought their counsel:

And some did in fact advance views at variance with the common determination, their former valour having given way to an unwonted and discreditable disloyalty. Fear had chilled and numbed their hearts, driving out natural fidelity, until they were prepared to deny both their king and their country. Had it suited their interests, they would have denied, like Peter, their very God.\(^{43}\)

Still, with a rousing appeal to Portuguese history and skill at arms, the king vanquished most of the nobles’ concerns. And in The Lusiads, a gloriously bloody struggle, complete with noble traitors and common heroes, ensued.\(^{44}\)

Reality was somewhat more prosaic. Intent on securing his rights to Fernando’s legacy, Juan invaded and fought his way toward Lisbon. Rallying his supporters (both noble and common), João moved his army north from the Portuguese capital to intercept the Castilian invaders. On 14 August 1385 the two armies met in battle on the plateau of Aljubarrota, near the site of the modern town of Batalha.\(^{45}\) Despite Juan’s great resources and strength, João won. Portugal’s
independence was secured, although a lasting peace with Castile came only in 1411.\textsuperscript{46} Still, for the sixteenth-century Portuguese, the Battle of Aljubarrota and the events preceding it reinforced the idea that they were God’s chosen people, meant to be independent. The only possible explanation for the infant’s cry heralding João de Avis as the new king of Portugal was divine intervention. Obviously God supported Portugal and had no intention of allowing foreigners to rule over His people. Because of this, the Portuguese believed that they had been granted victory over the much stronger Castilians.

**Africa and empire**

With Castile fended off, but too powerful to attack, King João I set his sights on Africa. Extending the *Reconquista* into Africa, he hoped, would provide the active frontier he needed to keep his nobles occupied and rewarded. As a first step, he decided to take the Moroccan port of Ceuta. Located in a strategic position in the Strait of Gibraltar, this city served as a base for the Moorish corsairs who periodically raided the Algarve and attacked Christian ships sailing through the strait.\textsuperscript{47} By seizing Ceuta, the Portuguese hoped to protect the seaborne trade route between Italy and northern Europe for which Portugal was a vital way station. What made the city even more enticing was that it served as a center of the rich Saharan gold trade.\textsuperscript{48} Finally, João hoped that the city would prove an ideal staging point for the eventual conquest of Morocco, thus reversing the course taken by the Muslims in 711. In 1415 João launched his attack and, after only a day of fighting, took the city.\textsuperscript{49}

Although the Portuguese captured Ceuta with little effort, this step did not prove to be the first leading to the demise of Muslim rule in Morocco. Nor did the city deliver its trade into Portuguese hands; the Moorish merchants simply moved to other cities and bypassed the old center. Still, holding Ceuta did help consolidate Christian control of the strait and its traffic. However, the cost was high: the Moors constantly harassed Ceuta’s garrison and supplies often had to be obtained by risky raids into the surrounding countryside. In the long run, the conquest accomplished only two basic things. First, as Camoens observed, occupying Ceuta made practically impossible a renewed Islamic invasion of the Iberian peninsula.\textsuperscript{50} Second, the experience at Ceuta set the pattern for the Portuguese overseas
empire. Instead of territorial conquest, the Portuguese established strategic coastal forts, guarded them well, and tried to channel local trade through them.

Over the next century the Portuguese systematically explored the west coast of Africa, slowly edging ever further south. This process culminated in 1497 with Vasco da Gama’s epic voyage – the central narrative thread of The Lusiads – in which the Portuguese finally rounded the Cape of Good Hope and pushed on to India. There, after nearly a century of exploration, they discovered the source of the eastern spice trade. For the first time, Europeans could engage in this lucrative commerce without having to deal with Muslim intermediaries. Da Gama’s achievement, combined with the discovery of Brazil in 1500, quickly converted Portugal from a minor Iberian kingdom into one of Europe’s wealthiest realms. By the second half of the sixteenth century the Portuguese had built a wide network of forts and trading-posts throughout Africa, Asia, the East Indies, and Brazil from which they supplied European markets with slaves, spices, and other commodities. The rapid expansion of the Portuguese Empire and the prosperity it brought, vindicated the belief in the divine mission of the Portuguese people. Imperial and commercial success was simply the means God had chosen to spread His Gospel to the farthest ends of the earth. God had preserved Portugal’s independence from Castile for this very reason.

Imperial decline and decay

When Camoens published The Lusiads in 1572 this history was in the all too distant past. At the end of his poem, he lamented that

those to whom I sing are become hard of hearing and hard of heart. This country of mine is made over to lusting greed, its sense of values eclipsed in an austerity of gloom and depression: there is no longer to be had from it that recognition which fans the flame of genius as nothing else can.

Camoens’s voice echoed that of many of his countrymen, who saw Portuguese greatness exchanged for corruption. For them, the Portuguese spirit had faltered. Despite the rich legacy of heroic exploits by men like Vasco da Gama and João de Castro (governor of Goa and
The last half of the sixteenth century saw the Portuguese unable to sustain the economic, military, and demographic burdens demanded by their far-flung empire. As a result, instead of continuing its inexorable advance into every corner of the world, the Portuguese empire began to weaken and shrink. The renewed strength of Portugal’s Muslim competitors in the spice trade reinforced this trend and made it more apparent. No longer able to command the market, Portugal saw its revenues from the trade begin to fall, although its expenses did not. Modern historiography has ascribed this situation to the Portuguese failure to block off the Red Sea and thus prevent the Ottoman revival of traditional Middle Eastern trade routes. The sixteenth-century Portuguese saw the same pattern, but wondered what spiritual failing had conferred victory on the Turk. Sure in their knowledge that they were God’s chosen people, they could only conclude that their collective sins – perhaps in the form of pursuing “futile glory or riches” – had brought this punishment upon Portugal.

In reminding the Portuguese of their heroic past, however mythical, The Lusiads prescribed the remedy for the malaise of empire. Through his poem, Camoens called upon his people to remember and renew their traditional values and strengths: their Christianity, their independence, and their divinely appointed place in the world. More directly, he called upon his king – who occupied his “throne in furtherance of the divine will” – to lead his kingdom back to its former glory. Under the pious and warlike King Sebastian, the ancient dream of the Reconquista would once again guide the Portuguese to greatness; for, as the poet explained, Sebastian was “sent by God to strike new terror into Moslem hearts and to win for the faith vast new regions of the earth.”

If the Portuguese refocused on their divinely appointed role, the “gloom and depression” that had beset them would fade away and Portugal would assert its proper place in the world. This, in 1572, was the imagined future: one sketched out by history, prophecy, and hope.

Reality, as we know, turned out quite differently. In 1578 the disastrous Battle of Alcazar dashed the national hopes raised by Sebastian’s youth, his vigor, and his reaffirmation of the Portuguese
as a proud and independent people. Just when the Portuguese found the king who would assuredly reinvigorate the kingdom, God snatched him away. For a people who considered themselves to be God’s chosen people, this turn of events must have seemed perplexing. Why would God deprive His people of the leader they needed to accomplish His work? Out of the confusion surrounding Sebastian’s death – and the national crisis precipitated by the Spanish annexation in 1580 – arose the idea that the Portuguese king had not gone to his grave, that God for some reason kept him hidden. Perhaps Sebastian was occupied with a sanctifying pilgrimage. Perhaps the Portuguese were not yet ready to take up their divine role. In any case, Sebastian would eventually return to lead his people to the culmination of their appointed destiny.

This returns us to the question with which this chapter opened, although in a more general form: What was it that made the Portuguese of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries ready to believe in Sebastianism? As we have seen, the cultural elements upon which Sebastianism drew – a separate people, elected by God, with a divine mission to carry Christianity to the world – were embedded in over half a millennium of Portuguese history. Fostered by empire and reinforced by the Spanish annexation, these elements created a distinct sense of Portuguese identity. For the people of Portugal, Sebastianism was an appealing formulation of this identity expressed in millenarian terms. It reflected both Portugal’s unique past and Portuguese hopes for a better future. For Portuguese rebels during the period of Spanish occupation, Sebastianism’s popular appeal would make it a useful political tool. It was nationalism in another guise.
3

Venice: Portuguese King or Calabrian Charlatan?

Taking on someone else’s name and person with intention to defraud was thought a serious crime in sixteenth-century France…. But how, in a time without photographs, with few portraits, without tape recorders, without fingerprinting, without identity cards, without birth certificates, with parish records still irregular if kept at all – how did one establish a person’s identity beyond doubt?

Natalie Zemon Davis, The Return of Martin Guerre

Among the papers that Inígigo de Mendoza dispatched to Madrid in the summer of 1598 were a sonnet and a letter, written in Italian and signed “The Unbelieved King of Portugal.” In poetry and prose, these documents briefly chronicled the story of Portugal’s King Sebastian: his “cruel fate” and apparent death at the Battle of Alcazar twenty years earlier, his miraculous survival through God’s mercy, his recent return to the world. Whoever the author was, he seems to have been intent on proving that Sebastian was still alive. Nonetheless, the Spanish ambassador to Venice evidently considered the documents barely worthy of note, mere curiosities. He did not offer a translation. Nor did he explain that they implicitly questioned King Philip II of Spain’s right to rule Portugal. Instead, he simply sent them to the Spanish Council of State, buried amidst more important concerns. Some weeks later, on 13 September, Philip’s death brought the matter to life.

Over the following five years, Spanish officials in Italy, Spain, and Portugal found themselves frequently distracted by “The Unbelieved
King of Portugal,’” his supporters, and the disturbances generated by his story. What Inigo de Mendoza dismissed as inconsequential proved troublesome. Why? Part of the answer can be found in the events themselves. In essence, the news both of the Portuguese king’s reappearance and the Spanish king’s death raised the same troubling question: Who was now king? What had been a simple question of a legal, orderly, and fore-ordained succession became confused with complex issues of sovereignty, legitimacy, and identity. Further compounding the confusion – and providing much of the rest of the answer – were two additional factors common to all of early modern Europe. First, in a society in which information was unreliable and moved slowly, rumor often passed for news. Second, the personal nature of political ties made the state brittle and subject to the flaws of mortality.

**Portugal and the death of Philip II**

Philip’s passing severed the personal and legal ties that bound his subjects to the Spanish monarchy. In Castile this was of little consequence. There, in Spain’s dominant kingdom, local and imperial interests generally coincided. Few nobles stood to gain from anything other than an orderly transition. Furthermore, since the heir to the throne resided in Castile, he could personally create anew the links of patronage and fealty that bound subject to king. For outlying provinces like the Kingdom of Portugal, distance complicated the situation. In these areas, the king’s death brought a dangerous liminal period in which local elites were freed of their feudal restraints. Without the presence of the heir to guide the dynastic state safely through to the next reign, it became especially vulnerable to the forces of rumor, conspiracy, local resentments, and incipient nationalism. For ten days in mid-September 1598, Portugal was adrift. During that time, the rumor of a living King Sebastian who would soon return to take up his throne cast its shadow over the news of Philip’s death. These two events – a king’s death and the genesis of a rumor – set the stage for a group of Portuguese rebels who had never been reconciled to Spanish rule in Portugal. It provided them with the opportunity to convert what had been a mere dynastic struggle into a national one.
In the Portuguese capital, mourning for Philip was a subdued, official affair. By order of Portugal’s council of governors, it began on 20 September, the day after they learned of the king’s death, and ended three days later.\(^5\) On Sunday, the first day of mourning, the bells of Lisbon started tolling at two in the afternoon and stopped at ten the next day. On Monday afternoon, proclamations issued throughout the city instructed everyone to dress appropriately. Fishwives wore black veils, laborers donned caps, and nobles put on hoods.\(^6\) On Tuesday, no work was done. That morning, the city’s oldest official and three magistrates led the people of Lisbon in a procession to three principal landmarks: the Cathedral, the \textit{Rua Nova}, and the Rossio Plaza.\(^7\) At each location, one of the magistrates raised a shield bearing Philip’s coat-of-arms above his head and cried out: “Weep, weep [Portuguese] people for your good king, Don Philip, who is dead and who governed you for eighteen years in peace and with much justice…”\(^8\) Then the magistrate dropped the coat-of-arms on the ground, shattering it.\(^9\) Three times the symbol of Philip’s power was raised; three times it was broken. Philip II of Spain was no longer King of Portugal.

Sometime during these three days of mourning, the rumor about King Sebastian intruded. It told of a daring escape from North Africa: Sebastian and twenty other Christians had stolen a galley and, fleeing their Muslim captors, raced north into the Adriatic Sea towards secure Christian territory.\(^10\) This news caused a great stir in Portugal—although incredible, it seemed possible.\(^11\) After all, Christian slaves did sometimes escape their Muslim masters and return home. If Sebastian had survived the Battle of Alcazar, he might have been captured and enslaved; consequently, he might have languished for twenty years in captivity somewhere in North Africa. If true, however, the coincidental timing was fantastic. For some Portuguese, Philip’s death seemed to have fortuitously made way for Sebastian to return and reclaim his throne. At least in the popular imagination, the Portuguese faced a crucial question: should they swear fealty to Philip II’s son and legitimate heir, Philip III, or reinstate the long-lost King Sebastian?

Authorities in Lisbon launched an investigation. Was the rumor miraculous truth or was it baseless sedition? Popular pressure in the form of excited speculation demanded an official response. The brief inquiry revealed that some letters from Rome had inspired the
account of Sebastian’s escape, but failed to uncover the authors. Unable to verify the disturbing tidings or identify the perpetrators, the authorities tabled the matter. And, on Wednesday, 23 September 1598, the proclamations which ended mourning for Philip II ordered the people of Lisbon to prepare for the ceremony that would fill the vacant throne. No one was to work and everyone was to dress festively. That afternoon, the people of Lisbon gathered at the Terreiro do Paço, where the highest-ranked Portuguese nobles swore an oath of loyalty to Portugal’s new king: Philip III of Spain.

For the moment the question of succession in Portugal had been settled. The Portuguese nobility had taken its oath and Philip III was king. Legally, the Kingdom of Portugal was anchored to the Spanish crown. Yet Spanish authority in Portugal was brittle. Slow and unreliable communications, soldiers of uncertain loyalties, and bureaucracies better structured for graft than governance forced early modern European states to depend on local elites to rule. For those elites whose interests did not coincide perfectly with those of the current regime, political rumor and popular sentiment created possibilities to exploit. In Portugal in 1598, the news about Sebastian aroused both millenarian expectations and political ambitions. For those who yearned for Portuguese independence – Sebastianists, nationalists, and disgruntled nobles alike – the rumor of King Sebastian’s return hinted at a welcome release from Spanish rule.

**Genesis of a rumor**

This rumor originated in Venice. Months earlier – some time during the summer of 1598 – a man had turned up in the Most Serene Republic claiming to be the long-lost King Sebastian of Portugal. Initially, outside the small community of Portuguese merchants and exiles, he attracted little notice. Nevertheless, word of the man and his claims eventually spread. Among the Venetians he was apparently regarded as some sort of celebrity; he seems to have socialized with various nobles and prelates who were, perhaps, intrigued or amused by his assertions. Undoubtedly, he was the same “Unbelieved King of Portugal” whose writings ended up in the Spanish ambassador’s dispatch to Madrid, but had been disregarded. Up to this point the man was more odd than dangerous. This changed with the news of
Philip II’s death and the ensuing mood of disaffection in Portugal; the supposed Sebastian no longer appeared harmless. Anxious not to be seen by the Spanish as the source of unrest in Portugal, the Venetians moved to eliminate the threat. On 22 October 1598, having decided to forbid the man – whoever he was – to remain in Venice, the Council of Ten sought to discover his whereabouts. By 24 October, they had been informed that the man claiming to be King Sebastian had recently gone to Padua and was lodged there at the Collegio Cocco. That day the Council sent word to the Paduan Rettori directing them to order the man to leave the city within twenty-four hours and, within eight days, to leave the Venetian Republic. Moreover, they forbade him ever to return.

On 7 November the Spanish ambassador to Venice lodged a formal protest before the Venetian Collegio. He informed them that the supposed Sebastian had ignored their injunction and that the “scoundrel” was once again in Venice. In fact, the man’s “beastly whim” had gained such notoriety in the city that Iñigo de Mendoza could no longer overlook the matter, as he had for the previous three months. Consequently he requested that the Council take the man into their custody so that the question of his true identity could be resolved. Mendoza explained that, in any case, he intended to uncover the truth and take the appropriate steps. If the man could prove that he was indeed King Sebastian of Portugal, the ambassador assured the Venetians that his master, Philip III, would gladly restore the Portuguese throne to his long-lost cousin; however, if this was a “malicious and sad machination,” Mendoza expected the impostor to be punished.

Clearly, punishment was the outcome Iñigo de Mendoza anticipated. As he reminded the Collegio in his complaint, the real King Sebastian had fallen in battle twenty years earlier at Ksar-el-Kebir; both the King of Spain and the King of Morocco had subsequently done everything in their power to ascertain his fate. Without a doubt Sebastian was dead. Besides, the ambassador argued, this was a particularly poor impostor: he looked nothing like Sebastian. In fact, claimed Mendoza, the man was from Calabria (in southern Italy) and spoke not a word of Portuguese. It was hard to believe that Sebastian could have forgotten his native tongue. Obviously, the man could not be the missing Portuguese king. And impersonation of a king, an extremely serious crime, warranted retribution.
If, as Mendoza asserted, the supposed Sebastian was obviously a second-rate impostor, why had the Spanish suddenly become so interested? After all, the ambassador himself disregarded the man and his claims for some three months. Certainly, the death of Philip II and the news from Portugal were factors; yet the Portuguese nobility had sworn fealty to Philip III and the Portuguese people had not revolted. Moreover, with his refusal to leave Venice, the alleged impostor hardly seemed keen to return to Portugal and incite a rebellion. So why did the man the Spanish came to call the Calabrian Charlatan now appear menacing? In effect, although the man himself seemed harmless, the rumors he inspired were not. For a state like early modern Spain, held together primarily by personal ties of loyalty to the monarch, anything that threatened to disrupt those ties was dangerous. Whatever the real intentions of the man claiming to be King Sebastian of Portugal, once news of his claims reached Portugal, he constituted a threat. As the Spanish had learned on three prior occasions, the rumor of Sebastian’s return could act as a catalyst for unrest in Portugal. If care were not taken, the tenuous ties linking Portugal to Philip III might be broken and replaced by ties to a resurrected Sebastian. This threat in turn endangered other Spanish domains, for talk of events in Venice and Portugal had spread. For instance, the ambassador received a letter from Sicily warning him of the impostor and even informing him of where he lodged in Venice. Any mis-step, or even hesitation in handling the situation, might reveal a weakness that would encourage rebels elsewhere. So, while the Calabrian Charlatan himself might be ignored, the first rumblings from Portugal of millenarian expectations and national sentiments could not. Íñigo de Mendoza and his superiors in Madrid felt compelled to put a quick end to the matter.

Having heard the ambassador's views, the Collegio relegated the matter to the Senate for consideration. There, presumably after some discussion, one Senator submitted a resolution calling for the arrest of the man calling himself King Sebastian. Once detained, he was to be handed over to the Avvogadori di Comun – the state attorneys – who would prosecute his case; afterwards, the Senate would decide on a “just and opportune” outcome. The resolution, however, failed to pass and the supposed Sebastian continued to have free run of the city.
On 17 November Íñigo de Mendoza renewed his grievance, this time in writing. His concern, as he informed the Collegio, was that the false Sebastian’s claims would incite “some disturbance in Portugal.”³² Should this happen it would undoubtedly harm the friendship between Spain and Venice – a circumstance for which he, the ambassador, would be blamed. After all, Mendoza conceded, the Signoria previously had no reason to act, seeing as he himself had disregarded the matter and had long failed to bring it to their attention. Now, however, the situation had changed. The Charlatan had come to Venice “half-naked and without any followers,” but now found himself “regally dressed”; furthermore, he now lived “sumptuously” and led “a good company of other scoundrels.”³³

To forestall any possible and unfortunate deterioration in diplomatic relations, he implored the Collegio to arrest the impostor so that the whole matter could be cleared up. And – although he disliked making such a request, especially in public – his duty obliged him to seek as well the punishment of certain Venetian nobles who protected the “scoundrel” and moved his lodgings from one place to another. In fact, Mendoza pointed out, it was these aristocrats, not the Serene Republic itself, who threatened to damage Venice’s amicable relationship with Spain. As ambassador, he sought only to ensure that this did not happen. Simply apprehending and trying the Calabrian Charlatan would bring the mutual satisfaction and “perpetual peace” that both Spanish king and Venetian doge desired.³⁴

Mendoza’s statement apparently bewildered at least some of the members of the Collegio. After assuring the Spanish ambassador that they too wished to sustain the good relations between their respective rulers, they informed him that the supposed Sebastian had already left Venice. Accordingly, they believed that they had brought the matter to a satisfactory conclusion. Nevertheless, Mendoza insisted that the impostor remained in the city and continued to receive many visitors, among them Venetian noblemen and priests. Although not entirely convinced, the Collegio consented to look further into the matter. When their investigation was complete, they would summon the ambassador and inform him of their findings. As Íñigo de Mendoza took his leave, he urged the Venetian ministers – “per l’amor di Dio” – not to allow a regrettable conclusion to this affair to undermine Venice’s relationship with Spain, especially at the very beginning of Philip III’s reign.³⁵
Obviously, Mendoza hoped to quash the rumor of Sebastian’s return by eliminating its source and punishing those who helped it spread. As the ambassador well knew, in an era lacking steady and reliable sources of information, rumor served as news. Usually, however, the best way of dealing with damaging noise was to dismiss it; most rumors were ephemera, quickly drowned in early modern Europe’s universal flood of gossip and speculation. Actively trying to suppress a rumor ran the risk of magnifying it and lending it credence. Nevertheless, some rumors grew beyond the point where they could be safely ignored. Exaggerated and promoted for political purposes, such speculation was dangerous: a well-timed challenge might incite a popular revolt or encourage ambitious or resentful local elites to test the strength of their bonds to the early modern state. For the Spanish, the widespread and persistent rumors surrounding the Calabrian Charlatan threatened their hold on Portugal in just this way.

Spanish diplomatic pressure on Venice had its effect. Following the discussions of the Colle\gi\o with Mendoza, the Senate debated the matter and how best to respond. However, the Senators could not agree on whether to detain the alleged impostor immediately or simply to renew the order of expulsion. Disagreement seems to have fallen along the factional lines developed in the 1580s: the “Old” party pursued a policy of neutrality in European politics and hence did not wish to offend Spain; in contrast, the “Young” party believed that neutrality had led to Spanish dominance in Italy and, hoping to end this, sought to ally the Most Serene Republic with Spain’s northern European opponents (France, England, and the Netherlands). Reflecting these divisions, three resolutions came to a vote; none passed.\textsuperscript{36} Nevertheless, probably driven by hopes for Spanish participation in a league against the Turks (which overshadowed Venice’s European political concerns), the Senators eventually formed a consensus.\textsuperscript{37} On 24 November the Council had six of the fake Sebastian’s Paduan and Venetian accomplices arrested.\textsuperscript{38} They were immediately turned over to a special four-man commission formed that same day and invested with the usual “power to detain, to prosecute, to torture.”\textsuperscript{39} The next day, on 25 November 1598, the Venetian authorities collared the Calabrian Charlatan himself and handed him over to the commission as well.\textsuperscript{40}

For the next two years, the supposed Sebastian languished in jail. No longer did he receive Venetian nobles and prelates curious about
his miraculous survival at the Battle of Alcazar and his subsequent
adventures fighting for Christendom. Instead, his days, weeks, and
months were punctuated by official interrogations and visits from
probing skeptics.\textsuperscript{41} His visitors scrutinized his story and uncovered
each flaw and inconsistency. Yet he did not alter his claims; he
steadfastly insisted that he was, in fact, the long-lost King of Portu-
gal.\textsuperscript{42} (Torture was apparently not applied.) After an initial flurry of
activity the formal inquiry tapered off since – besides failing to
extract a confession – it had uncovered little that was new. Increas-
ingly left undisturbed in his cell, the prisoner turned once more to
composing sonnets.\textsuperscript{43} Other than admitting he was an impostor,
there was little else he could do. His fate would be decided by others.

\textbf{Identifying the prisoner}

Outside the prison walls at least three groups – Venetian investiga-
tors, Spanish officials, and Portuguese rebels – sought to decide the
fate of the imprisoned poet. Naturally, given the man’s unchanging
and extraordinary claims, the key issue was one of identity. This was
no simple matter. Lacking any impartial and indisputable means for
establishing a person’s identity (such as comparing fingerprints,
examining dental x-rays, or consulting photographs), early modern
institutions were forced to rely on logic and the testimony of gener-
ally less-than-reliable witnesses.\textsuperscript{44} Any contested identity thus rested
on a fragile reconstruction of frail memory. In the case at hand, the
dispute over who the man actually was turned on memories faded by
twenty years and prejudiced by political purposes.

Caught at the center of this debate was the four-man commission
established by the Venetian Senate to adjudicate the matter. Any
ruling they made, especially if not backed by convincing evidence,
would provoke someone: the “Old” or the “Young,” the Spanish or
the Portuguese. Realizing this, Marco Querini (a member of the com-
mmission) persuaded a Portuguese Dominican friar to go to Lisbon to
obtain the proof they needed; in exchange, upon his return, he
would be allowed to speak with the prisoner. Querini expected this
friar – Estêvão de Sampaio – to come back with incontrovertible
documents that would either verify or refute the supposed Sebastian’s
assertions.\textsuperscript{45} Converting rumor and speculation into fact, however
tenuous, would clarify the political choices with which the Serene
Republic was faced; in addition, the delay caused by the investigation would give the two Venetian factions time to form a consensus about which choices might prove most advantageous.

For Sampaio, this journey entailed great risk. Twenty years earlier, the Dominican friar had opposed Philip II of Spain’s claims to the Portuguese throne, and instead supported Dom António, the native Portuguese claimant. At the Battle of Alcântara – one of the few military engagements of consequence in the brief contest between Philip and António – Sampaio’s patriotism converted him into a combatant.  

He killed one Spanish soldier and captured a royal standard from another. For these acts of rebellion, on 28 January 1581 the new (Spanish) vicar general of the Portuguese Dominicans issued an order for his detention and incarceration. Although jailed, Sampaio eventually escaped and made his way to the French city of Toulouse, from where he continued to agitate against the Spanish occupation of Portugal. As a result, in 1599, Fra Estêvão de Sampaio was a wanted man in all Spanish territories, including Lisbon.

In spite of the danger, Sampaio returned to the Portuguese capital. There he hoped to compile an authoritative list of Sebastian’s physical traits: his height; the color of his eyes; the color of his hair; the location, size, and shape of any scars he had; and, anything else that could be used to identify an individual. Sampaio searched Lisbon for people who had known Sebastian and could provide this kind of detailed information about their king. Unfortunately, most had died. Still, he tracked down a few people who had served in Sebastian’s household, including his barber and shoemaker. From them, he obtained what he needed: notarized and sworn testimony of the signs by which the true Portuguese king could be recognized. For example, from the barber Sampaio learned that in 1578 one of Sebastian’s lower right molars had been pulled, and from the shoemaker he learned that one of the king’s legs was shorter than the other. In November and December 1599 Sampaio wrote to Querini from Lisbon, apprising him of his findings. The friar informed the Venetian that while he would like “to show the falseness of this Fabrication,” he could not. He swore – “by the living God and [his] holy orders” – that the signs he had sent were true, implying (without actually saying) that the prisoner in Venice was who he claimed to be: King Sebastian of Portugal. This testimony had no immediate,
tangible effect. Still, it may have renewed Venetian doubts about the true identity of their captive poet for, during the summer of 1600, the news in Lisbon insisted that the supposed Sebastian’s jailors had transferred him to better quarters and provided him with a daily stipend for food.\textsuperscript{54}

By October 1600 Sampaio was once again in Venice, campaigning for the release of his king. In a letter written to José Teixeira, another Portuguese exile, Sampaio swore – driven only by “a fraternal love, the truth, and zeal for the freedom of [Portugal]” – that “the King Dom Sebastian, our lord, is a prisoner in [Venice].”\textsuperscript{55} He claimed that this was proven by the signs he had gathered in Portugal for, without exception, the alleged impostor bore each one. The Portuguese friar complained, however, that the machinations of Íñigo de Mendoza and the malice of Portuguese Jews had prevented the Venetian Signoria from seeing the truth by convincing them that their prisoner was a Calabrian. Sampaio requested that Teixeira, in his role of advisor to the King of France, persuade his master to intervene on Sebastian’s behalf. If Teixeira were to come to Venice with the appropriate royal missives, the Venetians would surely recognize the truth and free King Sebastian.\textsuperscript{56}

Like his fellow Dominican, Fra José Teixeira had supported Dom António against Philip II.\textsuperscript{57} However, unlike Estêvão de Sampaio, Teixeira seems to have taken up words – instead of arms – to fight the Spanish invasion and takeover in 1580. In effect, Portuguese liberty became Teixeira’s gospel and he zealously proclaimed it to his countrymen. For instance, in 1582 in the Azores, during a mass for a group of António’s supporters, a Portuguese Jesuit made the mistake of presenting a homily on a text from St. Matthew:\textsuperscript{58} “Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of? They say unto him, We are able.”\textsuperscript{59}

Although by all accounts an excellent discourse of great comfort to the Portuguese patriots, it upset Teixeira. After the Jesuit had finished, the Dominican friar rose, went to the pulpit, and proceeded to give an impromptu political sermon. He complained “that what the [Jesuit] father preached about and dealt with was only the Gospel: what you all already know; and, of that which is so important for you to know and to do, he says nothing.”\textsuperscript{60}

For Teixeira it was far more important to speak about how the King of Spain had unjustly subjugated Portugal, unseating Dom António,
the legitimate lord and king; how António had suffered in the wilderness while the Spanish pursued him and how he had escaped by following a star to a ship named “The Magi”; and, how the “Spanish Lutherans and Castilians” had occupied the rebels’ lands and taken their women and children. Following this patriotic litany of troubles and miracles, Fra José Teixeira called upon his compatriots to pray for King António’s victory, an act that would inspire them to their duty as “good Christians and subjects.”

A year earlier, as part of the propaganda effort in the struggle to free Portugal, Teixeira published a book entitled De Portugaliæ Ortu (On the Birth of Portugal). In it he argued that legitimate political power was given “by God through the people”, and therefore that it was by the will of the people that each Portuguese king had ascended the throne, not by right of inheritance. In other words, as any modern nationalist would insist, sovereignty resided in the people. Since António’s right to rule in Portugal had been legitimized by popular acclaim before the Spanish conquest placed Philip II on the throne, any of the Spanish king’s legal claims had been superseded. Nevertheless, political legitimacy without military power proved worthless: to expel the Spanish invaders António and his followers needed allies. Following his return to France in 1583, Teixeira took part in French court life, doubtless hoping to influence French policy regarding Portugal. He attended court whenever he was in Paris and spoke of the Portuguese plight at every opportunity. Eventually he became counselor and preacher to two French kings, Henri III and his successor Henri IV; nevertheless, Teixeira never could convert these positions into effective action against Spanish rule.

With the death of Dom António in 1595 Teixeira’s political world collapsed. Over the following years, many of his fellow exiles abandoned the cause and made their peace with Spain. Perhaps their loyalties had been dynastic, tied to António himself; perhaps they had simply tired of an endless and hopeless struggle. Still, Fra José Teixeira refused to give up. Although he had never wavered in his support for Portugal’s dispossessed king, the friar’s political loyalties were not personal or dynastic; they were national – both pro-Portuguese and anti-Spanish. In the final years of the sixteenth century, when Portugal seemed irrevocably attached to the Spanish empire, the rumors and stories surrounding Sebastian must have held a natural appeal for an early modern nationalist like Teixeira.
After all, they told of the miraculous return of a native Portuguese king who, with God’s help, would surely recover his throne.

From August 1600 at the latest, José Teixeira avidly followed the tidings from Venice.69 Over the next six months the Dominican slowly pieced together and published an annotated collection of documents – letters, bits of news, fragments of ancient prophecies – concerning King Sebastian and his life following the Battle of Alcazar. In this volume, the Adventure Admirable par dessus toutes autres (The Strangest Adventure that Ever Happened), Teixeira transferred his fight for Portuguese freedom to new ground.70 At the heart of his argument was the idea that Portugal had been established and sanctified by God. Thus the Portuguese loss of independence violated God’s plan; however, this calamity would soon be overcome.

Teixeira built the core of his case on a series of documents uncovered or produced by Fra Estêvão de Sampaio during his perilous trip to Lisbon in late 1599.71 The first of these documents was allegedly the sworn testimony of Afonso Henriches, the first king of Portugal, describing his vision the night before the Battle of Ourique. That night Afonso had retired to his tent to rest and prepare himself to face his Moorish foe in the morning. Seeking inspiration, he read the biblical account of Gideon’s victory over the Midianites for, like the Israelites, the Portuguese were outnumbered.72 After a prayer for victory, Afonso fell asleep and his vision began.73 In it, he learned that God had chosen “…to establish an Empire upon [Afonso] and [his] posterity, so that [God’s] name would be revealed and increased among the most distant nations…. [Portugal would be] a sanctified Kingdom, pure in the faith, and loving piety.”74 This chosen status was to last for sixteen generations, after which Portugal’s royal line would weaken and the kingdom would enter a time of troubles; nevertheless, God would continue to favor and help the Portuguese.75

As Afonso had foreseen, his dynasty faltered at the appointed hour – the ill-fated Sebastian was Portugal’s sixteenth king.76 Although the future might have appeared bleak for the Portuguese living at the end of the sixteenth century, there was reason for hope; God after all had promised not to abandon his people. In fact, for those who knew how to interpret them, ancient prophecies could provide a chart for the unfolding of God’s plan. For instance, St. Cyril the Carmelite prophesied that “In the time of 54 years a Sun will rise…. And this Sun will
be hidden. . . . Afterwards he will come to triumph over the world.”

In his commentary on this text, José Teixeira asserted that the “Sun” referred to Sebastian; the fact that the Portuguese king was born in 1554 provided unquestionable proof. In another prophecy, St. Isidore of Seville predicted the appearance of “a Hidden king, twice given [by God].” Again, Teixeira interpreted this as a reference to Sebastian. The first time Sebastian was “given” was in 1554 when, with his birth, he provided King João III of Portugal with a successor, thus saving the kingdom from annexation by Spain. The second time had begun with Sebastian’s miraculous appearance in Venice in 1598 and, as before, would surely result in the liberation of Portugal.

Neither of the Portuguese Dominicans was content, however, to leave the future of his country entirely in God’s hands. Sampaio’s second document described an agreement of “vassalage” between Afonso and the Pope, detailing their reciprocal feudal duties. This legal contract established Portugal as a fief of the Holy See, a kingdom distinct from and independent of Spain. With the apparent extinction of the Portuguese royal family, it might seem that this agreement had lapsed or passed on to Philip II; however, Teixeira insisted, the original enfeoffment had been done with the consent of the Portuguese people, making them party to the covenant. Consequently, the Pope had an obligation to the Portuguese nation to ensure that they remained his feudatories, “free of all foreign domination.”

Both Estêvão de Sampaio’s and José Teixeira’s arguments expressed one fundamental idea: a Portugal “free of all foreign domination.” Differing audiences and changing circumstances dictated their terminology – whether dynastic right, divine sanction, feudal contract, or popular will. Thus, shifting allegiance from Dom António to the supposed Sebastian was a matter of making the best of present opportunities. In fact, for the two Portuguese patriots it mattered little whether the man in Venice was an impostor or not. As with modern nationalist groups, any means of ridding the nation of foreign rule was legitimate.

This point was not lost on the Spanish. As part of his ongoing efforts to unmask the Calabrian Charlatan, Íñigo de Mendoza closely watched both Portuguese travelers and the Portuguese community in Venice – people suspect by virtue of their nationality. In February 1600 the ambassador informed his superiors of three minor, but somewhat disturbing, incidents. First, one of Dom António’s sons
– Dom Cristóvão de Portugal – had passed through the city on his way to Constantinople. He was on a mission, reportedly inspired by the Dutch, to plead with the Turks to declare war on the Spanish. However, Mendoza believed that nothing would come of this initiative, since the Turks were fully occupied elsewhere. Second, several Portuguese had come to Venice to investigate the rumor of King Sebastian’s imprisonment. Among these were a group of Portuguese Franciscans who had asked to visit the prisoner, but the Venetian authorities had prevented them from doing so. As a result, they claimed that the man really was King Sebastian and were spreading this rumor back to Portugal. Third, although he provided no details, the Spanish ambassador briefly noted that a Portuguese friar had been corresponding with one of the Venetian commissioners assigned to the supposed Sebastian’s case.85

Only the third of these incidents grew into something of significance. In April a Portuguese archdeacon in Rome delivered two letters to the Duke of Sessa, the Spanish ambassador to the Pope.86 One of these letters, dated 8 December 1599, was a report from Estêvão de Sampaio to Marco Querini. In it, the Dominican relayed his findings concerning the physical signs by which the real King Sebastian could be recognized and implied to the Venetian that his prisoner was indeed the Portuguese King.87 The second letter was far more interesting. This one, dated 15 November 1599, was also from Sampaio but addressed to a Portuguese merchant in Venice by the name of Nuno da Costa. In it, the friar related the same signs by which Sebastian could be identified; in this letter, however, Sampaio noted that these signs were enough “to reveal the duplicity of [the prisoner].”88 Furthermore, he stated, the secretive way in which the Venetian Signoria was investigating the affair had only fueled the rumors and speculation in Lisbon.89 The Duke duly sent copies of these two documents to both Madrid and Mendoza, noting that the Portuguese in Venice obviously knew that the supposed Sebastian was an impostor.90

In September the Dominican friar again came to Mendoza’s attention. This time, the Spaniard ran across a copy of the original Latin version of the documents and prophecies which Estêvão de Sampaio had collected in Lisbon.91 The ambassador described this “persuasive epistle” in a report to Madrid, noting that it predicted the emergence of a Hidden King who would expel the Spanish from Portugal.92 However, in spite of the Duke of Sessa’s report and the intercepted
letters, Mendoza did not think that Sampaio had connected the Calabrian Charlatan with the Hidden King. Even the friar’s obviously anti-Spanish politics apparently did not overly concern the ambassador. Instead, he dismissed the friar as “simple.”

**Punish or release?**

About this time Íñigo de Mendoza’s replacement – Francisco de Vera y Aragón – arrived in Venice. When Philip III appointed de Vera as ambassador, he ordered him to pay special attention to the matter of the Calabrian Charlatan. Due to the threat of a Portuguese revolt in support of a returned Sebastian, it was imperative to punish the impostor and any accomplices who could be identified. Consequently, Philip instructed his new ambassador to redouble his efforts to persuade the Venetians to subject the Charlatan to an appropriate and public punishment; the king believed that this was “such a damaging fabrication and bad example” that it needed to be ended.

Francisco de Vera wasted no time in assessing the situation in Venice. On 9 December 1600 he appeared before the Venetian **Collegio**, demanding that the Calabrian Charlatan be punished or released. He informed them that the “insolence” of Fray Estêvão de Sampaio had forced him to act. De Vera could no longer tolerate the lies being spread by Sampaio, Nuno da Costa, and their rebel accomplices in public places, including the Piazza San Marco. Therefore, he appealed to the Senators to do what was just. If, as they seemed to think, the man was a lunatic not to be held responsible for his actions, he should be released; if not, he was obviously an impostor and should therefore be “severely punished.” By demanding that something be done, even if it meant liberating the false Sebastian, the ambassador apparently hoped to provide the Venetians a way to satisfy both Spanish and Portuguese without appearing to take sides. Besides, should the **Collegio** choose to liberate their prisoner, Francisco de Vera had already devised plans to recapture him.

Two days later, Dom Cristóvão de Portugal and other Portuguese rebels gathered in Venice made a similar appeal. Much like the Spanish ambassador, they appealed to the **Collegio** to administer justice. They asked to be allowed to see and recognize the prisoner. Should they find him to be an impostor, the Portuguese would call for the
“exemplary justice” warranted by the affair, if he proved to be Sebastian, they asked that he be released into their custody. To ensure complete satisfaction on part of the Venetians, Dom Christóvão would agree to remain behind with several companions as a guarantee. If Sebastian’s claims later proved to be false, the Senators could impose whatever punishment they chose.

Bending before this pressure from both the Spanish and the Portuguese, but not really meeting either side’s demands, the Venetians released their captive on 15 December 1600. They ordered him to leave Venice within twenty-four hours and all Venetian territory within three days. After over two years in jail the man claiming to be King Sebastian had finally regained his freedom. The messiah of Sebastianists, native king of Portuguese nationalists, and potential catalyst of a revolt against Spanish rule might now make his bid for the Portuguese throne. If Francisco de Vera’s plans failed, the Calabrian Charlatan’s release boded ill for the Spanish viceroy in Lisbon where, over the previous eight months, popular support for the supposed Sebastian had grown.
4

Lisbon: Rumor and Simmering Discontent

Long live, long live the Fatherland and its noble hearts, that they may esteem only their God, their King, and their honor: leaving to their descendants what they were left by their ancestors.

João de Castro, *Discurso da vida do Rey Dom Sebastiam*¹

News of the appearance and imprisonment in Venice of the Calabrian Charlatan, the supposed King Sebastian, soon reached Portugal. However, the effect was not the engulfing tidal wave hoped for by the man’s supporters, for back in Portugal the news incited no riots and inspired no rebellions. Nonetheless, Sebastian’s rumored return reminded the Portuguese of their lost independence and each ripple of news threatened to erode Portuguese complaisance with Spanish rule.

In the years following union with Spain the Portuguese never completely reconciled themselves with their loss of independence. Only a minority embraced Spanish rule. A few nobles did make their way successfully in the political circles of the Spanish court. Some Portuguese merchants did exploit their new status as Spanish subjects and traded legally in Spain’s American territories for the first time. Yet most Portuguese remained restless. Widespread corruption and generally ineffective government kept the traditional anti-Castilian sentiments of the Portuguese alive and well.² In fact, throughout the period of Spanish rule, almost daily incidents of protest and rebellion reminded the Spanish of their need for political legitimacy. This was the danger inherent in the claims of the Calabrian Charlatan.

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¹ *Discurso da vida do Rey Dom Sebastiam* by João de Castro

They helped undermine King Philip III of Spain’s rule in Portugal by providing the Portuguese with a focus around which their national resentments and political hopes might coalesce into rebellion. Well aware of this, the new rulers of Portugal paid the matter close attention and intervened where they could. Perhaps hoping that the diplomatic talents that helped Spain absorb the kingdom twenty years earlier would prove as useful in defusing the current situation, Philip appointed his father’s expert on all matters Portuguese, Cristóvão de Moura, to the position of viceroy of Portugal.3

Cristóvão de Moura

On 1 May 1600, some eight months before the Venetians banished the supposed King Sebastian of Portugal from the Most Serene Republic and all of its territories, the new Spanish viceroy arrived in Lisbon. The day before, Moura’s party – including his wife, children, servants, and numerous retainers – had arrived at the town of Barreiro on the southern shore of the Tagus, opposite the Portuguese capital, following a month-long overland journey from Madrid. There they were met by the commander of the Castilian soldiers garrisoning the Castelo São Jorge, his captains, and numerous officials from the courts, all of whom had earlier crossed the river to await the new viceroy and to swear their obedience.4 At mid-afternoon of 1 May the vice-regal party embarked on four boats (three galleys and a brigantine) to make the two kilometer crossing to Lisbon. Moura crossed in royal style. He sat on a solitary chair placed upon a carpet in the stern of the brigantine, shaded by an awning of crimson damask, surrounded by his retinue. From this seat he could survey the entire city of Lisbon stretched out before him along the riverbank. As the boats approached the northern shore of the Tagus, the ships in port proclaimed the viceroy’s arrival by firing salvoes. From the hill overlooking the city, the Castilian soldiers lining the walls of the Castelo São Jorge took up the salute, shooting their cannons and muskets. As these military heralds boomed their welcome, the four boats touched shore at the fort next to the Terreiro do Paço, where Moura and his party disembarked.5 Ashore, the new viceroy greeted the Portuguese and Castilian nobles gathered there, embracing many whom he knew from his childhood in Lisbon or from his later years on diplomatic
missions for the king of Spain. This done, Moura climbed to one of the fort’s balconies. He looked out over the people crowding the Terreiro and the adjacent river-front who jostled to get a glimpse of the man who would rule the Kingdom of Portugal in the name of Philip III. Acknowledging the multitude below, Cristóvão de Moura removed his hat and bowed his head.6

Luis Cabrera de Córdoa, Philip’s court chronicler, described this same event with a somewhat different slant. According to Córdoa, writing in Madrid on 27 May 1600, the new viceroy’s reception in Lisbon was rather cold. Apparently none of the major Portuguese nobles showed up, and only the Castilian nobles and officials received him warmly.7 This tension between Portuguese and Castilian permeated Moura’s entire tenure as viceroy, from 1600 to 1603. Moura found himself in the impossible position of trying to meet the demands emanating from the Spanish court without unduly antagonizing the Portuguese nobility, especially the most powerful. Speculation about Sebastian’s return only made things worse. Soon after his arrival, Moura found himself writing reports describing rumors, beliefs, and actions questioning Philip’s right to the Portuguese throne; worse, he had to admit that there was little he could do about it. Still, even as he encouraged Philip to take decisive action in Venice to put an end to the whole affair, he downplayed the seriousness of the many Sebastianist incidents. He repeatedly reminded his king that the Portuguese were among his majesty’s most loyal subjects.8 But then, Cristóvão de Moura himself faced a contradiction which seems to have troubled him: he was Portuguese by family and birth, but Castilian by education and career.9

In 1553, when Moura was 14 years old, his uncle Lourenço Pires de Távora – the Portuguese ambassador to Castile – took the first step towards launching his nephew’s expected career as a courtier in Portugal. This step consisted of arranging for Moura to join the household of Doña Juana, the Castilian wife of the heir to the Portuguese throne. The arrangement followed the traditional Portuguese and Castilian practice of intertwining the nobility of both kingdoms. By placing sons in each other’s households, the nobility of both kingdoms ensured themselves of a supply of officials and diplomats familiar with the adjacent kingdom and its court. Another benefit came from the resulting intermarriages that tied Castilian interests to Portuguese ones and vice versa. The royal families of both kingdoms
were probably the most assiduous followers of this practice. For centuries the royal houses of Spain and Portugal had married their children off to each other. Union under a single monarch was the ultimate goal: an end consciously recognized and pursued by the rulers and nobility of both kingdoms. However, there was one central problem in the whole arrangement. The nobility in each kingdom fervently hoped that it would be their respective monarch who would head the union; they faced the possibility that the other monarch would rule with a certain amount of dread.

This apparent distaste on the part of the nobles for a foreign king was not a matter of national pride. As families, the nobility of the two kingdoms had sacrificed whatever national animosities they might have felt, and invested their children in both Portugal and Castile. Furthermore, union did not mean the absorption of one kingdom by the other; in such an event, each kingdom would remain juridically independent, with the monarchy the only common institution. This composite monarchy avoided the problems inherent in trying to impose a uniform government over historically different peoples by the simple expedient of continuing to rule them as separate nations. Their local laws, privileges, traditions, and noble hierarchy remained intact.

For the nobility the distaste for a foreign king arose instead out of self-interest, at an individual level. A noble who wished to enjoy the political and economic benefits of a position at the center of power could dedicate his career to only a single royal court. If union occurred under the patron for whom he had served, it almost certainly would mean greater prestige and more lucrative royal favors. Otherwise, union probably meant the eclipse of a prosperous career, for only those who were known and trusted by the winning monarch were likely to reap the benefits.

So, when Moura joined the household of the expected next queen of Portugal, his family was grooming him for an influential position in the Portuguese royal court. Events, however, diverted Moura from the career path plotted by his family. On 2 January 1554 Juana’s husband died. For three weeks the Portuguese king and queen attempted to keep this news from the pregnant widow in an effort to prevent a shock which they feared would have grave consequences for the unborn heir to the throne. Although their subterfuge failed, their fears proved groundless. On 20 January 1554 Juana gave birth to a
son, the future King Sebastian. A short four months later, Juana left her infant son in the care of his paternal grandparents and departed with her household for Castile. Whatever her personal inclinations in the matter, they were overshadowed by the needs of her brother, Prince Philip.\textsuperscript{13} The son of Emperor Charles V needed someone competent whom he could trust to rule Spain in his stead while he was away in England for his marriage to Queen Mary.\textsuperscript{14} He selected his sister Juana for that position. Furthermore, Juana was still young enough to be considered for the central part in another round of the matrimonial diplomacy of the age. The now unmarried Spanish princess was quite simply too valuable to leave in Portugal raising Sebastian. Because of this, Cristóvão de Moura found himself far away from home, in the royal court of Spain. There he passed his most formative years, often in the presence of the Emperor Charles V and King Philip II.

By the time King Sebastian led his army to its disastrous defeat at Ksar-el-Kebir, Moura had become an invaluable member of Philip's royal court. After serving the Castilian monarch and his sister on a variety of missions to the Portuguese court for nearly twenty years, the future viceroy of Portugal was a seasoned diplomat, well regarded in both Lisbon and Madrid. Perhaps his most important assignment to this point occurred in December 1576, when he served as the chief go-between for Philip and Sebastian. At the behest of both monarchs he arranged their meeting at the Hieronimite monastery at Guadalupe. The young Portuguese king wished to ask his uncle for the military and financial support required for his long-dreamt-of plans to conquer Morocco for Christendom. Although Philip viewed the entire situation as youthful folly, he agreed to the meeting. He reportedly hoped to convince his nephew that he should be attending to far more important concerns, such as arranging a marriage for himself and producing an heir. Although they met several times for private discussions, neither king felt satisfied with the results. As the Spanish historian Antonio Danvila y Burguero pointed out:

If God had intended to bring together under the same roof two diametrically opposed creatures, then he would have achieved this in the Monastery of Guadalupe, for never were there seen such disparate characters as that of Don Sebastian and Philip II, born never to agree, nor for one to give way to the will of the other.\textsuperscript{15} In the end, neither king obtained what he wanted.
Late on the night before Sebastian was to leave, Moura’s cousin – a member of the Portuguese entourage – informed him of the Portuguese king’s frustration and anger, and of his pique that his uncle did not plan to see him off in the morning. Moura prevented a complete rupture between the two monarchs by waking and warning the Spanish king. The next morning, Philip personally awakened his nephew and accompanied him a short distance on his journey. Sebastian left content, thinking that he had finally obtained his uncle’s favor.

When Sebastian failed to return from Morocco in 1578, leaving his great-uncle Cardinal Henry as the aged and never-married heir to the throne, Cristóvão de Moura found himself in an ideal position to further his own career in Philip’s service. This opportunity arose because the Spanish ambassador to Portugal, Juan de Silva, was missing somewhere in Morocco. As required by his position, de Silva had accompanied Sebastian on his fateful journey and had been captured by the Moors at Ksar-el-Kebir (an outcome not required by his position, but probably inevitable). In the chaos of the defeat no one knew for quite some time whether the ambassador had survived or not. Due to Moura’s practical experience dealing with the Portuguese court, his family connections in Portugal, and his record of faithful service, Philip selected him as de Silva’s substitute. As Philip’s unofficial ambassador to Portugal, Cristóvão de Moura pursued his master’s claims to the Portuguese throne as Henry’s heir.

Moura soon proved his great diplomatic ability as well as his complete loyalty to King Philip. During King Henry’s brief two-year reign, the Portuguese diplomat did everything necessary to ensure Philip’s succession to the Lusitanian throne: he publicly argued the genealogical niceties of the succession in the Spanish king’s favor; he promised royal favors to Portuguese officials; he spread Spanish silver to the influential (especially important in light of the Portuguese need to ransom the hundreds of captives in Morocco); he obstructed the Portuguese Cortes when they were about to make the wrong decision. When Henry died in 1580, having declared no heir, the Spanish claims to Portugal – persuasively argued by Moura and the Spanish army on the frontier – were unbeatable.

This then was the source of the new viceroy’s cold reception in Lisbon. For those who cast him in the role of traitor, the appointment was obviously Moura’s reward for betrayal. Furthermore, Cristóvão de
Moura’s arrival in Lisbon as the virtual king in Portugal insulted the highest levels of the Portuguese nobility. A man who came from a minor noble family and who had sold out to a foreigner had returned to Portugal to occupy the most powerful position to which a Portuguese nobleman could aspire.\(^1\) Personally this situation created enormous problems for Moura, for these were the people with whom he had to deal. At a more subtle level it probably reminded many of the Portuguese nobles that, by accepting Spanish silver and favors, they (or their fathers) had sold out as well and had gained little for it.

**News, rumor, and speculation**

Although, while on the Council of Portugal in Madrid, he had recommended ignoring the wild speculations about the return of Sebastian, within six weeks of his arrival in Lisbon the viceroy understood that the strange events in Venice were of great importance and should be attended to immediately.\(^1\) On 17 June 1600, he reported to the king that “…rumors circulate among the people with news about that Calabrian who is imprisoned in Venice, the common people believing that this prisoner is King Sebastian, as he claims.”\(^1\) In spite of the quasi-seditious nature of these rumors Moura reminded King Philip of the loyalty and love the Portuguese had always felt for their kings. However, the viceroy also noted, this natural fidelity was unfortunately combined with a natural credulity which made the news from Venice about the alleged King Sebastian rather disturbing for them. He recommended persuading the Venetians to punish the Charlatan themselves or to place him in Spanish custody; in either case the trial and punishment should be public.\(^1\) Moura concluded that this was the only means of putting a quick end to the growing Sebastianist agitations in Portugal. He understood that the fundamental problem for anyone who believed the news from Venice was a nasty dilemma. To whom should a Portuguese give his legendary loyalty? To a distant Castilian king only recently come to the throne? To a native Portuguese king miraculously returned after twenty years? A well-publicized trial would expose the claims of the Calabrian Charlatan as fraudulent, as well as ridiculous. With the impostor unmasked, the rumors of Sebastian’s return would cease, the credulous Portuguese would no longer wonder if their
loyalty to Philip actually belonged elsewhere, and the trouble would end. However, all Moura could do from Lisbon was suggest this course of action to the king in the hope that Philip would act on his advice and mobilize Spanish diplomacy in order to get the Ven-
etians to cooperate.20

Knowing that he could not afford to wait for decisive action in Venice – as an experienced diplomat he was quite familiar with the slow workings of Spanish bureaucracy and international diplomacy – Moura began investigating the situation. In spite of a frustrating conspiracy of silence, by the end of October the viceroy had a rough idea of the extent of the problem.21 His spies and informants reported that the rumors were widespread, apparently extending throughout the kingdom.22 Furthermore, they afflicted not only the common people but also "very dignified members of religious orders," and even "principal noblemen who seem sensible."23

Through the end of his viceroyalty in 1603, incidents associated with the news of Sebastian's appearance in Venice continually plagued Moura and forced him to continue his investigations.

Most of the evidence we have for the effects, in Portugal, of the Calabrian Charlatan's claims comes from Cristóvão de Moura's reports to King Philip on these Sebastianist incidents. Unfortunately the bulk of these are missing; those that remain cover only the first year and the final months of Moura's tenure in Portugal.24 Because of this, it is impossible to reconstruct a complete narrative of events, at least as seen by the viceroy. However, we can still develop a reason-
able idea of which Portuguese social groups were affected and their reactions.

In his reports Moura consistently distinguished between three main groups of people involved in the Sebastianist rumors, roughly following the traditional three medieval estates: the nobles, the religiosos (members of religious orders), and the povo (the common people).25 For the most part, in each of the incidents he recounted, only one of these groups was involved. It was as if the Sebastianist activities in Portugal were played out on three isolated strata. (As we shall see, the only exception to this was Moura's conclusion that the religiosos were the ones who actively spread the rumors and thus caused most of the trouble.)26 The viceroy treated each of the groups as if they had no significant interactions, although he clearly feared the possibility. For instance, in an incident with two nobles he noted
that they, fortunately, “had little credibility with the people,” and therefore presumably their activities had little influence on the povo.27 Nevertheless, we know from a contemporary chronicle that Moura’s three groups did sometimes interact. First, however, we need to examine each of the groups – nobles, religiosos, and povo – and the incidents the viceroy associated with each of them.

Although most Portuguese nobles had accepted union with Spain (even if grudgingly), the news from Venice stirred great interest. For those nobles disgruntled with the new regime, the return of Sebastian – whether real or not – provided a possible political tool. Provoking some disturbance might force Philip to pay more attention to his Portuguese nobles and, perhaps, buy them off with lucrative favors. In such a gamble the chance of loss far exceeded that of gain. Still, if the game were played right, a clever noble might turn the Sebastia-nist rumors to his advantage. It seems appropriate, then, that Moura apprehended the first nobles associated with the rumors in a Lisbon gaming house.

When the viceroy cast his net of spies across Lisbon in search of the names and activities of those spreading the seditious news about the Charlatan, he ordered them to pay particular attention to the gaming houses, for there “many people gathered and spoke more openly.”28 In one house, Moura’s spies soon reported, a nobleman named Nuno Mascarenhas had publicly stated that the rumors about the imminent arrival of the prisoner from Venice must be true. This implied that he believed King Sebastian would soon return and reclaim his throne. Later, when Mascarenhas fought with another nobleman over their gambling, the viceroy found himself armed with a convenient excuse to take action. Sometime in October 1600 he shut down the gaming house and arrested the two noblemen, as well as the owner of the house, Rodrigo Lobo.29 After questioning all three Moura concluded that the noblemen were only peripheral figures in this matter, that their involvement was more a matter of grumbling and idle speculation than sedition.30 He therefore diffi-ciently recommended to the king that no punishment was necessary in the case of Mascarenhas and Lobo; in fact, he advised Philip, all that was really needed in dealing with noblemen who complained about their situation was to keep them busy. And, if the king were to pay closer attention to his Portuguese nobles, they would have no time for such speculations.31
As already noted, much of this disgruntlement stemmed from the fact that the Spanish annexation of Portugal had benefited few Portuguese. Some nobles who, like Cristóvão de Moura, moved to the new center of power found the new situation highly advantageous. However, the majority found themselves suddenly relegated to the provinces. Even worse, Castilians sometimes came to Portugal and occupied positions that the Portuguese believed should have been theirs under the terms of the union with Spain.\(^3\) Although not shorn of all political and economic power, they suddenly found themselves with fewer chances to wield it or make it grow. Flirting with the Sebastianist beliefs provided a way for Portuguese nobles to make known their dissatisfaction with the situation in Portugal, to make their voices heard.\(^3\) By publicly speculating about the truth of the rumors of Sebastian’s return and its consequences they sent a not-so-subtle message to their king that perhaps their loyalties had been inadvertently misplaced for the past twenty years. In the case of Mascarenhas and Lobo, their message was heard, although they gained little for their efforts. In December, Philip suggested that the two nobles receive a strong rebuke, but he left the final decision to Moura.\(^3\)

In spite of incidents like the one at the gaming house, rumors about the Calabrian Charlatan seem to have played a minor role among the Portuguese nobility. Beliefs about Sebastian and whether or not he had returned were apparently of little immediate consequence in their world. What mattered was currying the current king’s favor and obtaining from him the offices that brought power and wealth. Still, for some noblemen publicly discussing the rumors may have been a way to gain attention; for others such discussions may have been merely an amusing dalliance, the subject of idle speculation.

The second group Moura dealt with, the *religiosos*, seem to have seen more possibilities in the news from Venice. Practically from the first day of union with Spain many *religiosos* had been openly anti-Castilian. Seizing whatever material current events offered them, many preachers used their sermons to launch impromptu attacks on Castile.\(^3\)

One such opportunity came with Moura’s appointment as viceroy. Beginning in April 1600, about the time Moura left Madrid to take up his new duties, plague had periodically visited Lisbon. The officials
charged with safeguarding the city’s health attempted to isolate the afflicted in the city’s sick house. This soon filled— not only with the sick, but with filth and the unmistakable stench of the “bad” air which the medical profession of the age believed was the source of contagion but never learned to deal with effectively.\(^{36}\) With the Casa da Saude overflowing, the officials set aside the Rua Formosa for the most gravely ill, blocking off both ends of the street in an attempt to enforce a rudimentary quarantine. In spite of the application of the best medical theories of the time, when the new viceroy arrived the plague “walked openly [out of hiding] through [Lisbon].”\(^{37}\) In the week of Moura’s arrival more than sixty-five people died; on one day alone eighteen perished, not including the dead from the sick house. An anonymous chronicler judged one day that week to have been, if not good, at least less bad, for on that day the cart that collected the bodies of the dead passed in front of the house where he was staying with the body of only one unfortunate.\(^{38}\) Quarantines might slow or even stop the spread of plague, but they did nothing to help those already stricken.

In spite of endless processions and prayers, religion too could do little to cure or prevent plague. Still, it at least provided an explanation for an otherwise mysterious phenomenon. In the early seventeen century most Europeans believed that nothing happened by mere chance. For them every occurrence formed part of the divine plan, and therefore anything out of the ordinary required interpretation.\(^{39}\) In Portugal, as in the rest of Catholic Europe, it was the intermediaries between God and man, the preachers, who decoded the divine message embedded in a given event and made their interpretation public for the benefit of their flock.\(^{40}\) From the outset of the absorption of their kingdom into the Spanish monarchy, many Portuguese preachers had publicly opposed the union. In their sermons they denounced the loss of independence, supporting their message with biblical stories, historical allusions, and current events.\(^{41}\) They also interpreted disastrous and monstrous events as signs of divine displeasure, signs which showed that, like Babylonian rule in biblical Israel, Spanish rule in Portugal was God’s way of chastising the Portuguese people for their sins. Lisbon’s preachers promoted this interpretation of the plague that spring of 1600, reminding their flock anew of its place as a modern Israel in the divine plan. More subtly, their sermons also told of how the viceroy’s betrayal of his country
and the nobles’ willingness to accept it had brought down the divine scourge.\textsuperscript{42}

Given such sermons, it was only natural that Moura suspected that the Portuguese \textit{religiosos} were the main group spreading rumors of Sebastian.\textsuperscript{43} Within the \textit{religiosos} the viceroy concentrated on the mendicant orders in Portugal (primarily the Franciscans and the Dominicans).\textsuperscript{44} Instead of withdrawing from the world as did the monks of the traditional monastic orders, the mendicant friars had pledged themselves to an activist role, primarily among the less fortunate. Providing for the poor, caring for the sick, teaching the ignorant – all were roles taken up by the mendicant orders. Their ideal was one of apostolic poverty: renouncing material wealth and political power, and taking up a Christian life of piety combined with service. In doing so each friar helped transform his corner of the real world into some approximation of an ideal one. This ideal was of course enormously appealing to the \textit{povo}, and to Moura made the mendicants’ subversive activities seem all the more dangerous.

Rumor of Sebastian’s return proved to be perfect ammunition for the attacks of the anti-Castilian \textit{religiosos}. Sebastianism combined the proven religious message of a millennium of justice and prosperity with a Portuguese particularism which labeled the Castilians as the bearers of injustice and hard times. Given their history of anti-Castilian activities it is no wonder that the \textit{religiosos} eagerly spread the news from Venice. One Franciscan friar assured his flock that he had met with the prisoner in Venice and recognized him as Sebastian, his king. Moura reported that the friar’s provincial quickly punished him for this, but that it was probably too late.\textsuperscript{45} Testimony like the friar’s undoubtedly lent credence to the rumors among the more trusting; and official opposition only reinforced their apparent truth. Of their betters, the \textit{povo} was most likely to believe those who had long ministered to their needs.

Moura’s third group was what he called the \textit{povo}. Unfortunately, the viceroy did not do historians the favor of defining exactly whom he meant when he wrote “el pueblo” or “esta gente.”\textsuperscript{46} Nor did he specify the extent or distribution of Sebastianist belief; he said only that belief in the return of Sebastian was widespread, affecting both young and old.\textsuperscript{47} Because of this, the \textit{povo} remains anonymous, an ill-defined grouping of the Portuguese third estate – peasants, tradesmen, merchants. The very vagueness of Moura’s description suggests
that he did not view the commoners’ gossip and speculation about the news from Venice as a threat to be investigated and countered; instead, he worried that a member of the ruling classes – a nobleman or a cleric – would incite the povo to riot or rebellion.

Moura should probably have been more concerned with the povo itself. For the unprivileged people of early modern Europe, revolt – whether incited by outsiders or generated from within by unbearable social and economic conditions – was perhaps the only effective means of communication with the ruling, privileged classes. Theoretically government was a mutually beneficial exchange between ruler and ruled; practice, however, was quite different. The burdens of state weighed heavily on the backs of the third estate in the form of taxes, labor, and other demands. In exchange, the state was to provide protection and justice. As peasants and other unprivileged groups knew, sometimes what they most needed was protection from the representatives of the state: the petty officials, the rapacious tax collectors, the unpaid soldiers. Powerless and virtually voiceless in their demands for justice, they sometimes turned to riot or revolt, knowing that this would at least force the ruling classes to hear their grievances. Inevitably, the rulers exacted a bloody price for such violence. Nevertheless, those rioters who survived were sometimes rewarded for their efforts, for the rulers – hoping to maintain fragile order – would sometimes lighten their demands. Sooner or later, however, the unprivileged would be pushed once again to the breaking point.48

Just these sorts of pressures had been building up in Portugal. For instance, by 1601 the relations – never good – between the Castilian soldiers garrisoning Lisbon and the population of the city had deteriorated. In January Moura found it necessary to arrange, at considerable cost, different accommodations for the soldiers; he hoped that keeping the soldiers more isolated from the populace would help prevent disorder.49 Although this action may have reduced the daily friction between the two groups, it did not solve the problem. In May, two Castilian soldiers returning from their palace posts to their quarters in the castle were set upon and stabbed by a group of unidentified Portuguese. Not long afterwards two more soldiers were attacked in the streets; this pair sought refuge in a house and remained there besieged until a ten-man squad came to their rescue.50 Moura’s attempts to calm the situation were probably
hopeless, for the fundamental Portuguese objection to the Castilians went beyond any offensive liberties taken by the soldiers. Ostensibly the soldiers were in Lisbon to protect the city from enemy attack. From the Portuguese point of view, the foes most likely to attack – the English or the Dutch – were enemies of Spain, not Portugal. If the Spanish were to leave, the Portuguese believed they could renew amicable relations with their former allies. However, the Spanish stayed and Portugal remained the “first line of defense for the Iberian peninsula.” Consequently the Castilian soldiers were viewed, not as a necessary defense, but instead as the cause of foreign attacks. Foreign occupation, combined with a seemingly corrupt and unjust government, made the Portuguese restive. Although clearly unhappy with the Castilian presence, the Portuguese commoners were still not ready to chance the certain dangers and high price of revolt. Instead they placed their hopes for justice elsewhere: in a millenarian yearning for the world turned upside down.

The news from Venice fed these kinds of yearnings. While the critical mass that would turn gossip into a millenarian movement had not yet built up, some in the povo had begun to act on their hopes in the truth of the rumors. In October 1600 Moura reported that the people of Lisbon and its outskirts were making an odd investment. The investors would give money to “those who accepted it;” in return, these “brokers” agreed to pay back twice the amount invested upon the coming of the “Messiah.” Unfortunately, Moura states nothing about the sums involved or exactly who gave and who collected the money; nor does he explicitly state the identity of the messiah. However, he does mention that the practice arose in response to the widespread rumors that soon the man in Venice would come to Portugal. Surely, the messiah was Sebastian. Sebastian’s return was not merely the restoration of the legitimate king of Portugal, nor fundamentally a concern with who occupied the apex of the noble hierarchy. Instead it was what the povo most yearned for: a divine easing of their burdens. After so many years of punishment for their sins a redeemer would arrive. This Portuguese messiah would utterly transform Portuguese society, ensuring for the povo both justice and prosperity.

Notably these investments were apparently individual, private actions. They were not a community collection of funds to bring the messiah to Portugal, or to serve some other communal purpose.
Instead, they were personal or family preparations for an impending event: individuals gave the money, and individuals would collect the return. Clearly some part of the povo genuinely believed the rumors. There is no way for us to determine how many true believers wagered their scarce funds; however, that their investments came to the attention of the viceroy indicates that their numbers were not insignificant.

**New Christians or Venetians?**

In the povo, the viceroy suspected one sub-group in particular – the New Christians – of spreading the Sebastianist rumors. This segment of the Portuguese population was created in 1497 by the forced conversion of the Jews in Portugal, including both the Portuguese natives and the Spanish refugees from the expulsion of 1492. Like the Spanish five years before them, the Portuguese rulers decided that the time had come to create a pure Christian society in Portugal – the logical end of the crusading ideology of the Reconquista. However, in Portugal it was simply not practical to expel the Jews. They formed, as one historian estimates, nearly one fifth of the entire population of Portugal. Arranging sufficient sea transport – for they could not travel by land through Spain – would have been nearly impossible, as well as prohibitively expensive. Instead, the Portuguese rulers opted for forced assimilation. That way they would not lose a large portion of Portugal’s population, its wealth, or its skills. However, baptism – especially forced baptism – could not instantly wash away the convictions of the Jews or the prejudices of the Christians.

Initially the New Christians kept a low profile and maintained their separate communities. Some who had the means and opportunity to escape did so. Perhaps a few embraced Christianity, hoping that the many barriers to their participation in Portuguese society had really been swept away with conversion. The majority simply waited, hoping that like so many other persecutions this one would eventually end. Instead, things got worse: in 1499 a law prohibited the New Christians from leaving Portugal without royal license; in 1504 a mob attacked New Christians in the commercial center of Lisbon; in 1505 a crowd demolished an old synagogue in Évora. This was only the beginning. More laws prohibited New Christians from holding any important political or Church office, effectively removing the only
advantage that baptism might have conferred. Like their ancestors they were barred from most professions. In addition, the few permitted professions could be dangerous: the New Christian doctor whose Old Christian patient had the bad grace to die might be accused of murder. In 1536 the violence took a judicial turn, for in that year Portugal established a Spanish-style Inquisition. Any suspicious action – such as wearing white clothes on a Saturday, working on Sunday, or not eating pork – could bring a New Christian before the Holy Office, accused of judaizing; often all that was needed was the accusation. Unfortunates considered unrepentant or repeat offenders were burned. Forced to join the Christian community and then prevented from taking part in that community, the New Christians were driven to the social and political margins. There they could only wait for a messianic savior or plot to improve their condition. Consequently, in the minds of the Old Christians the New Christians became a dangerous, subversive force.

Perhaps the only effective protection from its oppressors that the New Christian community possessed was its financial strength. Wherever the New Christians could identify a crack where a few well-placed cruzados might buy them some relief, they tried to fill it. For instance, in 1542 the papal nuncio in Portugal, one Capodiferro, received 2,000 cruzados from the New Christians to ensure that their pleas in Rome for a general pardon went well. They also paid him a yearly stipend of 1,800 cruzados when in Portugal, as well as his expenses when corresponding with Rome on their behalf. Another of Capodiferro’s suspected financial dealings with the New Christians consisted of selling pardons for judaizing. Rumor had it that when the nuncio left Portugal, he left 30,000 cruzados richer. Such incidents only heightened the suspicions of the Old Christians who saw them as corrupt and a threat to Christian society.

Even after Spain absorbed Portugal the Portuguese New Christians continued trying to defend themselves with financial incentives to the powerful. In 1598 the New Christians began negotiations with the new Spanish king. In exchange for a cash payment of 675,000 cruzados and an interest-free loan of 500,000 cruzados (the total package to be delivered in four annual payments from 1598 to 1601), the New Christians sought a general pardon for judaizing. Such an agreement would empty the prisons of the Portuguese Inquisition and force any new judicial processes to deal only with offenses committed
after the pardon. This scheme raised a storm of protest from the Holy Office, several Portuguese and Spanish archbishops, the Governors of Portugal, the Council of Castile, and numerous nobles. In February 1600, in exchange for a promised loan of 800,000 cruzados from the Governors, Philip rejected the New Christian offer. Moura, who had just been appointed viceroy in Portugal, congratulated the king on his decision, saying “…that coins which had bought offenses to God could not shine.” Nevertheless, the Governors’ counter-offer fell apart in October 1601 when the Portuguese Cortes refused to raise the sum. Thereafter negotiations with the New Christians resumed.

Assaulted on all sides and able to buy only temporary relief, it is no wonder that the New Christians entertained messianic hopes. During the first half of the 1500s several prophets and false messiahs fed the New Christians’ dreams for a better world. Among the prophets was Bandarra, the author of the Trovas (the poems that provided the scripture of Sebastianist prophecy). Although apparently of Old Christian descent, Bandarra initially had his largest following among the New Christians who searched his poems for prophecies that would answer their prayers. With a history of millenarian disturbances, especially those associated with the Trovas, the New Christians were natural suspects in rumors surrounding the Calabrian Charlatan.

In September 1600 Cristóvão de Moura wrote that he was “very suspicious that all these things [the news of Sebastian] are a sham and spread by…” Here Moura started to write “New Christians,” stopped, crossed it out, and wrote “Venetians” instead. What was the viceroy’s doubt? Did he suspect the involvement of the New Christians, but was not sure? He may have known that Venetians were involved, but surmised that they were Portuguese New Christian merchants who had escaped to Venice, revealed their Jewish identities in the tolerant republic, and operated from there as Venetian merchants while maintaining lucrative commercial ties in Portugal. Perhaps, since he could not confirm his suspicions, he settled on “Venetians”. Moura’s change of mind is especially interesting since he did not mention the New Christians in any of his subsequent reports on Sebastianist activities for about a year. Then in May 1601 Moura again wrote “New Christians”; this time he did not cross it out. In this report he blamed “foreigners and New Christians” for spreading the rumors with “papers and false letters.”
Why the change of heart? Aside from the New Christian attempt to buy a pardon which had fallen apart before Moura arrived in Lisbon, the only major change in their relationship with the Portuguese state came in April 1601, just prior to the viceroy's renewed interest in the possibility that they had something to do with the Sebastianist rumors. On the fourth day of that month, a law was passed in Portugal – in return for 200,000 cruzados – which allowed the New Christians to sell their property and leave the kingdom with the proceeds. This law also prohibited the use of the terms New Christian, Marrano, confesso, and Jew. (When Moura wrote his report in May, he seems to have been breaking the law.) We can only speculate as to what connections might exist between these larger issues and Moura's reports. The viceroy's report in September 1600, where he chose to blame "Venetians" instead of "New Christians," was probably not a matter of protecting the New Christians, for he opposed the general pardon of 1598. Perhaps, in spite of his prejudice, he had genuine doubts about their involvement. What seems more likely is that he did not want the Portuguese, even if New Christians, to be seen as the source of the rumors. Moura, after all, continually tried to convince Philip of the natural loyalty of the Portuguese people. In May 1601, after the passage of the new law, the situation apparently changed in Moura's mind. He probably opposed this latest deal with the New Christians and perhaps wished to remind the king that the New Christians were troublemakers.

Whatever the actual involvement of the Portuguese New Christians, Moura never moved beyond his vague, apparently unsubstantiated, accusation. Instead, he concentrated his investigation on his foreign suspects, the Venetians. In late October 1600, a month after he had first accused the Venetians, the viceroy arrested a Venetian called El Febo. This man – apparently the captain of a Venetian merchant ship – had been implicated in spreading the rumors of Sebastian's return. Like the Franciscan friar, he claimed to have seen the prisoner in Venice and recognized him as the Portuguese king. Using as a convenient pretext three placards in support of Sebastian anonymously posted in public places (one quite appropriately at the Church of St. Sebastian), Moura had El Febo apprehended. The viceroy planned to use El Febo as an example of what happened to those who trafficked in sedition, hoping that this would dampen the eagerness to gossip about the Calabrian Charlatan. By blaming
a Venetian he also hoped to show the Portuguese povo that he did not hold them responsible for the matter. Moura’s action seems to have worked, for by February 1601 he was satisfied that the rumors of the Calabrian Charlateran were quieting down. Consequently, so as not to stir things up unnecessarily, he proposed to shut down his investiga-
tion. However, by May the rumors had “returned to life.”

Renewed rumors

With the resurgence of the rumors Moura must have become very frustrated, for none of his efforts seemed to have paid off. He even reported to the king that people “…come to ask me what I think about these things, if I believe them. And the more I ridicule and belittle what they tell me, the more suspicious they become, believing that what I do is a charade.” Who these people were is unknown. However, those in closest contact with the viceroy were officials in the government or the Church. Did they believe? Perhaps a few did. What seems more likely is that Moura’s obvious discomfort with the whole situation provided some nobles – undoubtedly a group with a mild sadistic streak – with some entertainment.

All of these strands came together two days before the feast of St. Simon and St. Jude, on 26 October 1601, when Moura’s detractors received, or perhaps created, an opportunity to attack. That day a fire gutted the Church and the Chapel of the Hospital de Todos-os-Santos in Lisbon. Had the fire started during the daytime when people were up and about, it might have been discovered and doused; instead, it began sometime after midnight and, by the time someone raised the alarm, lit up the whole city as if the sun were shining. A crowd formed and attempted to save the sacarium. They failed. The rescuers saved only the Church’s main doors, ripping them from their hinges. Two days later, when the feast day dawned, only the blackened walls of the Church still stood. The great heat of the fire had reduced nearly everything else, even the building’s iron supports, to little more than powder. Yet, not quite everything within the Church perished. Much to the amazement of the first to enter the smouldering remnants of the building, they found four miraculous survivals: the retable of Our Lady of Peace, the retable of St. George, a painting of King Sebastian, and a wooden carving of the Portuguese coat-of-arms.
Over the following three days the authorities investigated the fire, hoping to uncover its origin. They were unsuccessful. And their investigations could not dispel the growing belief in the unnatural source of the fire. During those same three days two more strange events occurred. On the morning that the investigation began, Lisbon woke to a dense fog, unprecedented for that time of year. When the fog burned off at mid-day a swarm of grasshoppers descended upon the city. For all three days, clouds of grasshoppers obscured the sun and people could not venture into the streets without being covered by the insects. When the biblical plague finally lifted, the olive trees in and around Lisbon looked as if they had been burned, for only the trunks remained.73

The significance of the outbreak of the fire at the Hospital de Todos-os-Santos was not lost on Lisbon’s preachers. For them its occurrence shortly before All Saints Day (Dia de Todos-os-Santos) was no mere coincidence of names.74 This sign, as well as the unseasonable fog and plague of grasshoppers, signaled that the fire was no natural event. Obviously, what had survived the conflagration was a divine message which could not be ignored. On All Saints Day the residents of Lisbon expressed their meek acceptance of divine will in a solemn penitential procession through the city. The city’s prominent leaders – both noblemen and clerics – led the ceremonies, calling on everyone to repent for the sins that had brought down these disasters. What those sins were could be read in the miraculous legacy of the fire. The survival of Sebastian’s portrait clearly indicated that the Portuguese king was still alive; the survival of the Portuguese coat-of-arms showed that Portugal would survive as well. The sin lay in having allowed the Spanish to absorb Portugal without a strong fight. Although the people of Portugal may have given up on their king and country, God had not. Clearly, the fire was intended to remind the Portuguese of where their loyalties should be placed. The well-known Jesuit Father Francisco Cardoso preached that day and made sure that everyone knew this.75 The irony of the situation would have been lost on no one present. For among the notables leading the procession was Don Cristóvão de Moura. The man trying to track down the source of the rumors of Sebastian’s return had been forced by his position to take a leading role in ceremonies which seemed to affirm the truth of those rumors and publicized their divine sanction.
The fire in the Hospital de Todos-os-Santos was emblematic of the situation in Portugal at the time. Like the fire, the rumor of Sebastian’s return threatened to engulf all of Portugal in flames. However, neither fire nor rumor got out of hand, and real damage was contained. Still, as the two retables, the portrait, and the coat-of-arms had survived the conflagration, so too had Portuguese hopes for a redeemer and their national aspirations for independence.

In early modern Europe, verifying a rumor was as intractable a problem as establishing someone’s identity. How did one separate truth from lies? Without reliable, consistent, and independent sources of information the task was, in all practicality, impossible. Even if reason and experience allowed someone like Cristóvão de Moura to dismiss a rumor as idle gossip, others believed it to be news. As the viceroy discovered, denials of the validity of the news often only confirmed its truth. Finally, if enough people believed, rumor – no matter how flimsy – took on a reality of its own. And talk could lead to action.
5

Venice to Leghorn: Sanctifying the King

Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.

John 20:27–9

When on the night of 15 December 1600 the Venetians released the prisoner whom the Spanish called the Calabrian Charlatan, they gave him one day to leave the city and another three days to get out of Venetian territory. They warned him that if he failed to follow this order he would spend the next ten years rowing in the galleys, with iron shackles upon his feet.¹ Exactly who the prisoner was – the long-lost King Sebastian of Portugal or a Calabrian adventurer posing as such – remained a matter of contention between the man’s Portuguese supporters and his Castilian detractors. In any case, the Venetians had tired of being caught in the middle and had “wisely washed their hands” of the whole affair.²

Finally free after two years and twenty-two days of imprisonment, the man made his way from the Piazza San Marco, headed for the inn where he stayed when he first arrived in the Serene Republic.³ One wonders what his thoughts were as he walked beside the canals and down the alleys of night-time Venice. If he was an impostor – a Calabrian named Marco Tulio Catizone – as the Spanish claimed, did

H. Eric et al., The Calabrian Charlatan, 1598–1603
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he think about Arnaud du Tilh, the French impersonator of Martin Guerre, to whom he had sometimes been compared? Perhaps he reflected on the final fate of Monsieur du Tilh: to be found out when the real Martin Guerre returned and to be hanged for the imposture.\(^4\) Yet that possibility probably seemed far off, for the real Sebastian had not been seen in over twenty years and most likely was safely dead. Besides, with his release from prison, things finally appeared to be going his way. On the other hand, if he was Sebastian (or deranged as some Venetians suspected), he may have barely contained his rage. Aside from the great insult of incarcerating the king and questioning his royal identity, the Venetians had peremptorily ordered him out of town and unceremoniously thrown him into the cold of a winter night. Even worse, they threatened him with the galleys, a punishment fit only for a common criminal. Did he mull over ways to make the Venetians pay for their arrogance?\(^5\) Whoever he was and whatever his thoughts, his options converged on one logical course. The imposter would pursue the charade to keep his Portuguese admirers happily financing a royal lifestyle; the real Sebastian would pursue the recovery of his birthright. Whichever the case, this meant establishing himself as Sebastian, King of Portugal, come to claim his throne.\(^6\)

Whatever one decides about the man’s real identity, what is relevant for our purposes here is what Sebastian – king or imposter – represented to the Portuguese themselves. If his royal identity could be established and become accepted, who he was took on various meanings. For a true believer in Sebastianism, he became Portugal’s messiah, a warrior-king who would liberate his people from their troubles. For a disgruntled nobleman, he became the apex of the Portuguese feudal hierarchy, representing patronage and order. For an anti-Spanish rebel, he became the national leader of Portugal, legitimate ruler and bearer of sovereignty. As we shall see in this chapter, the person of Sebastian was the nexus. He was holy; he was the king; he was Portugal. In him the millenarian and the national remained inextricably linked, the transition from one to the other was not yet complete.

**Dom António and the Portuguese rebels**

At this juncture we need to examine the motives of Sebastian’s supporters. Although they would have protested that their only wish was
to serve their country and its legitimate king, the underlying situation was somewhat more complicated. Sebastian’s supporters – the group of Portuguese nobles and clergyman who had gathered in Venice or who watched events unfold from France or elsewhere – had all once chosen to follow Dom António, the Prior of Crato, in his bid to succeed Henry to the Portuguese throne in 1580. This had proven unwise, for Philip II of Spain’s claim and overwhelming might handily crushed his rival’s efforts. For Diogo Botelho, one of António’s main advisors, supporting the Prior of Crato came at great personal cost: Philip

... banished [Botelho] from [Portugal]; and sent his wife, children, aunt, stepson, and his sisters (who were nuns and old) to Castile; and took all of his property, and gave it to whomever he pleased; this even reached the point where his wife died in exile in Castile.\(^7\)

Most of António’s supporters suffered some variation of Botelho’s fate, sharing at the least his life in exile. Having already paid such a high personal price, those who fought Spanish rule in Portugal probably felt they had nothing more to lose in opposing Philip, and much to gain. Any means of wrecking Portugal from Spanish control was worth trying.

In 1595, with the death of Dom António, the cause of Portuguese independence had been cast adrift. António’s two sons, Manuel and Cristóvão, inherited the claim to the Portuguese throne. Like their father they repeatedly pleaded their case with the rulers of France and England. However, they proved unable to acquire the financial and military support they needed to collect their inheritance. Although Spain’s enemies had once eagerly assisted Dom António and his cause, their enthusiasm had waned. Nevertheless, Dom Manuel and Dom Cristóvão persisted in their efforts. Their highest hopes probably lay with the French, for the persistent foe of Habsburg hegemony still had no wish to see Spain’s might augmented by the resources of Portugal and its far-flung empire.

Although the French had recognized Dom António as the legitimate King of Portugal in 1580, they had proven unable to provide the military support the Portuguese needed to resist the Spanish invasion that spring. By autumn, the Prior of Crato’s defense of his kingdom had crumbled in the face of the Duke of Alba’s overwhelming Spanish
forces. The prior, realizing that he could do little to regain his throne while in hiding and without extensive outside help, fled to France in early 1581. There he successfully petitioned Henri III and Catherine de' Medici for French military support. Almost immediately the French began to prepare a fleet to rescue the Azores, the one Portuguese possession that still resisted Spanish rule. Rumor claimed that António had agreed to cede Brazil, once regained, to the French in exchange for their help. A year later, on 16 June, a French fleet under the command of Filippo Strozzi set sail for Terceira (the best defended of the islands in the Azores). Unfortunately for the Portuguese and their French allies, well-placed spies among António’s supporters informed King Philip of the rebels’ plans. Even before Strozzi’s fleet sailed on 10 June, a Spanish fleet had set out from Lisbon to meet them. The two fleets met on 25 July; the ensuing battle resulted in the destruction of the French forces. Although the Portuguese on Terceira successfully repelled the ensuing Spanish landing, the following year they were not so fortunate. At the end of July 1583 the Spanish took Terceira. With this defeat António was left without a territorial base from which to fight his enemy. In spite of the Prior’s repeated pleas for more help, after the loss of Terceira the French did little more than continue to recognize António’s rights and provide him with asylum. In 1589, when Henri IV ascended the French throne, António’s hopes may have risen. However, Henri had trouble enough with the turmoil created by the French Wars of Religion and Philip II’s invasion of France in support of Henri’s enemies. In 1598, after Henri successfully established his control and pacified France, the Peace of Vervins ended the war with Spain and therefore ruled out active French support for the Portuguese cause.

Like the French, the English recognized Dom António as the legitimate King of Portugal and happily provided him and his entourage with a safe place of exile. In August 1581, because of the English interest – and possible involvement – in the planned French expedition against Terceira, Philip II instructed his ambassador to England to demand António’s surrender. (António was in London at the time, pleading for English support.) If the English did not do so, the ambassador was to warn them that they would face a Spanish embargo on all English goods; furthermore, should António leave England and enter any Spanish territory, it would be considered an act of war. However, the demand and the accompanying threats were
apparently never delivered, for by the time the ambassador received
his instructions, the English had cooled in their support of the
Prior.\textsuperscript{10} In spite of the increasingly anti-Spanish sentiment in Eng-
land, the English were not eager to antagonize Philip by actively
supporting António and his claims. This changed in 1584 after the
discovery of Spanish involvement in a failed plot to assassinate
Queen Elizabeth. Over the following years tensions built between
England and Spain, culminating in the attack by the Spanish Armada
in 1588. Although England defeated the invading fleet, the attack
demonstrated to the English their pressing need to challenge and
reduce Spain’s naval power. In reaction, they put together an expedi-
tion under Francis Drake and John Norris which was intended to
destroy the remnants of the Armada and eliminate Spain’s ability to
invade England. Of the major tasks planned, only one is of impor-
tance here: the invasion of Portugal. If successful, this would cut
the funds and warships available to Philip, as well as providing the
Spanish king with a major distraction.

On 16 May 1589 Norris landed with an army of about 6,000 men at
Peniche, planning to march overland to Lisbon; meanwhile, to sup-
port Norris’s attack, Drake took the fleet with the remaining soldiers
to the mouth of the Tagus.\textsuperscript{11} Dom António, his son Manuel, and a
variety of supporters accompanied the English army. António had
convinced the English that his presence would ignite a rebellion.
With popular support the English expected to capture the Portuguese
capital with little effort. António would regain his realm and the
English would gain an ally on Spain’s doorstep. Long having feared
this possibility, the Spanish had taken care to eliminate, or at least
weaken, any pro-António sentiment.\textsuperscript{12} For instance, in February 1589
(even before the English sailed), Philip summoned to Court in
Madrid the Portuguese nobles he least trusted; by this means he
hoped to prevent their leading a rising in Portugal.\textsuperscript{13} Later, warned
by Philip’s spies of Drake’s destination and plans, the Spanish gov-
ernor in Lisbon rounded up anyone suspected of sympathizing with
António’s cause. Of these, he executed the leaders.\textsuperscript{14} Due to these
efforts, and perhaps because the Prior of Crato’s popularity had faded,
the expected anti-Spanish rising never took place. Since the English
lacked the strength to take Lisbon themselves and almost no local
help was forthcoming (António attracted perhaps 200 Portuguese
soldiers), the invasion fizzled. On 8 June, the invaders embarked on
Venice to Leghorn: Sanctifying the King

Norris & Drake take Peniche
18 May 1589

Norris marches Army for Lisbon
18 May 1589

Norris takes Torres Vedras
19 May 1589

Norris besieges Lisbon
23-26 May 1589

Norris retires to Cascais
26 May 1589

Norris & Drake depart
8 June 1589

Drake takes Cascais
21 May 1589

Drake prepares to sail up Tagus past defenses at Sao Juliao
25 May 1589

Drake Receives News of Siege of Lisbon
26 May 1589

Figure 4  Lisbon circa 1589: the English invasion of Portugal
Drake’s ships and soon returned home. More than anything else, António’s inability to raise the Portuguese populace convinced the English that actively supporting him was a wasted effort.\textsuperscript{15} From the failed invasion to his death in 1595, António received little more than the passive recognition of his rights from the English. By 1600 the English were even less inclined to support António’s eldest son Manuel, for – abandoned by their French ally in 1598 – they were trying to end their long conflict with Spain.

Peace, for the cause of Portuguese independence, was disastrous. For nearly two decades the Portuguese who refused to accept Philip as King of Portugal had depended on the support of France and England to drive the Spanish out. Although this support had accomplished nothing concrete, it had been the only hope for restoring Dom António to his throne. This hope had been unrealistic: the French and English were unable and unwilling to do more than offer assistance for a Portuguese rebellion that António had proven incapable of inciting. France and England had neither the will nor the resources to take and defend Portugal by themselves. After 1598, with France at peace with Spain and England moving in that direction, the Portuguese exiles were bereft of any hope of help from their erstwhile allies. These new political realities forced António’s sons – Dom Manuel and Dom Cristóvão – and their supporters to reassess their struggle. At some point in the years following Dom António’s death and the Peace of Vervins, they must have realized two things, both of which João de Castro had long asserted. First, that the only way to restore Portugal’s independence was to raise the kingdom in revolt against Spain. Second, that they themselves lacked the popular support to accomplish this. Unless a way could be found to resolve these two problems, the cause of Portuguese independence would be lost.\textsuperscript{16}

Even as the hopes of the Portuguese exiles withered away in 1598, two events augured well for their cause. First, on 13 September Philip II of Spain – the arch-enemy – died in his monastery at El Escorial. Although his death did little to change Portugal’s status in the Spanish crown, the exiles at least had a new enemy. Instead of facing the man who had outmaneuvered them at every turn for nearly twenty years, they faced the young and inexperienced Philip III. The second event was the appearance of Sebastian in Venice in the autumn of 1598. However, António’s sons and their supporters were slow to recognize
its importance. Only after some sixteen months of persistent reports from Venice that the long-lost King of Portugal had returned, did they finally send someone to investigate.\textsuperscript{17} The timing here was of great significance. Sebastian's imprisonment in Venice coincided with the time when the Portuguese exiles, forced by their inability to achieve anything by following the Prior of Crato's old policies, began to search for a way to revitalize their struggle. What probably spurred the exiles to act was the reaction in Portugal to the news from Venice. From the rampant rumors and wild speculations concerning the return of Portugal's king, it soon became obvious that Sebastian commanded the popular support that Antônio and his heirs lacked. Whatever the man's true identity, the exiles saw him as a means to incite Portugal to rebellion against Spain. They therefore wished to establish him as King Sebastian of Portugal, come to claim his throne. But there were still deep divisions among Sebastian's supporters. Even as they worked together to restore their supposed king, the exiles fought over how best to accomplish their goals. In spite of these differences, they had all committed themselves to proclaiming Sebastian as the genuine Portuguese king. The rebels knew that this was probably their last chance to free Portugal from Spanish rule.\textsuperscript{18}

\textbf{Identifying and sanctifying the king}

This returns us to Sebastian. When he reached the inn, he probably had to pound on the door and yell to be let in, for at that late hour no one was awake. Inside his old room he found two of his Portuguese supporters, Rodrigo Marques and Sebastião Figueira. The two men – just roused from their beds, in their night-shirts, and most likely still half asleep – were "amazed by this unexpected event, and delighted to see him."\textsuperscript{19} After Sebastian briefly related the story of his release, Marques rushed out to take the miraculous news to the other Portuguese exiles gathered in Venice: Dom Cristóvão, Pantaleão Pessoa, Diogo Manuel, João de Castro, and Manuel de Brito d’Almeida. Since the various men were staying in different inns and houses, Marques went from place to place to spread the glad tidings. At some point it was decided that everyone should gather immediately in one place to decide what should be done. Castro’s lodgings were elected, for he occupied a larger and less public house.\textsuperscript{20} Time and secrecy were of
the essence, for the Portuguese exiles had no intention of allowing the Spanish any opportunity to disrupt their plans.

By sometime between one and two in the morning (here we are following Castro’s proselytizing account), the former prisoner and his Portuguese supporters were gathered in João de Castro’s lodgings.21 When Sebastian entered, Castro “threw himself at [Sebastian’s] feet, recognizing him as his true king and lord.”22 After everyone had recognized Sebastian and declared his loyalty, Sebastian made a short statement:

Portuguese, you have performed a very great service for your fatherland [patrie], and an outstanding service for me who am your King and Lord. You are my vassals and subjects. Since you have done what you should for God and your duty, I will not be at all ungrateful. I am your Father, and you are my children.23

Like a father he then asked for news about their families, speaking of them with great familiarity.24 Eventually the conversation returned to Sebastian, who briefly recounted the final moments at the Battle of Alcazar, when most of his noble companions were killed around him. After their escape, the king and the few men who survived with him had wandered the world. They all lived in extreme poverty, for they refused to accept the gifts of money that people occasionally offered them, preferring to trust in God’s providence.25 Following his summary of events Sebastian turned to an issue of central importance. He stated that he knew that many people doubted his identity. To satisfy such skeptics he needed his faithful supporters to have proof – other than their personal recognition – of his claims. Therefore, he submitted to a physical inspection that would allay any doubts. He showed his head wound which he received in Africa, taking the hands of some [of those present] and making them feel it; he showed his missing molar; he showed his legs, his arms, and even knelt, placing a slipper under one [knee] to show that he was shorter on one side.26

The resulting evidence was then compared to a list, obtained earlier from Portugal by the exiles, containing the twenty-two “marks and signs that the King of Portugal, Don Sebastian, carri[d] naturally on
his body.”27 For instance, sign twenty-one mentioned a scar on his head and sign thirteen stated that his body was shorter on the left side than on the right – both signs agreed perfectly with the physical proof Sebastian presented to his supporters. The king then placed his person and his fate entirely in their hands.

While Castro’s account of this meeting is almost certainly pure fabrication, it does reveal the image of Sebastian that he and the other rebels wished to present to their compatriots in Portugal. With this vision of Portugal’s sanctified king they hoped to inspire the Portuguese people. To help interpret the meaning that the physical examination of Sebastian’s marks and signs would have held in the early seventeenth century, it might be helpful to examine an otherwise unrelated series of events which occurred some fifteen years earlier in Lisbon.

At least since the Holy Day of the Finding of the Cross in 1585, the Mother Prioress of the Cloister of the Annunciation had been marked by the stigmata of Christ.28 On that day and on every Friday thereafter, starting about ten o’clock in the morning, the wound in her side bled five drops of blood.29 A cloth placed upon the wound would come away with a stain in the form of a cross. Although the news of this wondrous miracle spread widely, not everyone was convinced by the Prioress’s story. Skeptics claimed that the stigmata were painted – with ocher or some other substance – on the nun’s body, that the whole affair was a hoax. Eventually, to determine the truth of the matter, the Prioress’s superiors ordered an investigation. As a result, on 10 November 1587, Fray Luis de Granada and Fray Caspar de Aveiro went to the cloister to examine the wounds on her hands.30

Brother Luis de Granada wetted a kerchief in a vessel filled with water and began to wash the wound therewith and to rub it, which could not come to pass without great pain, for she suffered whenever he came close to the nail…. As ultimately there was no change either in the water in which the cloth had been wetted or in the colour of the wounds, we gave up tormenting her any further.31

Apparently not completely satisfied one way or the other, the two returned on 25 November with a third man, Fray Juan de la Cruz.32 To forestall any preparations, they arrived at the cloister
unannounced at two in the morning, demanding to see the Prioress. Invoking the orders of her superior as well as the story of how the Apostle Thomas resolved his doubts about Christ’s resurrection by feeling his wounds, the three men firmly requested that the Prioress submit to an examination of all her wounds.  

Although reluctant, she agreed. First, after calling on three old nuns to assist her, the Prioress bared her head so that the investigators could see the nine or ten small wounds on her head. Then she was made to show the wound in her left side, which she did with “great modesty and decency.” They then bade the Mother Prioress in the name of holy obedience to bare her feet and this she did with the help of the three old women. By the light of the candle we saw clearly and distinctly that above the instep of the right foot she had a wound – not quite round. This was of a beautiful ruby-red, and it showed in the centre the head of a nail. In the sole she had a round wound of similar colour with the black mark of a nail.

Last of all, they re-examined the wounds in her hands. Following this they spoke briefly with her about her mystical experiences. Then, they asked her when the wound in her side normally bled and took their leave. Returning at noon the next Friday, 27 November, they confirmed that the blood from her side left a stain in the shape of a cross upon a cloth pressed to it. By now convinced, they speculated “as to the purpose Our Lord, the originator of this miracle, could have had in willing it so,” concluding “that He has thus ordered it in the days when evil reigneth, to awaken men, who sleep.”

Thus, God’s miracle was confirmed and His purpose unraveled. Fray Luis de Granada and his two companions had examined the Mother Prioress’s wounds and found them to be real. Their reasoned and systematic observations, combined with the sure knowledge that such miracles could and did occur, established the truth of the nun’s claims. Like the Apostles who witnessed the resurrection of Christ, the three friars had the divine duty “to awaken men, who sleep,” to witness to the world the Truth that their investigation had revealed to them. The news that this miracle had occurred would reinforce the belief of the faithful. It would also undermine the claims of the Protestant doubters who said that the time for miracles
had passed. Most important was that with their testimony, men like Granada, Aveiro, and Cruz might favorably tip the balance for those who wavered in their belief.

Although Sebastian was not marked by the holy stigmata, there are some striking parallels between his examination and that of the Mother Prioress. First, in both cases the examiners wished to settle an issue of identity. For the nun the question was not who she was, but instead her status as a holy and blessed woman. If real, the stigmata signified divine favor, granted only to so exemplary a person. For Sebastian, his identity and his status as legitimate King of Portugal were inextricably bound. The marks and signs that established his person also established his station. Second, in both cases the examiners themselves, having made the identification, necessarily became Apostles of that identity. Their knowledge and conviction required that they share both with the world. Finally, in the case of the Mother Prioress, the stigmata demonstrated God’s intervention in human affairs. In the case of Sebastian, Castro’s account of the twenty years between Sebastian’s disappearance in Morocco and his reappearance in Venice (summarized below), established a parallel conclusion.

According to Castro, following the disaster at Ksar-el-Kebir, Sebastian and a few companions eventually made their way to Tangier, a Portuguese fort on the coast. Arriving at night, he called to the sentry, identifying himself as the king and demanding to be admitted. The next morning they embarked, with other stragglers, on a ship back to Portugal. Disembarking in the Algarve, Sebastian decided not to return to Lisbon, for he was too ashamed to face the consequences of his folly. Instead, he resolved to abandon his throne and travel the world as a common man. Over the following years the king and his companions wandered from battle to battle, venting their martial inclinations. As might be expected in such a crusader for Christendom, he fought most of his battles in the service of God, against the infidel Turks. In the process Sebastian “saw all of Europe, a large part of Asia, and some of Africa (visiting Prester John’s kingdom and other kingdoms in the interior).” Eventually, inspired by God and having tired of his battles and endless travels, Sebastian decided to become a hermit in a remote area. He was determined to spend the rest of his days in penance, leading a holy life. After some time Sebastian began to have visions ordering him to return to Portugal, to take up once
again his responsibilities as king. At first Sebastian fought these visions, thinking they were temptations of the Devil. However, his only companion – his saintly hermit guide – having begun to receive the same visions, convinced Sebastian that they were real and that he had to obey God’s command. So Sebastian left his holy life and traveled to Sicily, arriving there by the end of 1597 or in early 1598. From there he took a galley to Rome to seek an audience with the Pope as a first step toward regaining his throne. However, God had not yet finished testing him. One night, while he slept, his servants robbed him of everything, even his clothes. Unable to prove his identity and in abject poverty, he turned back to a life of wandering, eventually ending up in Venice.42

Castro concluded that God had allowed Sebastian to fall into his folly – culminating with the Battle of Alcazar and Portugal’s loss of independence – to teach him and other men the dangers of relying solely on human wisdom.43 Then he was sent into the wilderness for some twenty years (half the time allotted to the tribes of Israel) to learn humility. Over those years God stripped Sebastian, like Job, of everything worldly: his throne, his youth, his martial spirit, his pride, his possessions, his clothes. In the end, the Portuguese king emerged with his faith purified and strong. Only such a king could lead God’s chosen people. For although Sebastian himself was not marked by the holy stigmata, Portugal was: in 1139, at the Battle of Ourique, God had “bestowed as [Portugal’s] escutcheon the five wounds he suffered on the cross.”44 This badge marked the Portuguese as having not only divine favor, but also the divine mission of taking Christian faith and civilization to the entire world. The king sanctified was a solid foundation upon which God could build a Portugal renewed, a Portugal free to carry out God’s will.45

God, messiah, and nation

This other-worldly image of Sebastian’s kingship contrasted sharply with that of Philip II. The Spanish king’s sanction to rule Portugal did not come from God; instead, it drew its legitimacy from the legal and political heritage of late-medieval Europe. Although theory stated that kings ultimately held their kingdoms by the grace of God, practice had cut God out of the equation. Who ruled a particular bit of territory had more to do with local power than with divine favor.
The accidents of marriage, birth, and death – as well as the ability to advance the resulting legal claims by force – dictated the shape and extent of most European states. Philip’s claim to Portugal was just this: a contested inheritance, seized and retained by force of arms. Had past dynastic marriages happened to follow a different pattern, the King of France or the Queen of England could just as easily have laid claim to Portugal in 1580. They might have found it less easy to enforce their rights, for they lacked the advantage of geographic contiguity. Still, that would have been merely one of many obstacles. The logic of state-building was legal and dynastic. In the relationship between ruler and ruled, the only issues that needed settling were legal and dynastic. Everything else – including differences in culture, language, and religion – could, and often did, remain unresolved.

It was such unresolved elements that provided early modern popular movements with fertile ground. Ignored by the ruling elites until they obviously posed a threat, such movements set deep roots. Aside from time to grow, popular movements possessed three interrelated characteristics which helped them survive when eventually they attracted the hostile attention of their political and social betters. First, they rejected the linear, progressive time imposed by the logic of institutions and laws. They hearkened back, instead, to a cyclical, mythic time more attuned to the natural cycles of days and seasons that governed the lives of most people. A cyclical sense of time allowed the faithful to believe that the world would return to a better past, much as winter inevitably would return to spring. Thus, failure was always temporary, a mistiming of the human seasons. Second, popular movements were eclectic, drawing inspiration and material from any source: religion, myth, folktale, rumor. This is not to say that their ideas were inherently irrational, self-contradictory, or uncritically accepted. Instead, this eclecticism reflected a lack of systematic thinking – each idea was useful in a particular situation; there was no need to impose an overarching and internally consistent system. As a result, what was adopted was often shorn of its original context and interpretation. Third, popular movements were eternally mutable, changing constantly under the force of circumstances. Although such movements drew from the mythic and traditional past, they operated only in the present. If they could not adapt themselves to current conditions – explaining the world and providing ways to deal with it – they died. Because of these
characteristics and because they were not beholden to strict logic or a rigid system, popular movements provided their enemies with a protean and resilient target.

Sebastianism was such a movement. Over some eighty years it had grown from a series of prophetic poems mostly of interest to the Portuguese New Christians, into an endemic popular force in Portugal which contested Philip II of Spain’s right to rule the kingdom. In 1600, for those who accepted the basic premise of Sebastianism – that Sebastian would return to rescue his people in their time of need – there could be no other king. Only Sebastian, the king appointed by God, could rule. For the Spanish, this meant that no argument for Philip’s legitimacy could convince any believer. For Sebastian’s followers, this was why it was crucial to establish the royal identity of the Venetians’ ex-prisoner and the miraculous nature of his return – hence Castro’s doubting-Thomas account of the meeting in Venice. By fulfilling prophecy they would gain immediate and widespread popular support. However, there was one minor detail in the prophecies that remained unfulfilled: Sebastian was to return to Portugal, not to Venice. This is what Sebastian’s new-found Apostles set out to accomplish.

Leaving Venice

With the fate of their king in their hands, Sebastian’s supporters turned to the major concern of the moment: getting Sebastian out of Venice before his twenty-four hours were up. First, however, they decided to let him spend most of the dawning day catching up on badly needed rest. Nightfall would be soon enough to leave town and would make it easier to leave unnoticed. Fray Sampaio and Fray Crisóstomo – two of Sebastian’s earliest and most ardent supporters – insisted on taking Sebastian to their monastery. There he would be safe from Spanish spies. With the king hidden in the monastery, the leaders of the Portuguese rebels reconvened at Dom Cristóvão’s lodgings to discuss the best way to proceed.51

Everyone agreed that the best first step was to get Sebastian to France, well away from Spanish hands. Three routes were considered. The first led north along the trade routes from Venice into Austria and Germany. This was rejected, for if the travelers were discovered the Austrian Habsburgs were likely to accommodate their Spanish
Venice to Leghorn: Sanctifying the King

16 December 1600
Sebastian leaves Venice

29 December 1600
Sebastian arrested in Florence

Figure 5  Northern Italy circa 1600: the Calabrian Charlatan’s route from Venice
relatives. The more direct second route led north-west through the Alps, to Switzerland, and into France. However, although not fraught with the political dangers of the northern route, this one was rejected as well. Sebastian’s followers worried that after so long in prison, the king would lack the strength to make it through the treacherous passes and winter snow. Consequently, they settled on the third path. This would take Sebastian south and west through the Duchy of Florence and on to Leghorn where he could embark for France. Since the Grand-Duke was pro-French and had married into the French royal family, Sebastian’s followers reckoned this route reasonably secure. However, they took further precautions. Sebastian was to travel disguised as a friar, accompanied only by a little-known, but trustworthy, friar as guide (they considered themselves to be too well known to be safe companions for the king). In addition, to distract their enemies, they would remain in Venice, acting as if Sebastian were still with them.52

As planned, Sebastian slipped out of Venice at nightfall on 16 December. However, after a propitious start, all the rebels’ carefully considered plans began to unravel. For some reason, Sampaio and Crisóstomo had decided against an outside guide and the well-known Fray Crisóstomo undertook the task himself. From there things only got worse. After the first day, Sebastian tired of his disguise and refused to wear it. Instead of immediately leaving Venetian territory by going directly to Ferrara, Crisóstomo took a detour through Padua. Since Sebastian was well known there, secrecy was completely forsaken. Before long the news of his passage through that city in the company of a friar was common knowledge in Venice. Castro and the others immediately became alarmed but, in order to contradict the news, felt compelled to stay in Venice. From Padua Crisóstomo finally took Sebastian to Ferrara. There, instead of keeping to themselves, they contacted the papal nuncio, but accomplished nothing. Remarkably, they passed through Bologna without incident. Finally, they arrived in Florence on 29 December, the last stage on the way to Leghorn and safety in France. However, that night, on the orders of the Grand-Duke of Tuscany, Sebastian was once more arrested and cast in jail.53 His freedom had lasted a mere two weeks. King Sebastian’s second coming would have to wait.
6 Florence, Naples, and Sanlúcar: Descent into Purgatory

But, reader, I would not have you turned from good resolution for hearing how God wills the debt shall be paid. Heed not the form of the pain: think what follows, think that at the worst beyond the great Judgment it cannot go.

– Dante Alighieri, Purgatorio, Canto X, verses 106–11

Initially at least, the Calabrian Charlatan’s incarceration in Florence probably seemed as if it would be much like his spell in Venice. Except for the occasional interrogation he would probably be left alone. Meanwhile others would dispute, make deals, and decide his fate. However, this time was different. Whatever the beginnings, this time the impostor was destined to end up enmeshed in the legal machinery of the Spanish state, a central and full participant in the process. For Spain’s officials this was a welcome turn of events. Instead of facing millenarian yearnings, nationalist sentiments, or vague rumors – amorphous foes who melted away at the first sign of trouble but never fully disappeared – the Spanish could focus on a concrete and captive opponent.

In spite of its many institutional deficiencies and structural weaknesses, the early modern state’s legal processes worked fairly regularly. Lawyers questioned. Witnesses testified. Judges weighed the evidence and pronounced their verdicts. Through it all, the system produced written documents which recorded the proceedings in detail. In the end, early modern trials revealed crimes, unmasked criminals, and discovered accomplices. While they failed to guarantee the culpability of those declared guilty, they generally provided
the state with a salutary tale intended to preserve and promote order.\textsuperscript{2} This result was all the more important when, as with Sebastianism in Portugal, the crimes appeared to be communal and individual criminals could not be identified, held accountable, and punished. The supposed Sebastian had fallen into just this sort of legal machinery.

**Florentine politics and Spanish diplomacy**

For the Calabrian Charlatan’s Portuguese supporters, the news of his capture in Florence must have been a shock. After all, the Grand-Duke of Tuscany – Ferdinando I – was famously anti-Spanish. Unlike his predecessor, Ferdinando pursued a vigorous foreign policy intended to counter Spain’s imperial designs in northern Italy. He worked to end the petty disputes between the remaining independent Italian states that the Spanish had so capably exploited; he stopped his predecessor’s practice of making irredeemable loans to the ever-bankrupt Spanish state; he revoked a long-standing agreement to clear all Florentine alliances with the Spanish king. Ferdinando even went so far as to ally himself with Henri IV of France, providing the French king with financial and political support in his civil war against the Spanish-backed Catholic League. In fact, on 5 October 1600 (only three months before the capture of the Calabrian), the grand-duke’s niece had married Henri, cementing Florentine-French ties.\textsuperscript{3} Nonetheless, despite his normally anti-Spanish politics, the grand-duke had the supposed Sebastian arrested.

The apprehension of the Calabrian Charlatan in Florence was probably due to the efforts of Francisco de Vera y Aragón, the Spanish ambassador to Venice. In early December, upon learning of the prisoner’s imminent release, de Vera had alerted the rulers of the surrounding Italian states that Spain would view with great favor anyone who turned the man over.\textsuperscript{4} Later, perhaps apprised by his Portuguese informant of the impostor’s intended itinerary, the ambassador wrote to the grand duke requesting assistance.\textsuperscript{5} De Vera may even have had the help of the supposed Sebastian’s guide, Fray Crisóstomo da Visitação. According to João de Castro, the Portuguese conspirators suspected that the friar had betrayed his compatriots. Not only had Crisóstomo illicitly taken charge of the purported
Portuguese king and slipped out of Venice, he had not gone directly to Leghorn, nor had he maintained secrecy for long; it was almost as if he were inviting arrest. Worse, Castro claimed, Crisóstomo had literally turned in his king in Florence. Further suggesting the friar's guilt was his quick release from Florentine custody even though he too had supposedly been arrested. In spite of the conspirators' suspicions, it seems more likely that the Portuguese friar simply miscalculated, believing that he and his companion were safe in pro-French Tuscany. He had no reason to suspect that Ferdinando would fail to support an anti-Spanish cause. In any case, whoever was ultimately responsible for the Calabrian's capture the fact remained: the Grand-Duke of Tuscany held someone desperately wanted by Spain.

For Ferdinando the Charlatan's arrest was a stroke of fortune. Suddenly the grand duke found himself in a position to do Philip III of Spain an important favor at little cost to himself. After all, Portugal was far away – the impostor and his claims were irrelevant to northern Italian politics. Detaining him neither increased nor diminished Spanish power in the adjacent states. But in Florence itself this act made the self-proclaimed imperial master beholden to the former servant. Even if only symbolically, Spanish power was weakened. The grand duke's order was not a shift in policy: instead it was a subtle, unexpected twist that reaffirmed Florentine independence.

Ignoring the entreaties of João de Castro and his compatriots for an audience, Ferdinando instead focused on an arrangement with Philip. After some three months of discussions the Florentines agreed to hand their captive over to the Spanish. (During this same period the Portuguese scrambled for political support in the courts of northern Europe and spread rumors that the man released in Venice had not been detained in Florence but had arrived in France.) In exchange Ferdinando requested only Spanish “protection for [his] house, state, and children” – implicitly, absolution for his past sins against Spain.

Trapped in the legal machinery of the Spanish state

Absolution was not the fate in store for the Calabrian Charlatan. Tardy French efforts to secure his release and a failed attempt at suicide did nothing to alter Ferdinando's program. Sometime in late March or early April the Florentines remanded their prisoner
into Spanish custody. And so, on 1 May 1601, the supposed Sebas-
tian, erstwhile king of a captive Portugal, arrived in Naples. His
descent into a Spanish purgatory had begun.

The Calabrian Charlatan was now caught in the machinery of the
Spanish state. His story would be examined from every angle and the
seemingly endless resources of the state would be invoked to build
the case against him. From this point forward our story is not one of
conspiracy, rebellion, and incipient nationalism but of patient,
relentless efforts to reveal the impostor’s true identity, purged of all
lies and fabrications.

Shortly after the Calabrian Charlatan arrived in Naples a curious
event took place. While this incident only briefly intersected with the
case of the supposed Sebastian and only temporarily diverted the
Spanish viceroy – Fernando Ruiz de Castro, the Count of Lemos – from
his investigation, it helps show part of the context for the impostor’s career. On 6 May a man calling himself António Jorge
de Cruz came before the viceroy, apparently at his own request. De
Cruz (described by Lemos as tall, dark, his beard speckled by age, and
very Ladino) presented himself as an Armenian merchant acting as
courier for the Portuguese viceroy of India; to prove this, de Cruz
had in his possession a viceregal dispatch. Upon examination, the
packet of letters – although dating back to 1593 – proved genuine; in
fact, one letter had been written by a secretary who, eight years later,
was working for Lemos in Naples and could identify his own hand-
writing. Pressed by the count for more details, de Cruz told the
following story. Although he had received the dispatch in 1593,
various troubles had delayed him and he had departed from (Portu-
guese) Hormuz for Italy only the year before. He had traveled
through Persia where the king, hearing of his mission, had given
him a letter for the King of Spain. (As with the dispatch, de Cruz
produced this letter, but Lemos could find no one in Naples who
could read it.) Finally, only two months before, he had made his way
to Constantinople. From there he had gone through Malta, Palermo,
and Messina before arriving in Naples to discharge his duty and
deliver the dispatch.

Nonetheless, instead of rewarding the man for his service, Lemos
had him detained. As he wrote in his report to the king, the count
suspected that de Cruz was a Turkish spy; after all, the supposed
merchant’s itinerary from Constantinople to Naples had touched
every location south of the viceregal capital where Spain had galleys. Furthermore, a brief investigation had revealed that seven years earlier de Cruz had delivered a similar dispatch to the then viceroy in Naples, but – apparently – that time had received his reward and gone on his way.\textsuperscript{18} It was at this point, while being escorted to his cell, that the Armenian’s path briefly crossed that of the Calabrian Charlatan. Reportedly de Cruz caught sight of the supposed Sebastian and burst out laughing, claiming to have known the real Sebastian in Lisbon. Unfortunately, although the Count of Lemos noted this incident, he seems not to have pursued any possible connection between the two prisoners.\textsuperscript{19}

This brief encounter between the Armenian and the Calabrian appears inconsequential, ephemeral. Yet, if the Spanish assessments of both men – Turkish spy and royal impostor – were correct, did that burst of laughter reveal more than simple amusement? Had the two men, perhaps in other guises, crossed paths before? We can only speculate; however, as we watch the viceroy unravel the Calabrian’s story and piece together his past, this possibility seems increasingly likely. Juxtaposed with the Armenian, the Calabrian Charlatan seems only one of a multitude of early modern impostors, spies, and swindlers who exploited the inefficiencies of the state and preyed on the gullible. Was the laughter that of one confidence man seeing another’s game gone awry? Was this a glimpse into a world where the players knew each other, boasting of their own successes and laughing at another’s failures? Perhaps.

One wonders what role such an underworld might have played in early modern politics. Was these a political substratum of spies, informers, and con-men who trafficked in information of any kind, whether genuine, rumor, or forged? How often, and to what extent, did the state act on the basis of such material without substantiating it with more reliable sources? Were many of the players ensnared by their illusions uncovered, or – perhaps worse – their illusions become reality? As we shall see, the Calabrian Charlatan was certainly trapped in just this way.

From the outset the supposed Sebastian’s initial interview with the Count of Lemos went badly.\textsuperscript{20} Upon seeing his prisoner, the viceroy was shocked to discover that the man bore absolutely no resemblance to the real King Sebastian; in fact, this difference was so striking that the count ordered a portrait made and sent to Philip III in Spain.
Speaking with the man did nothing to dispel the viceroy's conviction that he dealt with a fraud. He noted that the Charlatan spoke Portuguese very badly and would occasionally slip and use a Calabrian word. Furthermore, while the purported King of Portugal knew much general information about his kingdom, when pressed for detail he revealed only his ignorance. Lemos quickly concluded that the Calabrian Charlatan was "a mad-man bereft of reason" and that someone had been filling his head with stories of Sebastian, his African adventure, and his miraculous return. After reaching this conclusion the viceroy confronted the impostor with one fact: that he, the Count of Lemos, knew the real Sebastian, having visited him in Lisbon before the Battle of Alcazar. According to Lemos this revelation left the man dumbfounded. Perhaps playing for time and a chance to think, the Charlatan asked to confess to "a learned person." Agreeing to the request the count sent for his confessor. However, instead of admitting to any crime the man informed the confessor that he would beg God to reveal his true identity, that he was indeed King Sebastian of Portugal.

With this the formal legal process against the supposed Sebastian began. Since the man was apparently Calabrian, the viceroy sent some officials to Calabria – to the towns of Rossano and Taverna – to search for anyone who might know the prisoner. One way or another, Lemos intended to discover the man's true identity and figure out who was behind the imposture. However, instead of waiting for news from Calabria the viceroy pressed on. On 8 May he appointed a prosecutor for the case. In addition he found various Portuguese who had known the real Sebastian. The prisoner was shown to these witnesses; each declared him a fraud. Nonetheless, throughout this early stage of the investigation against him, the Calabrian Charlatan persisted in his claims and insisted on signing his name as "Don Sebastian of Portugal."

So, who was the prisoner? Was he an impostor, as claimed by the Spanish? Or was he Sebastian, as claimed by the exiles? Having the man in their custody certainly gave the Spanish and their contention the upper hand. Logically, however, the two views were at an impasse. After all, both sides could supply – and at various points had supplied – apparently credible witnesses in support of their arguments. Worse, the early modern state simply had no unambiguous means, other than the testimony of such witnesses, to identify a
person. Political realities only complicated the issue. In the question at hand, the Spanish knew perfectly well that their witnesses would appear unreliable to the eyes of the restive Portuguese. Consequently, something more was needed to make their case.

This logical impasse did not last. As a result of the viceroy’s inquiries another man turned up at the viceregal court. He identified the Calabrian Charlatan as one Marco Tulio Catizone, a native of the village of Magisano in the area of Taverna.27 Furthermore, the man informed the count, Catizone was married to a woman in Messina named Paola Gallardeta. Also, contrary to the viceroy’s belief, the man claimed that the impostor was no simpleton.28 With this information, Lemos obtained the tool to begin chipping away at the impostor’s façade.

As things turned out Lemos did not need his chisel. When, on the morning of 9 May 1601, he brought Catizone face to face with the man who had identified him, the Charlatan was once again dumb-founded. Obviously, the two men knew each other. The man asked Catizone who had tricked him into making his claims and received in reply only a stutter. At this point the viceroy intervened, promising to spare the Calabrian Charlatan’s life if he confessed. Thereupon the purported King of Portugal threw himself at the Count of Lemos’s feet, begging for mercy. The supposed Sebastian confirmed that he was indeed Marco Tulio Catizone from the village of Magisano, adding that his father was Ipolito Catizone and his mother was Petronia Cortes.29 Three years before he had left Messina and traveled north, eventually reaching Venice. There people began to tell him that he looked just like Sebastian: during mass one day an Italian soldier (who said that he had fought for Sebastian in Africa) told Catizone “that he was the [Portuguese] King or the Devil in his form;”30 another person had a portrait of Sebastian and declared that Catizone could be no other. In fact, the more Catizone denied that he was the King of Portugal, the more people insisted that he was: several Portuguese came to him and forcibly kissed his hands; a Venetian noblewoman offered to marry him; some unknown Portuguese gave him money to support himself. Finally, a very old hermit with a long white beard and wearing a brown habit came to Catizone, telling him that God had revealed that he was indeed King Sebastian of Portugal. Marco Tulio Catizone finally gave in. He decided to claim the identity of the long-lost King of Portugal.31
Undoubtedly the Count of Lemos did not accept all the details of Catizone’s confession. After all, he had noted that the man from Magisano looked nothing like Sebastian, and would have found it hard to believe that anyone would have spontaneously identified the man as the King of Portugal. Nonetheless, the confession was a start. To build his case further – and strip away any remaining lies and half-truths – the viceroy despatched an official to Magisano to retrieve the record of Catizone’s baptism and find more people who knew him; he also sent for Catizone’s wife, brother-in-law, and mother-in-law, ordering that they be brought from Messina. In addition to establishing the Calabrian Charlatan’s true identity, the count intended to prove that this was the same man who had been incarcerated in Venice for two years; Lemos was concerned that someone might claim that the Spanish did not have the real purported King of Portugal and that the whole investigation was a charade. Consequently, the viceroy wrote to the Spanish ambassador in Venice, asking him to send witnesses who could identify the Venetians’ former prisoner.\(^\text{32}\) Once all of these details were pinned down and the process completed, the Count of Lemos intended to sentence Marco Tulio Catizone to the galleys for life.\(^\text{33}\) However, as the viceroy informed Philip III, care would be taken to ensure that the rigors of galley life did not result in the supposed Sebastian’s premature death; the count knew well that it might serve the king’s purposes to take the living impostor to Portugal and unmask him there.\(^\text{34}\)

A month later the Count of Lemos was still waiting for the arrival of Catizone’s wife and her family. In the interim, the Duke of Maqueda had obtained two letters – both dated 5 September 1598, written in Italian, and supposedly penned by King Sebastian of Portugal – and sent them to the viceroy.\(^\text{35}\)

The first letter was addressed to Paola Catizone [Gallardeta] in Messina. In this missive, Sebastian asked Signora Catizone not to be angry at her husband’s delayed return, for he served the Portuguese king in a very important matter. Sebastian went on to tell her that he had encountered Marco Tulio at the papal court in Rome and been so impressed that he asked the Calabrian to become his ambassador to the King of Spain. As a consequence of this vital mission Signor Catizone might well be occupied for some time. Nonetheless, Sebastian had heard from her husband and could pass on the news that he was well and, undoubtedly, would finish his task soon. Once this was
done, the king assured her, Marco Tulio would return and be well rewarded, both financially and with an important place in the Portuguese court.\textsuperscript{36}

The second letter – addressed to a nobleman named Raymon Marquet – was written in a similar vein. Here too the King of Portugal told of finding Marco Tulio Catizone in the papal court and appointing him ambassador to Spain. As in the letter to Paola Gallardeta, Sebastian left the details of Catizone’s diplomatic mission sketchy, only hinting as to its nature by briefly recounting how he had not died in Africa and had recently come to Italy in secret. Again, the Portuguese king praised the Calabrian for his exemplary service and promised future rewards.\textsuperscript{37}

Unfortunately we do not know how the Spanish obtained these letters or why they surfaced three years after they apparently had been written. One might suspect Spanish forgeries intended to build the case against Catizone; but that seems unlikely since nothing in the letters identified the Calabrian as the man posing as King Sebastian of Portugal (the main charge against him).\textsuperscript{38} Furthermore, given the content of the letters, it seems almost certain that Catizone himself wrote them. If so, we can – speculatively – begin to reconstruct the early history of the Calabrian Charlatan, from the perspective of Marco Tulio Catizone.

According to Catizone, he left Messina about three years before his encounter with the Count of Lemos, probably in late 1597 or early 1598. Exactly why he abandoned his wife and traveled north remains unclear. The emphasis on future financial rewards in both letters, however, suggests a strong financial motive. Perhaps he was escaping his creditors or had not proven able to meet his wife’s financial expectations; perhaps he simply sought means to support his family. In addition, there appears to have been an element of pride involved. Had he been told that he would never amount to anything? After all, as described in the letters, the man from the village of Magisano had become a figure of some importance, for he was now moving in papal and royal circles. In any case, he left Messina and eventually reached Rome.\textsuperscript{39}

Marco Tulio Catizone probably encountered the story of the Portuguese king in the papal capital. Was it in this cosmopolitan city of churchmen, pilgrims, merchants, and other travelers that he first heard the tale of Sebastian’s disappearance at Ksar-el-Kebir? Did
someone tell him the rumors of the king’s heroic escape from captivity? Did the Calabrian hit upon the idea of claiming to be one of King Sebastian’s retainers, serving a master who was intent on remaining hidden? Whatever the details of exactly where and when, it seems that this was how the charade began. Initially at least, Catizone did not impersonate Sebastian himself. Instead, he posed as one of his faithful servants. One can imagine the Calabrian approaching Portuguese merchants in Rome, spinning a tale of how King Sebastian was now in Italy and sought a contribution – whatever could be spared – from any loyal Portuguese; how this was but the first step towards the restoration of Portugal’s independence and prosperity; how the Spanish would intervene should the whole matter not be kept secret. Such a story could not be told too often in one place. Overly curious contributors and ever-scarcer donations probably drove Catizone to move on in search of a new audience. He wandered north, doubtless seeking out Portuguese wherever he went, repeating and refining his tale, and living off any proceeds. By July 1598 the Calabrian was in Venice, already well versed in (and writing sonnets about) the legend of the unfortunate King of Portugal.40

Like so much else in this case, why Catizone shifted to claiming that he was Sebastian himself remains uncertain. This step was dangerous. He might – as happened with Lemos – encounter someone who had known Sebastian, be cornered by his lack of knowledge about Portugal, or fail to speak Portuguese like a native. In contrast, as a mere servant he escaped these dangers; and, his ignorance only heightened the furtive mystery of the whole matter. For Catizone and his game, playing the servant was a much better position. Therefore, something external probably pushed him into impersonating the Portuguese king. Did the Calabrian happen to tell his story to a Portuguese rebel, someone like Fra Estêvão de Sampaio, someone all too eager to make contact with Sebastian? With some persistence such a person could have uncovered the charade and realized that, by redirecting it a little, it might serve his political purposes. After all, according to Catizone, various people in Venice had tried to persuade him that he looked just like Sebastian; in addition, he claimed that someone gave him a book on the events at Ksar-el-Kebir, as if to prime him with knowledge of events that the Portuguese king should remember. If true, was there a concerted effort to convince the Calabrian that assuming Sebastian’s identity was perfectly reasonable
and not as hazardous as it seemed? An apparently minor risk, perhaps coupled with promises of great rewards, may have been what induced Marco Tulio Catizone to shift his charade. In any case, by the fall of 1598 the Portuguese king’s supposed return had attracted the attention of both Venetian and Spanish authorities. Once the Charlatan found himself under arrest on 25 November 1598, it was too late for him to find a fresh audience or to change his story. The die was cast. Ascent to royalty or descent into purgatory were the apparent stakes. 

In Venice Catizone seems not to have realized that the odds tilted against him. Even if nothing else had by then, his time in Naples certainly brought this realization. As each successive interview with the viceroy stripped away another layer of falsehood, the man from Magisano probably sank ever deeper into despair. Nonetheless, once he had abandoned the charade, he clung steadfastly to his new story: he was Marco Tulio Catizone, a petty confidence man who had been tricked into the charade for which he was being held. Did he hope to show that his intentions, while criminal, had not been political? By denying that he intended to occupy the Portuguese throne or even create unrest in Portugal, did he hope to suffer a milder form of justice? If so, Catizone probably rejoiced at the arrival (in July 1601) of his wife, her mother, and her brother – they helped confirm his latest claims.

At Catizone’s brief reunion with his family his mother-in-law took center stage. As the count wryly noted of the encounter, she “told [her son-in-law] a thousand things.” It seems that even the Calabrian’s marriage was based on deceit. With an accomplice, Catizone had arranged to be introduced to his future mother-in-law as a principal nobleman with lands yielding 500 ducats annual rent. In this guise he had asked for her daughter’s hand and had been gladly accepted. Now, as his mother-in-law fumed, they discovered that he was a “vile and shameless trickster.” Apparently this was his profession. He had probably remained in Messina, enjoying his marriage and living off of his wife’s family, only until his façade began to crumble. Unable to produce his rents or lands, he left. Perhaps he claimed that he had to investigate why the rents had not been collected or that he had suddenly been called away on very important matters. Maintaining a charade was hard work: one had to keep it in motion, constantly adding embellishments that would explain
unfulfilled promises and expectations. Each new angle had added layer upon layer of falsehood – layers that the Count of Lemos stripped away.

With this last confrontation, the viceroy was satisfied. On 17 July 1601 he reported to Philip III that the Calabrian Charlatan’s trial would soon be finished and that the prisoner would be sent to Spain as soon as possible.45 In the interim he was to spend his days chained to an oar, serving his life sentence in the galleys. Nevertheless, a year later Catizone remained in Naples.46 Had he convinced the Spanish authorities in Naples that his claim to be King Sebastian of Portugal was more the result of “insanity and ignorance” than of political designs?47 While not exactly pleasant, life in the galleys was better than death by hanging. Besides, compared to his fellow convicts Catizone had it easy: the commander of the galleys had orders to ensure that the Charlatan ate well and did not over-exert himself while rowing.48 Still, when the galleys left for Spain that year, Marco Tulio Catizone went with them.49 His descent into purgatory had not yet reached bottom.

The Calabrian Charlatan’s arrival at Sanlúcar de Barrameda in southern Spain on 23 February 1603 marked the beginning of the final stage of his long journey through the machinery of Spanish justice.50 Once again a court bombarded Catizone with questions: Who was he? Where was he from? Why had he impersonated King Sebastian? Who were his accomplices? The questions were the same. And, for the most part, so were the answers – even those elicited under torture. While this phase of the trial dragged on for months and generated hundreds of pages of documents, it added little new to Marco Tulio Catizone’s story.51 Satisfied for the most part with the results of the investigation in Naples, the officials in Sanlúcar focused instead on uncovering and prosecuting any of the Portuguese conspirators in the affair.52 Nonetheless, for our purposes a few added details are worth noting.

During his several imprisonments – in Venice, Florence, Naples, the galleys, and even El Puerto de Santa María in Spain itself – the Calabrian had been in contact with the same group of Portuguese rebels.53 They frequently sent him messages by various means (once one was hidden in a loaf of bread) and sometimes even found it possible to visit him. On each occasion they encouraged him to persist in his claim to be King Sebastian of Portugal. During the rare
visits they coached him in Portuguese and gave him books filled with information about Portugal and Sebastian. They even provided him with funds.\textsuperscript{54} Although this may help explain why Catizone maintained his charade so long, it only raises questions about the Portuguese rebels. While visiting the impostor during his imprisonment in Naples or later, could they have been unaware of his confession to the Count of Lemos? This seems unlikely. Yet, some Portuguese continued to see him and encourage him. Perhaps some of the rebels refused to accept that the game was over. Did they latch onto the impossible hope that – if they kept the charade going – by some chance they might get lucky, arrange for their alleged king’s escape and triumphal return to Portugal? Two friars – Fra Estêvão de Sampaio and Fra Boaventura de Santo António – even visited Catizone in El Puerto de Santa María and soon found themselves imprisoned and undergoing their own trials in Sanlúcar de Barrameda.\textsuperscript{55}

Throughout his trial, the Calabrian insisted on his constant reluctance to adopt the persona of Sebastian. Nonetheless, he had done so since he had been beset at every turn by Portuguese pressuring him into continuing the charade. Even its beginnings had not been his responsibility. In fact, according to Catizone, the same sort of thing had happened to him before. As he recounted, during his travels in Italy he spent a few months in Verona. While there he was told that he looked just like a nobleman named Don Diego de Aragón; since the Veronese persisted in calling him Don Diego, he adopted the man’s name and status. If Catizone was to be believed – and he was not – he was apparently plagued by people forcing another’s identity upon him.\textsuperscript{56}

As we saw from his confession in Naples, the impostor claimed that this was exactly what had happened to him in Venice; however, in Sanlúcar he altered the details of his story. This time Catizone maintained that he was in church one day when three or four Portuguese and a Venetian approached him. They told him that he looked like King Sebastian of Portugal and, in fact, that he was Sebastian. In spite of the Calabrian’s protests to the contrary, they insisted. Later the same group came to his inn and persisted in their claims. Catizone relented; thus began the charade.\textsuperscript{57} As before, Marco Tulio Catizone sought to cast his story in such a way as to minimize his own guilt. Yet, to be approached by some such group, he must have
done or said something to arouse their attention. After all, in spite of what the man from Magisano said, it could not have been his swarthy features that marked him as a potential King of Portugal. As we inferred from Catizone’s letters to his wife and the nobleman in Messina, he was probably posing as one of Sebastian’s servants and with this guise attracted the interest of the Venetian and the three or four Portuguese.\textsuperscript{58} Perhaps these men had heard the Calabrian’s story and – hoping to contact Sebastian – tracked him down in church. There they may have discovered that there was no former King of Portugal to be found and left disappointed. However, did they subsequently decide that, if they could not find their king, they could produce him? Was the second encounter at the inn their successful attempt to convince the Calabrian con-man that he could play for higher stakes and win?

While much of this is speculation, one small detail of Catizone’s confession in Sanlúcar lends credence to this reconstruction. Although he did not name the three or four Portuguese whom he met, he did identify the Venetian as a Captain Febo.\textsuperscript{59} And we know from Cristóvão de Moura and a Portuguese chronicler that one of the major sources of the news in the Portuguese capital about King Sebastian’s return was a Venetian captain called El Febo.\textsuperscript{60} This detail brings us full circle – through Captain Febo we can connect the rumors and unrest in Lisbon directly to a Portuguese conspiracy in Venice which had begun at least by the summer of 1598.

**Reconstructing the conspiracy**

We now have all the pieces: a Calabrian con-man posing as King Sebastian of Portugal; his Portuguese supporters – primarily João de Castro, Estêvão de Sampaio, and José Teixeira; the mysterious Captain Febo; the failure of the movement in favor of Dom António with its attendant lack of popular support; the long-standing sense of a separate Portuguese identity as demonstrated in *The Lusiads* and the anti-Spanish unrest in the streets of Lisbon; a series of prophecies announcing the imminent arrival of the Hidden One and the ensuing salvation of Portugal; the previous false Sebastians and the widespread enthusiasm for any rumor of Sebastian’s return; and – perhaps most important – a critical moment in Spanish politics: the death of Philip II. Some of these pieces we have examined in detail; others,
unfortunately, remain obscure. Still, we now have enough to begin puzzling out the nature of the Portuguese plot.

From this collection of people and events we could piece together several interpretations. If we were to take the published writings of Castro, Sampaio, and Teixeira at face value, we might conclude that the Portuguese rebels really thought that they had found Sebastian and simply sought to restore their sovereign to his rightful place. Yet, as we have seen, there are strong reasons to doubt that these men really believed that the swarthy Calabrian was their king. While João de Castro may have been the “St. Paul of the Sebastianist religion,” this St Paul had never been on the road to Damascus.  

If not believers, should we argue that the conspirators were merely opportunists? Perhaps by chance they encountered Marco Tulio Catizone and his claims and decided to see what they could make of them. This interpretation certainly fits the course of events following the impostor’s arrest in Venice on 25 November 1598. After this point the Portuguese seem not to have followed a well-conceived or prepared plan. Like everyone else – whether Spanish, Venetian, or Florentine – they made the best of what fate and their adversaries handed them, reacting to each twist and turn in the matter as it unfolded. Yet, what happened prior to 25 November? In his testimony in Sanlúcar de Barrameda, Catizone insisted that he had been recruited to play the part of Sebastian by Captain Febo and a group of Portuguese; if true – and it seems likely – this event took place no later than early July 1598. This was an opportunity created, not just grasped.

We can trace the first stirrings of the Sebastianist plot as far back as 1588 when João de Castro wrote of his intention “...to devote all of my ability and life to awaken[ing] Portugal by some means, [to] opening its eyes.” Over the next ten years the course of events in Spanish-occupied Portugal and Castro’s own pursuits helped lay the ground-work for the conspiracy. Key in this period was the failed English invasion of Portugal in 1589. This taught the Portuguese – and everyone else – two important lessons: first, that Spain’s enemies lacked both the resources and the will to drive it from Portugal by military means alone; second, that Dom António, despite his belief to the contrary, commanded little popular support. While Dom António’s closest followers may not have realized or accepted it at the time, the aborted raid effectively spelled the end of António’s rebellion. On that front at least, the Spanish could rest easy.
In contrast to many of Dom António’s other supporters, João de Castro recognized the futility of António’s efforts early on. Given his determination to “awaken” Portugal from at least a year before the failed invasion, the lessons of 1589 seem to have confirmed Castro’s conclusion that only a widespread popular revolt stood any chance of restoring Portuguese independence. Castro apparently hoped that a rising would radically reorient Portuguese politics. Noblemen who had made their peace with Spain and remained in Portugal would be inspired, with some prodding from the exiles, to realign their allegiances. Building from a base of popular politics, the high politics of diplomacy and intervention might then succeed. First, however, João de Castro needed to find the spark that would ignite the passions of the Portuguese people; this he sought in the millenarian yearnings revealed by the appearance of the first two false Sebastians (the third, who appeared in Spain, generated little interest).

Over the next decade Castro studied the prophecies associated with Sebastian and tried to determine how best to exploit them. This long-term dedication reflected not only Castro’s commitment to the Portuguese cause, but also his failure to convince Dom António and the other Portuguese exiles that utilizing Sebastianism would prove fruitful. Thus António’s death in 1595 removed a major obstacle. At some point afterwards Castro apparently convinced his compatriots to give his ideas a chance and they began to prepare the plot. By July 1598, their Sebastian was in place in Venice, ready to act.

Before we accept this version of events, we need to answer three simple questions: Why 1598? Why Venice? Why Catizone? The answer to the first of these questions is fairly straightforward. In 1598 King Philip II of Spain was old and infirm; his death was only a matter of time. By acting in the liminal moment between Philip II’s passing and the oath of allegiance to his heir, the conspirators probably hoped to change the transition of power in their favor. As we have already seen, in Lisbon the first rumors of Sebastian’s escape from captivity coincided with the news of Philip’s death. Mere coincidence? Perhaps. More likely, a conspirator placed in the Portuguese capital waited for just that news and, when it arrived, began to spread the rumors. This had the desired effect of arousing popular enthusiasm for Sebastian and casting doubt on the political legitimacy of Philip’s son. Nonetheless, popular pressure proved insufficient to derail the Portuguese nobles’ oath to Philip III.
While we cannot say with certainty, having the Charlatan make his claims in Venice may have been a carefully thought-out choice. Having him make his first appearance in Portugal was, in all likelihood, not even considered. After all, the first two false Sebastians had turned up there and, although they had quickly drawn a following, they had just as quickly attracted Spanish attention. Before anything could really happen both men had been arrested, tried, and sentenced. Consequently the supposed King of Portugal needed to return elsewhere, beyond the reach of Spain. This way, a popular movement in support of the man might have time to gather momentum. For this, France and England may have initially seemed good choices. However, they were less than ideal. Due to the political alignments at the end of the sixteenth century, any plot in either kingdom would probably appear to be just that: an anti-Spanish plot, instigated by Spain’s enemies. João de Castro and his compatriots may have reasoned that it was best not to raise any unnecessary questions about their Sebastian. Furthermore, the internal logic of the prophecies and stories about the missing King of Portugal made an appearance in northern Europe improbable at best. Therefore, the ideal location would not be openly anti-Spanish, would fall outside of areas of Spanish control and influence, and lie near enough to North Africa to be a logical destination for an escaping Sebastian. Venice met these requirements. It had two additional advantages as well. First, a sizable Portuguese merchant community provided a strong base of support as well as a conspiratorially clean conduit for the news of Sebastian’s return to reach Portugal. Second, the political rivalry in Venice between the “Old” and the “Young” (and, in particular, the anti-Spanish stance of the “Young”) worked in the conspirators’ favor. If nothing else, the “Young” could be expected to resist any kind of cooperation with the Spanish, giving the conspirators some room to maneuver. In fact, there probably was active “Young” involvement in the plot; this would explain the participation of El Febo, the Venetian captain.

In contrast to the selection of locale, the choice of Marco Tulio Catizone seems senseless. He spoke no Portuguese, looked nothing like Sebastian, and had never even been to Portugal. Surely the conspirators could have found an unknown native Portuguese of the right age who at least looked somewhat like the missing king. Yet they did not. Why? Perhaps they never intended their returned
king to leave Venice, much less go to Portugal to claim his throne. They may have thought that to provide Castro’s spark, all they needed was a rumor, one with all the trappings of truth but never to be examined closely. For this, Catizone – Calabrian con-man and willing Sebastian – was convenient, adequate, and disposable.

If so, the crux of the conspiracy took place between 20 and 23 September 1598. During the fragile period between the news of Philip II’s death and the oath to Philip III, fellow conspirators in Lisbon publicized and fanned the rumors already trickling out of Venice. With the failure to create anything beyond a stir, the plot collapsed. In Venice, apprised now of the dangers posed by the Calabrian Charlatan, the Spanish ambassador worked to have him arrested. If the Venetian “Young” had been actively involved, they found it wise not to interfere too much in the dealings with the Spanish; with the scheme derailed, there was little point. Among the Portuguese plotters only a few, it seems, wished to continue with the charade. They probably argued to their compatriots and any Venetian accomplices that the plan was still viable, that the rumors simply needed more time to work. Thus, these few men continued to insist that the man in Venice was the Portuguese king. In this confused aftermath of move and counter-move, the Spanish won the key battle: on 25 November 1598 the Venetians imprisoned the supposed King Sebastian of Portugal.
Conclusion

...the dread of death, ..., which, while it afflicts and mortifies the individual, guards and protects the society.

Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*

On 23 September 1603 the Spanish brought the trial in Sanlúcar de Barrameda to a conclusion. Several of the Charlatan’s suspected accomplices and associates – both Portuguese and Calabrian – received sentences ranging from death to freedom, depending upon how closely they could be linked to the conspiracy to wrest Portugal from Spanish rule. For playing the central role of King Sebastian, Marco Tulio Catizone suffered the harshest fate. His right hand was cut off; he was hanged; his body was drawn and quartered and the pieces were strewn in the roads; finally, both his head and right hand were put in a prominent place, on public display. The charade was ended.

This was exemplary justice exemplified. Yet where were those meant to see the spectacle, to learn from it? As an object lesson, the supposed Sebastian should have been condemned and punished in Lisbon. There, those who wagered on the Hidden One’s return, those who furtively gossiped of the king’s appearance in Venice, and those who spread the rumors telling of Sebastian’s survival at Ksar-el-Kebir might have glimpsed the possibly gruesome consequences of such speculations. Instead, the drama of justice executed took place far away in southern Spain, before an irrelevant Spanish public. Any lesson was lost. For most Portuguese the impostor’s fate thus became another item of questionable news, yet another rumor among many
clamoring for attention. So what was the point of playing out the public execution? Perhaps the Spanish simply had a restricted audience in mind: one who was in need of instruction, but did not necessarily have to witness the proceedings in person. Certainly, for the conspirators – even those fortunate enough not to be in Sanlúcar – the news from southern Spain was real and the lesson all too clear.

Nonetheless, it seems odd that the Spanish chose to limit their audience so drastically. After all, in early modern Europe exemplary justice was seen as a bulwark against the disorder inherent in the fallen descendants of Adam. By instilling in everyone, not just the guilty, a healthy fear of the consequences of criminal behavior, this ordinary public spectacle supposedly helped maintain order. However, the case of the Calabrian Charlatan was extraordinary and demanded special treatment. For most Portuguese, the matter had never moved beyond the realm of rumor; and although Portugal’s restless nobles, fractious priests, and hopeful millenarians avidly gossiped of King Sebastian’s return, the speculations had inspired little action. As the Spanish seem to have realized, a public execution in Lisbon could have upset the relative calm in Portugal by substantiating at least part of the Sebastianist illusion. Even worse, people might then have reasoned that if some of the story was true, why not the rest? It was preferable by far for Spain’s rulers to forgo the possible benefits of exemplary justice. Why help transform rumor into reality? Order was better served by quietly eliminating the conspiracy and the conspirators, then letting the gossip run its course and fade away.

Throughout the entire affair, from the Calabrian Charlatan’s appearance in 1598 to his death in 1603, the Spanish faced the same sort of dilemma. How did one fight a rumor, especially a rumor that fed an all-too-real discontent? Ignoring it would only allow it to spread and deepen. Attacking it would focus attention on it, marking it as important news. Anything the Spanish did or did not do could be ‘spun’ against them: a failure to challenge the rumor could be seen as tacit acceptance; an attempt to silence it could be seen as an effort to conceal its truth. Realizing that they could not control the situation through the direct application of their power, the Spanish dealt with the seditious gossip indirectly. For example, when Íñigo de Mendoza in Venice publicly expressed the Spanish doubts about the matter, he also insisted that he only wished to ascertain the truth; in
fact, he assured the Venetians, should the supposed Sebastian prove genuine, he would of course immediately be restored to his throne. Thus the Spanish very carefully neither confirmed nor denied the news from Venice. Instead, in the guise of seeking the truth, they quietly unleashed the diplomatic and legal machinery of the state. Without fanfare the Spanish found, rounded up, and tried as many conspirators as they could. In doing so, they eliminated the ultimate source of the rumor, without directly attacking the rumor itself.

For the Spanish this was probably the wisest course; they knew all too well the dangers of disorder. Simply put, the early modern state was fragile. A powerful state like Spain certainly commanded the military might to crush any internal opposition. However, applying that force came at a price. First, the hierarchical nature of early modern power made it costly to gather and focus resources, whether military or political. Any extraordinary action required negotiation, a give and take that demanded expensive favors and privileges. Second, and more important, resources were limited. This meant that concentrating power to deal with one problem created opportunities for others. While attention and resources were focused elsewhere, enemies and opportunists – both external and internal – were only too willing to exploit the situation. Thus, for the early modern state, disorder of any sort represented a grave danger. For the Spanish this was the inherent menace of the Calabrian Charlatan, for he threatened to inject a dose of chaos into Portugal.

For João de Castro and his fellow conspirators, on the other hand, a bit of chaos was exactly what they wanted. By 1598 they had fought Spanish rule in Portugal for nearly two decades, but had accomplished nothing. Armed resistance, international diplomacy, and a foreign invasion had all failed. They had always challenged Spain where it was strong – militarily and diplomatically – and had been overwhelmed. Nonetheless, these Portuguese rebels were determined to fight on. This time, however, realizing their own lack of strength, they sought to attack where the Spanish were weak. By adopting the prophecies and legends of Sebastianism, the rebels invoked the popular millenarian dream of O Encuberto, the hidden hero-king who would usher in a lasting reign of peace, prosperity, and justice after defeating the forces of evil. This, they hoped, would draw the Portuguese people into political action and help weaken the Spanish hold on Portugal.
As we have already seen, the matter of the Calabrian Charlatan can be broken into two phases. In the first phase, before the nobles’ oath to Philip III, the conspirators tried to take advantage of the shaky transition of authority from one king to the next. Since the hierarchy of early modern power depended on personal oaths of fealty, the death of Philip II temporarily severed the link tying Portugal to Spain. By introducing the story of King Sebastian’s miraculous return, the rebels sought to tap into the popular appeal of Sebastianism and thus inspire – or perhaps force – the nobles of Portugal to declare their support for their former king and thus break with Spain. Here the rebels’ dose of chaos took the form of injecting, at a carefully selected moment, an alternative path for Portuguese politics to follow and the popular pressure to do so. When this plan failed, Castro and his compatriots eventually turned to a second, more desperate phase of their plot. In this phase the conspirators continued to spread the alleged King Sebastian’s story in Lisbon. News of his long pilgrimage and penance, his unjust imprisonment in Venice, the Spanish efforts to usurp his rights by labeling him an impostor and charlatan, and his treacherous capture in Florence, served – the rebels hoped – to tap into the endemic anti-Spanish sentiments of the Portuguese. Ideally, the level of popular unrest in Portugal would rise to the point where a national rebellion would be sparked. Again, since they could not take on the Spanish directly, the Portuguese rebels relied on social chaos to open up new possibilities.

As we have seen, the efforts of João de Castro and the other Portuguese rebels ultimately failed. Although – like modern nationalists – they discerned the potential power inherent in popular politics, they never could inspire the widespread nationalist revolt they wanted. Should we interpret this, as have so many students of modern nationalism, as evidence that national sentiment did not exist in the early modern period? We should not.

In the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries there was certainly an imagined Portuguese community. This was not a new community, some new nation arising spontaneously on the back of a change in the mode of production; instead it represented the almost haphazard accumulation of centuries of history: unique, idiosyncratic, complex, thick. Bound together by their language, the *Reconquista*, the decades of exploration and expansion overseas, and the prophecies of Sebastianism, the Portuguese people were a self-
identifying, modern nation. At the same time, nationalists like João de Castro sought to take advantage of this sense of nation for their own political purposes. In this sense, early modern nationalism did exist. Furthermore, Castro and his Spanish opponents viewed this sentiment as a political force to be used or feared; it certainly was not to be ignored.

If this was the case, then why does nationalism seem to be so muted as a political force in early modern Europe, especially when compared to Europe in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries? Although this question is beyond the scope of this work, we can suggest a few possibilities. First, while the sentiment of nationalism did exist in the early modern period, political manipulators (that is, nationalists) had not yet learned to exploit that sentiment systematically nor developed the organizational mechanisms to do so. They only called upon it by chance or out of desperation, not as part of a long-term, coherent, and organized political plan. Second, in the early modern period, political sovereignty was vested in the elites. Until the state invented (and was trapped in) the fiction of popular sovereignty and the idea that it worked in the interests of the people, it was an alien imposition that served merely to preserve the privileges of the elite. It was only when the nation absorbed the state that the people of the nation had any practical reason to care which state ruled over them. Third, paralleling the transition in sovereignty – from God, to king, to people – was a transition in salvation. The inherent promise, and appeal, of nationalism is that once the nation has removed its foreign oppressors and established its sovereignty, a new era of social justice will begin; thus will the nation be saved. Finally, the modern period saw the introduction of abundant, cheap, and effective firearms which undermined the elites’ monopoly on organized political violence. If large enough, modern national groups could make ruling them a very costly proposition. What is different about modern nationalism is not the “tribal” sentiment itself, but rather the context in which it acts.

For whatever reason – missing elements in the nationalist equation or deft Spanish handling of the situation – João de Castro and his compatriots were not able “to awaken Portugal…. [to] open its eyes.” Nevertheless, the Portuguese rebels were the precursors of the modern nationalists who later called upon the same kinds of sentiments and successfully created their own nation-states.
Some six weeks before the Calabrian Charlatan’s execution in Sanlúcar de Barrameda took place, a minor Portuguese official brought an egg to Cristóvão de Moura, the Spanish viceroy in Lisbon. Prominently displayed on the eggshell were the five shields of the Portuguese coat-of-arms. What made this egg extraordinary and worthy of the viceroy’s attention was, as the official explained, the fact that it had been laid that way.¹

In itself, this was a minor incident. The Milagro Gallinero – as Moura called the episode in his report to Philip III – caused a slight stir in the Portuguese capital, was briefly investigated, and then officially forgotten.² Nonetheless, the Milagro Gallinero was emblematic of the tangled political, religious, and personal currents in Portugal during the first years of the seventeenth century.

Upon examining the egg, Cristóvão de Moura noted that the coat-of-arms on the eggshell appeared to have been hand-painted. Consequently he ordered the arrest of the official who had brought him the egg. Questioned, the man revealed that he had purchased the mysterious item from a poor woman who told him of its extraordinary origins. Wondering what this marvel might mean, he had taken the egg to Lisbon’s monasteries for an interpretation. The Portuguese friars with whom he spoke agreed that a miracle had occurred and that it was an omen of things to come. After showing it to various people and explaining its portentous nature, he had brought it to the viceroy. Moura’s investigation apparently stopped here and the minor official was declared guiltless. As with the many incidents related to the Calabrian Charlatan, the viceroy’s inclination was to
ignore the whole episode; rumors, gossip, and other popular rumblings were best left to fade away. This must have required a great deal of forbearance on Moura’s part, for the Milagro Gallinero was a cleverly encoded assault on the viceroy himself and his position.

For someone like the viceroy, well versed in royal Portuguese iconography and recent events, the personal attack would have been obvious. The miraculous egg had the five shields of the Portuguese coat-of-arms adorning its shell,

...five shields in bright blue... And within the five shields, disposed in the form of a cross, [were depicted] in a different colour the thirty pieces of silver for which Christ was betrayed, five in each shield, the shield in the centre counting twice.

With the egg's delivery, Don Cristóvao de Moura – Portuguese nobleman and Spanish viceroy – had received his thirty pieces of silver for his central role in the annexation of Portugal some twenty-five years earlier.

While the symbolism within the coat-of-arms cast Moura (and a whole generation of the Portuguese nobility) in the role of Judas, the egg itself encoded a different story. As the traditional Easter symbol of rebirth and resurrection, the egg was meant to remind Moura that, like Judas’s betrayal of Jesus, his betrayal of the Portuguese nation was in vain. The messiah – O Desejado, O Encuberto, or Sebastian – might be missing, but he was not dead. Portugal would be reborn. And, nearly half a century later, it was. On 1 December 1640 a noble-led uprising in Lisbon began the rebellion that ended Spanish rule by placing the native Portuguese Duke of Braganza on the throne as King João IV of Portugal.
Notes

Abbreviations

AGS    Archivo General de Simancas
AHN    Archivo Histórico Nacional (Madrid)
ANTT   Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo (Lisbon)
ASVen  Archivio di Stato di Venezia
BNL    Biblioteca Nacional (Lisbon)
BNM    Biblioteca Nacional (Madrid)
STC    Short Title Catalogue

Prologue

3 AGS, Estado-K, legajo 1676, fols 164–164v (7 Nov 1598).
4 AGS, Estado-K, legajo 1676, fols 171–171v (25 Nov 1598); the descriptive phrase “charlatañ calabrés” occurs throughout the Spanish documentation on the case, not just here.

In English, the word “charlatan” has two primary senses. The first (dating to the early seventeenth century) is of an itinerant huckster who sells medicines of dubious efficacy; he does so by attracting a crowd in the streets and volubly proclaiming the alleged virtues of his remedies. The second (dating to the early nineteenth century) is an abstraction of the first; it describes any self-proclaimed and self-promoting expert – whether medical or not. Thus, in English, “charlatan” could now be used to describe anyone from a medical quack to a mere impostor. The English word derives, via French, from the Italian “ciarlutano”. While in English “charlatan” originally seems not to have had the non-medical sense of the word, Italian had both senses by the fifteenth century. Castilian (the language of the ambassador’s report) also had both senses of “charlatán” very early (there is some debate about whether or not Spanish also adopted the word from Italian). In the case of the “Calabrian Charlatan”, it is clear from the context of the archival documents that those who used the term meant the more abstract sense of the word: impostor, not medical quack. Note however, that in both Italian and Spanish, “ciarlutano” (deriving from “ciarlare”) and “charlatán” (deriving from “charlar”) have the connotation of chatterer, someone who prattles on mindlessly. Thus one might reasonably infer that the “Calabrian Charlatan” was a very talkative fellow.

128
Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, vol. 1 (New York: 1972), 21. In Braudel's work, as in much work from the French Annaliste school, history is as played out on three scales: first, long-term geological, climatological, and demographic processes which shape everything else; second, culture which plays an important but definitely secondary historical role; and third, specific events which, while they loom large to individuals, actually have little lasting impact.


8 Note that this is in stark contrast to scientific understanding, which seeks to eliminate detail through simplifying assumptions that generalize and abstract the real world. See Isaiah Berlin, “The Concept of Scientific History,” in *The Proper Study of Mankind: an Anthology of Essays* (New York: 1998), 17–58.

1 Sebastianism, Millenarianism, and Nationalism


3 As Habsburg Spain had taken on the defense of (western European) Christendom from the Protestant heretics and the Turkish infidels, Portugal had taken on the mission of taking Christianity to the rest of the world. For example, in *The Lusiads*, Camões describes Portugal’s King Sebastian as “sent by God to strike new terror into Moslem hearts and to win for the faith vast new regions of the earth”; Luis Vaz de Camões (Camoens), *The Lusiads*, trans. William C. Atkinson (Harmondsworth, England: 1952), 40 (Canto I, verse 6).

4 Michael Barkun has argued that “millenarian movements constitute, as it were, the artifacts of disaster;” such disasters can be natural, economic, social, political, or anything that severely disrupts the normal pattern of human lives. Michael Barkun, *Disaster and the Millennium* (New Haven: 1974), 55–6.

5 Although, as it turns out, many of the most vocal Sebastianists were from the regular clergy.

7 Peter Worsley has suggested that, in cases where a society is making the transition from pre-modern to modern forms, a millenarian movement may mature into a modern nationalist movement. Peter Worsley, *The Trumpet Shall Sound: a Study of “Cargo” Cults in Melanesia*, 2nd ed. (New York: 1968), 254–6.

8 The name of the town varies in the literature: Alcazar, Alcazarquivir, Alcacer Quibir, El-Ksar el-Kebir; I use modern Morocco’s official transliteration of the Arabic.

9 Asilah in Arabic.

10 The internal politics of Morocco provided Sebastian with his excuse to invade. He had been invited to intervene in Morocco by Abd el-Malek’s nephew – Mulai Mohammed – who claimed for himself the right to rule Morocco. Abd el-Malek’s attempt to buy off the Portuguese reflected his wish to avoid unnecessarily stirring up the various tribal factions and finding himself in the midst of a civil war. See Bovill, *Alcazar*, 19–42.

11 This identification was later described by João de Castro, an anti-Spanish Portuguese rebel, as an effort on the part of the captured Portuguese noblemen to deter the Moors from searching further for Sebastian, thus affording him a better opportunity to escape. João de Castro, *Discurso da vida do sempre bem vindo, et apparecido Rey Dom Sebastiam nosso senhor o Encuberto des do seu naçimêto tee o presente* (Paris: 1602), 28v–29.

12 One of the perquisites of being a medieval or early modern soldier was the opportunity to loot the bodies of the vanquished foe of weapons, clothing, money, jewelry, etc. During the *Reconquista*, victorious armies traditionally allotted the three days following a battle for this purpose; see, e.g., Camões, *Lusiads*, 86 (Canto III, verse 53). Note that in addition to the 16,000 soldiers, there were approximately 10,000 non-combatant camp followers.

13 This was a contemporary allusion; Castro, *Discurso*, 6–6v, 12v.


15 See Alfonso Danvila y Burguero, *Felipe II y la Sucesión de Portugal* (Madrid: 1956).

16 After the restoration of Portuguese independence in 1640, Sebastianism lost its specifically anti-Spanish nature, but survived as a more general millenarian movement which promised social and economic salvation for the Portuguese people.

17 The viceroy Cristóvão de Moura, although Portuguese by birth, was Spanish by education and career. Moura was especially embarrassed by the credulity of his people; AHN, Estado, libro 76, fol. 3 ([20 Sep 1600]).

18 Quoted in Bovill, *Alcazar*, 157; also see footnote 2 on the same page which notes that this remark is generally attributed to the Irish Lord Tyrrawley (this was James O’Hara, 1690–1773, who served as the English ambassador to Portugal from 1728 to 1741 and again in 1752). See also António Machado Pires, *D. Sebastião e o Encuberto: Estudo e Antologia*, 2nd ed. (Lisbon: 1982), 15. [Note continues . . .]
Note that “Don” is the Spanish honorific title equivalent to the English “Mister” which, during this period, was usually reserved for the upper classes; the same title in Portuguese is “Dom”. Throughout this work, “Don” is generally used for Spaniards and “Dom” for the Portuguese. Nonetheless, there are some exceptions. For instance, “Don Cristóvão de Moura” (see Chapter 4), was Portuguese by birth but Spanish by career and loyalties – hence, I have used the Spanish honorific with the Portuguese version of his name (in Spanish it would be “Cristóbal de Moura” and in English “Christopher of Moura”). In other cases (e.g., “Don Sebastian”) the usage of “Don” for a particular person is fairly well established in English.

19 Bovill, Alcazar, 155.
21 “E perguntamo-nos ainda se, no contexto social da época, a promoção do sebastianismo, em última instância, crença de raiz popular, não foi, ao menos parcialmente, uma tentativa de índole política destinada a dinamizar, de algum modo, a comparticipação do povo nos objectivos da Restauração, de natureza claramente aristocrática.” Joel Serrão, Do Sebastianismo ao Socialismo (s.l.: 1983), 19.

22 One reason for this may be – as the anthropologist Peter Worsley argues in a very different setting – that, as a form of protest, millenarianism always eventually gives way to secular forms and the millenarian movement itself becomes marginal (Worsley, Trumpet Shall Sound, xliii). In the Portuguese case, if we consider Sebastianism during the period from 1580 to 1640 as a form of millenarian protest, the main objective (i.e., securing Portugal’s independence from Spain) was achieved. Its major goal accomplished, and with many former supporters focused on newly important secular concerns (such as securing their place in an independent Portugal), Sebastianism became increasingly marginal as a force in Portuguese society. Thus the shift that Serrão notes in Sebastianism may not be a matter of the aristocrats dropping a suddenly useless tool, but instead simply a shift in their attention to more important matters.

23 Serrão, Sebastianismo, 14–32.
25 Fonseca, Dom Sebastião, II:25.

27 Encubertismo was the Portuguese popular belief in a warrior messiah known as O Encuberto – the Hidden One; see the section below on
“Millenarianism.” Note that the chronological borders between the different phases are not as abrupt as the dates make them appear. Also note that, except for Encubertismo, these are my labels; they are not standard in the Portuguese literature.

Richard Landes defines millenarianism as the belief that the “End of Time” is imminent and “that these final events will usher in a reign of Peace, Justice and Plenty here on Earth and that salvation for the Just will be collective and its rewards experienced while living in the flesh.” Richard Landes, “Lest the Millennium be fulfilled: Apocalyptic Expectations and the Pattern of Western Chronography 100–800 CE,” in The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages, ed. Werner Verbeke, Daniel Verhelst, and Andries Welkenhuysen (Leuven: 1988), 205–6.

29 Had the Portuguese formulated their aspirations in the philosophic language of the modern era – scientific progress, national sovereignty, and a democratic right to self-determination – Sebastianism would seem familiar; it would remind us of the anti-colonial rhetoric of the twentieth century.


31 For an argument that such movements were in fact anachronisms (and for other examples from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries), see E. J. Hobsbawm, Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movements in the 19th and 20th Centuries (New York: 1959).

32 Keith Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic (New York: 1971), 415–22. Thomas also briefly discusses the short-lived English parallel of Sebastianism in the late-sixteenth-century belief that Edward VI had not died and would return to save England from the Papists (and from those Anglicans who were not Puritan enough).

33 This legend was also applied to Barbarossa’s grandson Frederick II, see Robert E. Lerner, “Frederick II, Alive, Aloft, and Allayed, in Franciscan-Joachite Eschatology,” in The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages, ed. Werner Verbeke, Daniel Verhelst, and Andries Welkenhuysen (Leuven: 1988), 359–84.


35 For other northern European examples, see Cohn, Pursuit.


37 Or, as in the case of Sebastianism, the hero did return but failed to accomplish his mission. In 1584, 1585, 1595, and 1598 different men claiming to be King Sebastian appeared and gained a following; however, they were arrested by the Spanish before they could even begin to free the Portuguese from Spanish rule. In these cases and continuing into the nineteenth century, many Portuguese retained their belief in Sebastian-
ism in spite of its repeated disappointments. For a survey of the course of Sebastianism, see the classic account: J. Lúcio de Azevedo, _A evolução do Sebastianismo_, 2nd ed. (Lisbon: 1947).

38 One modern study argues that failure of prophecy often results in even more fervent belief in the group of core believers; Leon Festinger, Henry W. Riecken, and Stanley Schachter, _When Prophecy Fails: a Social and Psychological Study of a Modern Group that Predicted the Destruction of the World_ (Minneapolis: 1956).

39 Several nineteenth-century Portuguese scholars saw a close connection between the legends of King Arthur and King Sebastian. However, this is not much emphasized in more recent works which tend to feature, instead, the millenarian Christian roots. See, J. P. Oliveira Martins, “O Sebastianismo,” in _História de Portugal_, vol. 2, book 4 (Lisbon: 1879; 11th ed. 1927), 80; for a more detailed look at the Celtic origins of Portuguese popular beliefs and customs, see Teófilo Braga, _O povo português nos seus costumes, crenças e tradições_, 2 vols (Lisbon: 1885).


41 José Veiga Torres, “O tempo colectivo progressivo e a contestação sebastianista,” _Revista de História das Ideias_ 6 (1984): 223–58. Note that Torres does not argue that the sophisticated and abstract notions in Joachim’s writings became part of popular messianic movements in their original, pure, and intellectual forms. Like many ideas that are taken out of their original context, Joachim’s were changed and distorted by confusion, incomplete understanding, ignorance, conflation with other ideas, and reinterpretation to fit local circumstances. Nonetheless, an influential core of Joachim’s thought can be found in later millenarian movements, including Sebastianism.

42 Joachim of Fiore divided history into three ages, following the Trinitarian nature of the Godhead: the Age of the Father, the Age of the Son, and the Age of the Spirit. Each age lasted 42 generations (counted with Biblical genealogy from Adam to Christ), with a vague transition period in between; this meant, for Joachim and his contemporaries, that the Age of the Spirit was imminent. See Reeves, _Influence of Prophecy_, 16–27.

43 Torres, “O tempo colectivo”, 225. However, as Ottavia Niccoli has observed: “If God is the lord of history and of the cosmos, to seek in the _orríbeli segnali_ of nature and in the voices of the prophets signs of his judgment of human history becomes at once a scientific, political, and religious process.” Ottavia Niccoli, _Prophecy and People in Renaissance Italy_ (Princeton: 1990), xvi.

44 St. Isidore was the Visigothic Archbishop of Seville, ca. 570–636.

45 This was part of the _Germanias_ revolt in Valencia from 1519 to 1528. See Ricardo García Cárcel, _Las Germanías de Valencia_ (Barcelona: 1975), 95–9 (chronology), 132–9 (El encubertismo); García Cárcel notes that, following
the first man, at least four other men in Valencia took on the role of *El Encubierto*.


48 An isolated mountain village located in the province of Beira, about 40 km north of Guarda.

49 *Bandarra* translates from Portuguese as loafer or idler.

50 A reputation for a “prodigious memory” may also have implied some connection to magical powers. If so, such a memory may have given Bandarra’s poems an aura of authority, whether religious or occult. See Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: 1966).

51 The New Christians were Portuguese and Spaniards of Jewish ancestry. Following their (often forcible) conversion to Christianity in the late-fifteenth century, they and their descendants had not been allowed to integrate fully into Iberian Christian society.

52 Trova LXXVIII, reprinted in Pires, *D. Sebastião*, 133:

> Um grão Leão se ergerá,  
> E dará grandes bramidos:  
> Seus brados serão ouvidos,  
> E a todos assombrará;  
> Correrá, e morderá  
> E fará mui grandes damnos,  
> E nos Reinos Africanos  
> A todos sugeitará.


54 St. Sebastian’s day is 20 January.

55 “... aa mesma hora que lhes tinha dado seu filho vnigenito pera os liurar do catiuheiro do Diabo; lhes deu hú Príncipe pera os liurar do de Castella.” Castro, *Discurso*, 4.

56 As José Veiga Torres describes it, Sebastianism is Joachimism nationalized. Torres, “O tempo colectivo,” 257.

57 “Discourse on the Life of the King Don Sebastian of Portugal.”

58 Castro, *Discurso*, 1 (title page), 2–3. Note that it is impossible to say what percentage or precisely which segments of the Portuguese population believed in Sebastianism. However, Castro was calling upon all Portuguese, of all three estates (presumably this was everyone born and raised in Portugal); also, as we shall see in later chapters, belief in Sebastianism was widespread enough to influence events.


60 “Viua, Viua a Patria, & os coraçôens generosos della, que nenhûa outra cousa respeitarem que seu Deos, seu Rey & sua honra: deixando a seus descendêtes o que lhes deixaram seus antepasados.” Castro, *Discurso*, 129v.
As Keith Thomas shows for England, there was a long European tradition of using ancient prophecies and popular beliefs for political purposes; see Thomas, Religion, 389–432.

Castro, Discurso, 43. Castro himself identified 1586 as the year of his first serious interest in the prophecies and rumors surrounding Sebastian; it may have been chosen to demonstrate his early Sebastianist convictions. Still, the date is plausible. Certainly Castro was interested by 1588 and had delved into the subject.

The belief, shared with nationalists, was “that nations have existed from time immemorial, though often in prolonged slumber.” Hence, for them nations seemed to be natural units of political-social division, needing little explanation. Anthony D. Smith, National Identity (Reno: 1991), 43.

For a sampling of treatments of all these questions, see John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, eds., Nationalism (Oxford: 1994).

As Eric Hobsbawm somewhat fancifully states: “[An intergalactic historian], after some study, will conclude that the last two centuries of the human history of planet Earth are incomprehensible without some understanding of the term ‘nation’ and the vocabulary derived from it. This term appears to express something important in human affairs. But what exactly?” Eric J. Hobsbawm, Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality (Cambridge: 1990), 1.

Students of nationalism can be roughly divided into two major groups; Gellner and Greenfeld are representative and will be the only ones discussed in any detail here. The first group (e.g., Ernest Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm, Benedict Anderson) believes that nationalism is an absolutely modern phenomenon with origins in the economic and material changes wrought by the Industrial Revolution. The second group (e.g., Liah Greenfeld, Anthony Smith, William Hutchinson) agrees that nationalism is primarily a modern phenomenon, but explains its origins in other ways.

Identities may be based on, *inter alia*, ancestry, ethnicity, occupation, religion, region, or village.


Greenfeld, *Nationalism*, 3.

“In brief, nationalism is a theory of political legitimacy, which requires that ethnic boundaries should not cut across political ones…” Gellner, *Nations*, 1.

While it might be argued that the millenarian terms mark a fundamental difference between Sebastianism and nationalism, they really do not. Nationalists of all periods are quick to clothe their rhetoric in the language most effective at inspiring and mobilizing their “people”.

While Gellner does “not [deny] that the agrarian world occasionally threw up units which may have resembled a modern national state,” his theory says nothing about how they originated or how they “resembled” modern national states. Gellner, *Nations*, 138.


MacCaffrey notes that opposition to Mary was so widespread that, had she ascended the English throne, civil war would have been almost certain; MacCaffrey, *Making of Policy*, 445.


An interesting difference between Elizabeth and Castro is that Elizabeth’s actions in this case were probably meant to prevent the direct, active, and potentially destabilizing participation of the people in English politics. In contrast, Castro set out to actively draw them in, hoping to incite a widespread anti-Spanish rebellion in Portugal.


These relationships can be personal or abstract (for example, a person’s relationship with the state or the church). As Benedict Anderson notes,
many of the communities to which we belong are “imagined” in that the relationships between the members of the community are not built upon personal contact, but instead upon common experiences and outlooks; see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: 1991).

88 Most people find it difficult to switch on and off different facets of their identities, especially if these are implicitly in conflict. Each time a person invokes a specific facet of his identity, it becomes incrementally stronger. Psychologically, the person has made a commitment to that identity. Furthermore, if the commitment was public, social expectations and pressures reinforce the need to maintain the commitment and to behave consistently. Thus, each person builds up a legacy of the choices he has made and generally finds it difficult to escape that legacy.

89 Although national identity is sometimes expressed in non-territorial terms (for example, linguistic, ethnic, religious), each of these can be mapped into a well-defined territory. Note that the size of territory is irrelevant; it is possible to conceive of Venetian, Italian, and European nationalisms.

The nature of the link between nationalism and the state varies and divides nationalisms into two basic categories: unifying and divisive. Unifying nationalisms generally have a close link to an already established state; they can work on unifying multiple states into one (the German model, in which Prussia was the core) or merging multiple nationalities into one (the French model). A divisive nationalism seeks to separate the group it represents from a state in which it feels it has no stake and establish its own state (the Austro-Hungarian model, in which various nationalisms plagued the empire).

90 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

91 For how ordinary people did shape politics in this period, see Wayne te Brake, *Shaping History: Ordinary People in European Politics, 1500–1700* (Berkeley, 1998).

92 In this context, consider the highjackings and suicide attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001. In the immediate aftermath, there was a widespread outpouring of American patriotism and increased national solidarity. Only time (and the course of subsequent events) will tell if these attacks helped create a generation of ‘Americans’ out of the various fragmented and bickering groups of hyphenated-Americans.


94 In Portuguese society Sebastianism behaved in just this way: it was a normally quiescent substratum of Portuguese culture that occasionally erupted during economic, social, or political crises.

95 For a collection of essays on nations as “chosen” people, see William R. Hutchison and Hartmut Lehmann, eds., *Many Are Chosen: Divine Election & Western Nationalism* (Minneapolis: 1994).

As in nationalist movements, a millenarian movement sometimes takes on a more active form and is led by a messianic figure (for example, in Münster during the Reformation). The difference is that the leader of this sort of movement is a kind of John the Baptist, charged with preparing for the arrival of the messiah, but unable in himself to usher in the new age.

Note that, like most categorizations of this type, the boundaries between the categories are not crisp; in any given period adjacent categories often overlap each other. Also note that why this transition occurred is beyond the scope of this study. Still, we can speculate that the Lutheran notion of “the priesthood of the believer” may have played an important role in this transition since it enabled individuals to act for themselves in religious matters, without having to seek the mediation of the Church – essentially an aspect of religious sovereignty was transferred from the Church to the individual Christian.

This is not always successful. Much of the history of nationalism is that of one nationality seeking to absorb, control, or destroy other nationalities.

Bernard Lewis points out that, in the Middle East, God is still sovereign and that this is why nationalism has constantly failed there: “In the secularization of the West, God was twice dethroned and replaced – as the source of sovereignty by the people, as the object of worship by the nation. Both of these ideas were alien to Islam …”. Bernard Lewis, What Went Wrong? Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response (Oxford, 2002), 106.

Although the nationalist sentiment is not new, modern forms of nationalism exist in a different context: first, nearly all politicians and other political activists are aware of national sentiments and actively seek to manipulate them; second, the modern technology of warfare is such that anyone can acquire the means for killing large numbers of people – thus allowing ever-smaller groups to demand sovereignty; and, third (acting somewhat in opposition to the second point), because of the speed and extent of modern communications, nations can be built from much larger groups of people.

2 The new chosen people

“He minha vôtade edificar sobre ti & sobre tua geração depois de ti, hû Imperio pera mim, pera que o meu nome seja leuado a gentes estranhas.” Afonso Henriques, “Copia do iuramento que El Rey Dom Afonso Henriques primeiro Rey de Portugal, fez em Cortes no anno de mil & cento & cincoenta & dous sobre a visão que vio núa reuelação que teue no
Campo de Ourique, estando pera pelejar com cinco Reys Mouros,” 133v; in João de Castro, Discurso da vida do sempre bem vindo, et apparecido Rey Dom Sebastiam nosso senhor o Encuberto des do seu naçimeto teo o presente (Paris: 1602), 131–135v. See the discussion below on the Battle of Ourique.

2 These were: 1. the King of Penamacor, 1584; 2. the King of Ericeira, 1585; 3. the Pastry-Maker of Madrigal, 1594–95; and, 4. the Calabrian Charlatan, 1598–1603. On all four, see Miguel d’Antas, Les Faux Don Sébastiens (Paris: 1866); on the Pastry-Maker of Madrigal, see Mary Elizabeth Brooks, A King for Portugal: the Madrigal Conspiracy, 1594–95 (Madison: 1964).

3 “…que no a auido charlatan mas necio ni que tan sin fundamento se aya atreuido a semejante chucarrera…” AGS, Estado-K, legajo 1676, fol. 164v (7 Nov 1598).

4 AGS, Estado-K, legajo 1676, fols 164–4v (7 Nov 1598).


6 For example, the Portuguese scholar Jorge de Macedo notes that the Portuguese considered themselves “‘escolhidos’ para o extraordinário empreendimento da descoberta do caminho marítimo para a Índia;” see Jorge Borges de Macedo, Um Caso de Luta Pelo Poder e a Sua Interpretação n’‘Os Lusíadas’’ (Lisbon: 1976), 13.

7 O Padrão dos Descobrimentos; located in Belém, near the Torre de Belém. While this monument was erected in the twentieth century and reflects a modern Portuguese sensibility of a glorious Portuguese past, it is an appropriate representation of a sixteenth-century Portuguese sensibility as well. One has only to read The Lusiads and other sixteenth-century Portuguese literature to confirm this.

8 Luis Vaz de Camões (Camoens), The Lusiads, trans. William C. Atkinson (Harmondsworth, England: 1952), 163–4 (Canto VII, verse 14). All references to The Lusiads will use this translated edition; however, canto and verse will be provided as well for those who wish to turn to the original Portuguese text.

9 “…there are…at least two histories: that of collective memory and that of historians. The first appears as essentially mythic, deformed, and anachronistic. But it constitutes the lived reality of the never-completed relation between present and past.” Jacques Le Goff, History and Memory (New York: 1992), 111. The history that we must deal with here is the “mythic, deformed, and anachronistic” history of the Portuguese of the late sixteenth century.

10 For the origins of this idea in western civilization, see Norman Cohn, Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come: the Ancient Roots of Apocalyptic Faith (New Haven: 1993), esp. 143–4. In his fictionalized account of the popular movement at Canudos in Brazil in the 1890s (the last major manifestation of Sebastianism) and the resulting massacre, Mario Vargas Llosa made a similar point quite elegantly: “The Little Blessed One knows how to decipher the symbols, to interpret the secret message of
the coincidences, accidents, apparent happenstances that pass unnoticed by the others; he has powers of intuition that enable him to recognize instantly, beneath the innocent and the trivial, the deeply hidden presence of the beyond.” The War of the End of the World (Barcelona: 1981; English translation and reprint, New York: 1997), 509.

11 As early as the twelfth century the Calabrian Abbot Joachim of Fiore believed that scriptural exegesis “could be applied not simply for moral and dogmatic purposes but as a means of understanding and forecasting the development of history.” By the sixteenth century, scripture was not the only historical document so used. See Norman Cohn, The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages (revised and expanded ed. New York: 1961), 108.


14 Macedo, Luta Pelo Poder, 11, 16–22.

15 See the discussion in the previous chapter of identity, national or otherwise, as the process of strengthening certain strands of identity and weakening others. Also, note that The Lusiads is simply used as a framework through which we can conveniently examine some of the anti-Spanish strands of sixteenth-century Portuguese identities.

16 This is not an argument that this was the dominant nature of Portuguese identity, only that these elements were present. For some individuals, political, economic, or social circumstances rendered these elements nearly irrelevant; for others, different circumstances placed these elements at the center of their identities.

17 Camoens does give some play to the legend that the Portuguese (the Lusitanians) descended from Lusus, son or companion of Bacchus; however, even for Camoens this is distant myth, not history. Camoens, Lusíads, 80 (Canto III, verse 21).

18 Also known as the Battle of Tours.

19 Asturias is a mountainous region on the north-central coast of Spain.

20 Most of the factual account of the Reconquista and medieval Portuguese history is drawn from the works of Derek W. Lomax, The Reconquest of Spain (London: 1978); H. V. Livermore, A History of Portugal (Cambridge: 1947); and, Alexandre Herculano, História de Portugal (Lisbon: 1846). Note that Lomax’s study has the virtue of being one of the few which includes the entire Iberian peninsula.

21 Thomas F. Glick, Islamic and Christian Spain in the Early Middle Ages (Princeton: 1979), 166. This term continues to be used in the twentieth century. During the Franco era, the law required people in Spain to speak in cristiano. However, in this case it did not encompass all of the Latin-based languages of Iberia, but was reduced to Castilian. See “Catalan Zeal,” Economist (20–26 September 1997): 54–5.

22 In Spanish, these rivers are the Miño and the Duero.
23 Tejo (Portuguese); Tajo (Spanish).
24 For the religious foundation of Portuguese society in the twelfth century, see Joaquim Veríssimo Serrão, Estado, Pátria e Nação (1080–1415), vol. 1, História de Portugal, 5th ed. (Lisbon: 1992), 215–16. More generally, note that many of the great noble houses of early modern Iberia owed their lands and power to the conquest of Muslim territory during this period – political power was built on Christianizing and repopulating the frontier; Bernard F. Reilly, The Contest of Christian and Muslim Spain, 1031–1157 (Oxford: 1992), 239–40.
25 This story led to the Portuguese reputation for loyalty to both their king and their honor which, in the sixteenth century, was considered a major feature of the Portuguese national character. For instance, while the Spanish ruled in Portugal, the Spanish viceroy repeatedly reassured King Philip III of the natural loyalty of the Portuguese people for their king. In one of his letters the viceroy wrote of “la fydelydad y amor côque siguen a sus reyes” (the loyalty and love with which [the Portuguese] follow their kings); AHN, libro 77, fol. 1v (17 Jun [1600]).
26 Camoens, Lusiads, 83 (Canto III, verses 34). The supposed presence of the Castilians at Guimarães is even more striking when one considers that, following his account of this key battle, Camoens dropped the Castilians and returned to historical accuracy by naming the Leonese as the enemies of Afonso and Portugal; see Camoens, Lusiads, 88 (Canto III, verse 70). As one historian notes of the Balkans: “Nationalist violence knows no eternal enemy. The current enemy is always eternal.”; see Misha Glenny, The Balkans: Nationalism, War and the Great Powers 1804–1999 (New York: 1999), 247.
28 Defeat could also be interpreted as a sign of divine favor. For instance, one anti-Spanish propagandist argued in 1602 that with the Spanish annexation of Portugal in 1580, God was obviously punishing the Portuguese in order to instruct them; in fact, God had always chosen the weak to serve His purposes. Castro, Discurs, 30v–33.
29 Cf. Constantine’s vision of the cross prior to his victory in battle.
30 Camoens, Lusiads, 84–6 (Canto III, verses 42–52).
32 See the discussion below on the Battle of Aljubarrota in 1385.
33 António José Saraiva, O Crepúsculo da Idade Média em Portugal (Lisbon: 1990), 163–6. For a detailed look at the medieval sources of the legend of Ourique and the close connection to Castilian sources, see Luís Filipe Lindley Cintra, “Sobre a formação e evolução da lenda de Ourique (até à Crónica de 1419),” in Miscelânea de estudos em honra do Prof. Hernãni Cidade (Lisbon: 1957), 168–215.
34 Camoens, Lusiads, 86 (Canto III, verses 53–4); for the 1419 version of this see Saraiva, Crepúsculo, 165; for a very early seventeenth-century version, see José Teixeira, Adventvre Admiraile, par dessvs tovtes autres des siecles passez & present (Paris: 1601), 39, 52–3.

For some early seventeenth-century examples, see Teixeira, *Adventure Admirable*, 36–40; also see Castro, *Discurso*, 131–5v.

See Teixeira, *Adventure Admirable*, 42–5, 53. Also, recall that the story claiming divine support for Afonso probably appeared in the late fourteenth century; however, even if the legend of the vision originated in Afonso’s time, the Portuguese king would have been unlikely to leave matters entirely in God’s hands and would have sought more worldly support as well; in any case, the choice of the Pope as feudal overlord was only appropriate for a divinely appointed king.

This was important during the succession crisis in 1580 (following Sebastian’s death) since it gave the anti-Spanish party in Portugal an acceptable reason to elect their own native Portuguese candidate: Dom António.


This desire to continue expanding at the expense of Islam extended well into the sixteenth century. For example, although opposed by some court factions, King Manuel I (reigned 1495–1521) had a “strong Messianic streak” and considered Portuguese expansion in Africa and Asia as a means of attacking Islam from the rear; see Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Career and Legend of Vasco da Gama* (Cambridge: 1997), 54–7.

Camoens, *Lusiads*, 102 (Canto IV, verse 3).


Camoens, *Lusiads*, 104 (Canto IV, verse 13).


The town grew up around the Mosteiro da Batalha (Monastery of the Battle) built there by João in celebration of his victory at Aljubarrota. Following World War I, the Portuguese put that most nationalist of shrines, a Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, in the chapterhouse.

Note that the legend of the Battle of Ourique was apparently concocted in this period, sometime before 1420.

The Algarve is the southernmost province of Portugal.


Camoens, *Lusiads*, 111 (Canto IV, verse 49).

This betrays an almost Calvinist sensibility about divine election. However, for the Portuguese the signs of election were collective, not individual.


As Diffie and Winius note of the empire: “the government of Portuguese Asia was notorious for its corruption.” *Foundations*, 419.

this was the famous grandfather of the João de Castro who figures so prominently in the history of the Calabrian Charlatan.

For instance, as early as the 1540s four of the Portuguese forts in Morocco were abandoned. Diffie and Winius, *Foundations*, 282.

The Red Sea was a vital link for Muslim traders in the movement of spices from India to commercial centers in Egypt. This way only a short portion of the journey was overland, thus greatly reducing costs. Diffie and Winius, *Foundations*, 415–8.

Camoens, *Lusiads*, 248 (Canto X, verse 150). For some Portuguese, the Spanish occupation in 1580 was interpreted as another such punishment; Castro, *Discurso*, 30v–33.


In 1572 Sebastian was only eighteen years old, but already he personified the prescription Camoens proposed for Portugal’s ills: a return to the heroism of the past by engaging the Moors once again in battle. António Belard da Fonseca, *Dom Sebastião: Antes e Depois de Alcácer-Quibir* (Lisbon: 1978–79), 1:31–72.


### 3 Venice: Portuguese King or Calabrian Charlatan?


2 “El mal creduto Rei de Portugal.” AGS, Estado-K, legajo 1677 (11 Jul 1598).

3 “empia sorte.”


5 From 1593 to 1599, Portugal was ruled by a council of five governors; these were Miguel de Castro (Archbishop of Lisbon), João da Silva (4th Count of Portalegre), Francisco Mascarenhas, Duarte Castelo Branco (Count of Sabugal), and Miguel de Moura. See Joaquim Veríssimo Serrão, *Governo dos Reis Espanhóis* (1580–1640), 2nd ed., vol. 4, *História de Portugal* (Lisbon: 1990), 41–2. Were the three days of mourning to match the three days elapsed between Christ’s death and his resurrection?


7 These were the Sé, (probably) the *Rua Nova do Almada*, and what is now the *Praga Dom Pedro IV*.

8 “...choray choray pouo pello uosso bom Rey dom felipe que he morto e uos governo. 18. annos em pas e com m[a]Justa...”; Soares, *Memorial*, 353.


10 “Barbaria” (North Africa); “il golfo di Venezia” (the Adriatic Sea).

11 This was the report (“si era levata una publica voce”, “Ciò sulle prime aveva fatto una grande impressione”) of Francesco Soranzo, the Venetian
ambassador to Madrid; while apparently not a first-hand witness to the reaction in Portugal, that reaction was apparently strong enough to have been reported and achieved notice in Madrid. Toderini, “Finto Don Sebastiano,” 2.

12 Toderini, “Finto Don Sebastiano,” 2.

13 The Terreiro do Paço (Palace Square) was an important public gathering place in sixteenth-century Lisbon. Soares, Memorial, 353–4.

14 Unfortunately, I have found little information on the man’s immediate supporters in Venice, whether Venetian or Portuguese.

15 ASVen, Collegio, Exposizioni Principi, filza 10 (17 Nov 1598). Also, AGS, Estado-K, legajo 1676, fol. 171 (25 Nov 1598). In addition to various printed sources, this chapter is based on four main archival foundations: (1) ASVen, C.X., Parti Secrete – minutes of the secret deliberations of the Venetian Council of Ten; (2) ASVen, Senato, Parti Secrete – minutes of the secret deliberations of the Venetian Senate; (3) ASVen, Collegio, Exposizioni Principi – transcripts of presentations by outsiders before the Venetian Senate; and, (4) AGS, Estado and Estado-K, the reports of the Spanish ambassador back to Madrid, the replies he received, and summaries prepared for the Spanish Consejo de Estado.

16 ASVen, C.X., Parti Secrete, filza 26 (22 Oct 1598). The Council of Ten was a group of ten men, generally charged by the doge and the ducal Council with undertaking “matters whose urgency and secrecy made seem undesirable consultation with any larger council.” In 1582–83, the Council of Ten became less involved in foreign and financial affairs (these were taken over by the Senate); it began, instead, to deal more with guarding the constitution, spying, counter-espionage, and criminal matters. Most of the material in this chapter on the structure and politics of the Venetian state was drawn from Frederic C. Lane, Venice: a Maritime Republic (Baltimore: 1973).

17 The Rettori were the Venetian officials who oversaw the local governing councils in the cities of the mainland.

18 ASVen, C.X., Parti Secrete, filza 26 (23 Oct 1598 and 24 Oct 1598). Note that many of these documents are summarized in ASVen, C.X., Parti Secrete, registro 14, fols 81–2.

19 This was essentially the council of ministers that ran Venice on a daily basis; it consisted of the Signoria (the doge, the six ducal councillors, and the three Capii dei Quarantia) and the three groups of Savii (Savii del Consiglio or Savii Grandi, Savii di Terra Ferma, and Savii ai Ordini).

20 “furfante.”

21 “bestial humore.”

22 Philip II, Philip III’s father, was Sebastian’s uncle.

23 “maligna et triste machinatione.” ASVen, Collegio, Exposizioni Principi, filza 10 (7 Nov 1598).

24 ASVen, Collegio, Exposizioni Principi, filza 10 (7 Nov 1598).

25 This was not merely a position taken for the benefit of the Venetians; in his report of 7 November to Philip III (essentially the same as his presen-
tion to the Collegio), Mendoza wrote “que no [h]a [h]auído charlatan mas necío ni que tan sin fundamento se [h]aya atreuido a semejante chucarrería.” AGS, Estadó-K, legajo 1676, fol. 164v (7 Nov 1598).


27 These false Sebastians had appeared earlier in Spain and Portugal: the King of Penamacor (1584), the King of Ericeira (1585), and the Pastry-Maker of Madrigal (1594–95). All were quickly arrested and punished by the Spanish authorities. See, inter alia, Miguel d’Antas, Les Faux Don Sébastiens (Paris: 1866), books 2 and 3.

28 AGS, Estadó-K, legajo 1676, fols 164v, 166 (both 7 Nov 1598).

29 ASVen, C.X., Parti Secrete, filza 26 (7 Nov 1598).

30 The Avvogadori di Comun were in charge of all cases involving the interests of the Commune; “giusto et conueniente.”

31 ASVen, Senato, Parti Secrete, filza 69 (7 Nov 1598).

32 “qualche disturbo in Portugallo.”

33 “venne qua mezzo ignudo, et senza nessun seguito, adesso lui si trova Regiamente vestito . . ., magna et beve opulentemente et mena seco una buona compagnia di altri furfanti.” ASVen, Collegio, Exposizioni Principi, filza 10 (17 Nov 1598).

34 “perpetua pace”; ASVen, Collegio, Exposizioni Principi, filza 10 (17 Nov 1598).

35 The phrase “per l’amor di Dio” translates literally as “for the love of God”, but has a mild expletive connotation in Italian. ASVen, Collegio, Exposizioni Principi, filza 10 (17 Nov 1598).

36 ASVen, Senato, Parti Secrete, filza 69 (all three 17 Nov 1598).

37 AGS, Estadó-K, legajo 1676, fol. 174v (5 Dec 1598).

38 These were Bernardino de Santi, Pasqualino Morosini, Gerolamo Santa Giustina, Silvestro Santa Giustina, Gerolamo di Migliori, and Ruggiero di Scudi. Subsequently, Prospero Baracco and Alessandro Bonis were arrested as well. However, on 16 and 29 January 1599 the Senate ordered the release of all these men (except, apparently, Silvestro Santa Giustina – his fate is unknown). On both the arrests and the releases, see Toderini, “Finto Don Sebastiano,” 9; on the arrests, see also AGS, Estadó-K, legajo 1676, fol. 172 (28 Nov 1598).

39 “facoltà di ritenere, costituire, torturare”; for the arrests and the commission, see Toderini, “Finto Don Sebastiano,” 8–9. The commission consisted of Bertucci Bondumier (consigliere), Alvise Basadonna (Capo di quaranta), Pietro Rimondo (Avvogador di Comun), and Marco Querini (censor).


41 Unfortunately, the Venetian documentation on the inquiry has apparently not survived. See Toderini, “Finto Don Sebastiano,” 9, footnote 1. See, for example, AGS, Estadó-K, legajo 1676, fols 232–232v (20 Jul 1599).
Also known as Estêvão Caveira; see João de Castro, *Discurso da vida do sempre bem vindo, et apparecido Rey Dom Sebastian nosso senhor o Encuberto des do seu naçimêto teo presente* (Paris: 1602), 46–46v, 56, 79; José Teixeira, *Adventure Admirable, par dessus toutes autres des siecles passez & present* ([Lyon]: 1601), 69; AGS, Estado, legajo 972 (15 Nov 1599, 22 Nov 1599, and 8 Dec 1599); AGS, Estado-K, legajo 1677, doc. 16 (5 Feb 1600); and, Soares, *Memorial*, 366.


The vicar general was the famous Fra Luis de Granada. On this incident see João Francisco Marques, *A Parenética Portuguesa e a Dominação Filipina* (Oporto: 1986), 64, footnote 13; in the same book, the source document (III) has been transcribed, pp. 405–8, esp. 407.


AGS, Estado, legajo 972 (15 Nov 1599).


AGS, Estado, legajo 972 (15 Nov 1599 and 8 Dec 1599).

“yo quisiera... mostrar la falsedad desta Inbención falsa.”

“per Deum viuum et ordines sacros”; AGS, Estado, legajo 972 (8 Dec 1599). Note that this bit of news could have been a rumor manufactured to support the more general rumors of Sebastian’s return.

Soares, *Memorial*, 366–7. However, note that I have found no evidence of such an improvement (or even change) in the prisoner’s living conditions in Venetian sources.


Teixeira, *Adventure Admirable*, 66–70. Sampaio wrote as well to other Portuguese exiles, asking them to get help from both France and England; see Castro, *Discurso*, 58–9.


The Azores islands were the one Portuguese possession that steadfastly remained loyal to Dom António following his defeat at Alcântara; the Spanish finally overcame António’s forces and forced the islands into
submission in the summer of 1583. The Jesuit was Faustino de Mayorga; Marques, Parenética, 80.

59 “nescitis quid petátis Potestis, bibere calicem: quem ego bibiturus sum? Dicunt ei, possumus”; quoted in Marques, Parenética, 80–1. This text was Matthew 20:22 (or Mark 10:38–9).

60 “o que o padre não pregou nem tratou senão do Evangelho: o que todos já sabeis: é disto que tanto vos importa saber e fazer nada disse”; quoted in Marques, Parenética, 81.

61 “os Reis Magos”; quoted in Marques, Parenética, 82.

62 “lutheranos hespanhós e castelhanos”; quoted in Marques, Parenética, 84. Presumably the “Spanish Lutherans” were Protestant German soldiers.

63 “como bons christãos e subditos”; quoted in Marques, Parenética, 84.


65 This popular acclamation occurred at Santarém on 19 July 1580, the day after news of a Spanish invasion had arrived in the city (actually, the news was not quite true, for the Spanish crossed the frontier a few days later). See Serrão, Século de Ouro, 88.

66 Teixeira was actually captured by the Spanish in 1583 when they finally conquered the Azores. The friar was taken to Lisbon and jailed; however, he soon escaped and made his way to France.


68 Castro, Discuso, 49.

69 Teixeira, Adventure Admirable, 3–7.

70 This was the contemporary English title: José Teixeira, The Strangest Adventure that ever happened: either in the ages passed or present. London: 1601. [STC #23864]. It would have been better translated as something like “The More Wondrous Adventure than All Others”.

71 Estévão de Sampaio, “Oracle Divin, digne d’estre pvblié et scév par tout le monde, imprimé à Lisbone en Latin, aucu permission du Saint Office, l’an MDC,” in Teixeira, Adventure Admirable, 35–49. Note that, according to the title, this was originally published in Lisbon in 1600; in addition, since it was in Latin and purported to be a simple collection of ancient documents and prophecies (unconnected to current politics), Sampaio seems to have obtained official permission to publish. Also note that this work was probably the “diuinum oraculum nunc Jure in orbem terrarum diuulgandum” described by Íñigo de Mendoza in one of his dispatches to Madrid; AGS, Estado-K, legajo 1677 (23 Sep 1600).

72 Sampaio, “Oracle Divin”, 37; the account of Gideon’s victory is in Judges 6:36–8:21.

73 This vision had a typical folkloric three-part structure: first, Afonso dreamt of an old man who promised him victory and told him that he would later see Christ; second, Afonso was awakened and then visited by
the same man who elaborated upon his previous message; third (the most important part), Afonso left the Portuguese camp and saw and spoke with Christ on the cross; however, this structure is of little relevance here and, therefore, has been glossed over.

74 “. . . establir vn Empire en vous & en vostre posterité, afin que mon nom soit diuulgué & augmenté és plus lointaines nations. . . . Ce me sera vn Royaume sanctifié, pur en la foy, & aimant pieté.”; Sampaio, “Oracle Divin,” 39.


77 “Au tèps de 54. années se leuera vn Soleil, &c. Et ce Soleil sera caché. . . . Puis il viendra à triompher du monde.”; Sampaio, “Oracle Divin,” 47. This was Cyril of Constantinople who became the prior general of the Palestinian Carmelites in 1232 and died ca. 1235. However, note that he was often confused with St. Cyril of Alexandria and St. Cyril of Jerusalem; also, his fame came primarily from his association with the Oraculum of St. Cyril in Joachimite writings. For Cyril’s connection to Joachim of Fiore, see Marjorie Reeves, The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages: a Study in Joachimism (Oxford: 1969), 57, passim.

78 Teixeira, Adventure Admirable, 57.

79 “Un Roy occulte deux fois pieusement donné . . .” Sampaio, “Oracle Divin,” 47–8. St. Isidore of Seville lived from ca. 560 to 636. Coincidentally he was canonized in 1598, the year that the Calabrian Charlatan made his appearance.

80 Teixeira, Adventure Admirable, 58.


82 Teixeira, Adventure Admirable, 53; Sampaio, “Oracle Divin,” 43.


84 Some Portuguese, knowing this to be the case, strove to prove their loyalty to King Philip III. For instance, sometime during the first half of 1599 a Portuguese Capuchin preacher based in Modena – Fray Zacarias – wrote to and visited Mendoza. Earlier, this friar had received a letter from another Portuguese Capuchin in Venice, telling him of the apparent return of King Sebastian. Highly suspicious, Zacarias decided to investigate. Although not allowed to see the prisoner, the friar was satisfied with Mendoza’s arguments and evidence; in July he wrote a letter to Philip denouncing the false Sebastian. AGS, Estado-K, legajo 1676, fols 232–232v (20 Jul 1599).

85 AGS, Estado-K, legajo 1677, doc. 16 (5 Feb 1600). Mendoza’s knowledge of the Portuguese friar’s [Sampaio’s] correspondence with the Venetian judge [Querini] probably came from a dispatch from the Duke of Sessa in Rome which contained two intercepted letters which he had been given by a Portuguese named Mathias da Silva; one of the letters was from Sampaio to Querini; the other was a letter of introduction for Sampaio written by Thome de Sousa in Lisbon to Mathias da Silva in
Rome; see AGS, Estado, legajo 972 (27 Jan 1600 with included intercepted letters of 22 Nov 1599 and 26 Nov 1599).

This was Mathias da Silva, the Archdeacon of Neiva; see previous note.

“para se ver a falsidade desse homem.”

AGS, Estado, legajo 972 (15 Nov 1599).

AGS, Estado, legajo 972 (19 Apr 1600).

Diuinum oraculum nunc Jure in orbum terrarum diuulgandum

“epistola persuasoria.”

“sencillo”; AGS, Estado-K, legajo 1677, doc. 66 (23 Sep 1600).

AGS, Estado-K, legajo 1677, doc. 28 (8 May 1600). Note that this was actually de Vera’s reappointment to the position of ambassador in Venice – de Vera was also Mendoza’s predecessor.

AGS, Estado-K, legajo 1677, docs 74 and 79 (16 Nov 1600 and Dec 1600).

“una Inuencion tan dañosa y de mal exemplo”; AGS, Estado-K, legajo 1677, doc. 79 (Dec 1600).

Vera later advised Philip not to punish Nuno da Costa, for the Portuguese merchant had occasionally supplied the Spanish ambassador with vital information in the matter of the Calabrian Charlatan. AGS, Estado-K, legajo 1677, doc. 101 (3 Mar 1601).

“castigado severamente”; AGS, Estado-K, legajo 1677, doc. 82 (9 Dec 1600).

“exemplar justitia.”

ASVen, Collegio, Exposizioni Principi, filza 11 (11 Dec 1600); see also Toderini, “Finto Don Sebastiano,” 9–12.

ASVen, Senato, Parti Secrete, filza 71 (15 Dec 1600).

4 Lisbon: Rumor and simmering discontent

1 “Viva, Viva a Patria, & os coraçôens generosos della, que nenhuação outra cousa respeitarem que seu Deos, seu Rey & sua honra: deixando a seus descendêtes o que lhes deixaram seus antepassados.” João de Castro, Discurso da vida do sempre bem vindo, et apparecido Rey Dom Sebastiam nosso senhor o Encuberto des do seu naçimênto tee o presente (Paris: 1602), 129v.

2 For more on the political environment in Spanish Portugal at this time, see António de Oliveira, Poder e Oposição Política em Portugal no Período Filipino (1580–1640) (Lisbon: 1990).

3 Cristóvão de Moura, first Marquis of Castelo Rodrigo, lived 1538–1613 and was the Spanish viceroy in Portugal in 1600–03 and again in 1608–12. For more details on Moura’s life, see Alfonso Danvila y Burguero, Don Cristóbal de Moura: Primer Marquês de Castel Rodrigo (1538–1613) (Madrid: 1900).
4 St. George's Castle, in spite of its ruined condition, still dominates the city of Lisbon from its hill-top position. It was originally built by the Visigoths in the fifth century to protect the natural harbor. In Moura's time it was the castle from which Spanish troops protected and controlled Lisbon and the surrounding area.

5 Even today travelers who come to Lisbon from the south by train arrive at the riverside Terreiro do Paço (the Palace Square) after crossing the Tagus on the ferry. Unfortunately little remains of what the viceroy saw since the great Lisbon earthquake of 1755 leveled the palace and much of the surrounding city; see T.D. Kendrick, The Lisbon Earthquake (Philadelphia: 1955). Today the square is known as the Praça do Comércio.


7 Luís Cabrera de Córdoba, Relaciones de las Cosas Suceditas en la Corte de España, desde 1599 hasta 1614, ed. Pascual de Gayángos (Madrid: 1857), vol. 1, 64, 71.

8 AHN, Estado, libro 77, fol. 1v, 3 (17 Jun [1600] and [20 Sep 1600]). AHN, Estado, libros 76 and 77 form the major archival foundation of this chapter. The relevant documents in both of these books consist primarily of Moura’s regular reports to the king and the Consejo de Estado; in some cases the replies Moura received are included as well.

9 AHN, Estado, libro 77, fol. 9 (23 Oct [1600]).


11 On this topic see Julia Montenegro, “Prólogo,” in Castilla y Portugal en los albores de la edad moderna (Valladolid: 1997). Montenegro argues that, during the medieval period, the political and cultural borders between Portugal and Castile were rather fluid, in fact “ambas potencias eran parte de una misma realidad y con unas similares, o muy parecidas, circunstancias”; for instance, large numbers of Portuguese students flooded into the University of Salamanca and matrimonial ties between Portuguese and Castilian nobles were common; “Prólogo,” 7. For the early modern period the same situation existed.


13 It was only two years later, in January of 1556, that Philip would be King Philip II although he had helped in the rule of his father’s kingdoms, particularly Spain, since early 1551; see Geoffrey Parker, “Apprenticeship, 1527–1558,” in Philip II, 3rd ed. (Chicago: 1995).
For the effect of this in Portugal, see António Belard da Fonseca, Dom Sebastião: Antes e Depois de Alcácer-Quibir (Lisbon: 1978–79), I:27.

“Si Dios se hubiera propuesto reunir bajo el mismo techo a dos criaturas diametralmente opuestas, lo consiguiera en el Monasterio de Guadalupe, pues nunca se vieron caracteres tan dispares como el de Don Sebastián y Felipe II, nacidos para no ponerse nunca de acuerdo, ni ceder el uno a la voluntad del otro.” Alfonso Danvila y Burguero, Felipe II y el Rey Don Sebastián de Portugal (Madrid: 1954), 315.

From its very inception (1583), Moura had been on the Consejo de Portugal, a position he held till his appointment as viceroy in 1600. Santiago de Luxán Meléndez, “Los Funcionarios del Consejo de Portugal: 1580–1640,” Cuadernos de Investigación Histórica 12 (1989): 197–228; see tables of members on pp. 224–8.

“. . .andaua ruydo en el pueblo có nueuas de aquel calabres que es preso en venecya, tenyendo el vulgo por cyerto que este preso es el Rei dô Sebastyan, como el lo dyz.” AHN, Estado, libro 77, fol. 1 (17 Jun [1600]).

AHN, Estado, libro 77, fols 1–2 (17 Jun [1600]).

AHN, Estado, libro 77, fols 1v, 10v, 12v (17 Jun [1600], 23 Oct [1600], and 1 Nov 1600).

AHN, Estado, libro 77, fol. 12 (1 Nov 1600).

AHN, Estado, libro 77, fol. 9v (23 Oct [1600]).

“religiosos muy graues,” “caualleros principales y que parecen cuerdos.” AHN, Estado, libro 77, fol. 3 ([20 Sep 1600]).

These are AHN, Estado, libro 77, fols 22–130v; they would have covered, approximately, the period from the end of June 1601 to the end of July 1603. AHN, Estado, libro 77 is a bound volume of the collected correspondence between Moura and the Consejo de Estado. At some point, someone physically ripped the missing folios from the book. At least one Portuguese historian attributes this (and many other missing documents) to a subsequent Spanish conspiracy to conceal the truth that the supposed impostor was in fact King Sebastian; see António Belard da Fonseca, Dom Sebastião: Antes e Depois de Alcácer-Quibir, 2 vols. (Lisbon: 1978–79), II: 89–129.

Note that the religiosos included only the regular clergy (those bound by a monastic rule [regula]), not the secular clergy (those not bound by monastic vows).

AHN, Estado, libro 77, fol. 9 (23 Oct [1600]).

“cô la gente tienen poco credito,” AHN, Estado, libro 77, fol. 10v (23 Oct [1600]).

“concorria mucha gente y se ablaua con mas publicidad.” AHN, Estado, libro 77, fol. 10 (23 Oct [1600]).

AHN, Estado, libro 77, fol. 10 (23 Oct [1600]).

Moura never named the third nobleman – perhaps he was detained because of the fight, but was never implicated in the matter of spreading the rumors.
31 AHN, Estado, libro 77, fols 11–11v (23 Oct [1600]).
33 On the utility of voicing dissatisfaction to effect change, see Albert O.

Hirschman, Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organiza-
34 AHN, Estado, libro 76, fol. 477 (19 Dec 1600).
35 On this this extensive topic, see João Francisco Marques, A Parenêtica

Portuguesa e a Dominação Filipina (Oporto: 1986).
36 For a succinct description of the early modern association of smell and

illness, see Michel de Certeau, The Possession at Loudun (Chicago: 1996),
32–4. For a detailed study of an early modern Italian reaction to the
plague, see Carlo M. Cipolla, Faith, Reason, and the Plague in Seventeenth-
37 “...andando ia dezembussada nesta cidade quando entrou o Vizo Rey
dom Cristouão Marques de castel Rodrigo...,” Soares, Memorial, 375.
38 “Entrada do Marques,” fol. 165.
39 See Keith Thomas, “Providence,” in Religion and the Decline of Magic (New
40 It was not so different in Protestant Europe where – instead of intermedi-
aries between man and God – there were pastors, ministers, and teachers
who helped guide their followers to the correct interpretation.
41 Perhaps much of the preachers’ animosity was fed by the eagerness with
which the Spanish tried to impose the reforms called for by the Council of
Trent. As Sara Nalle notes of the Spanish city of Cuenca in the last half of
the sixteenth century, most of the lower clergy opposed the reforms since
they centralized ecclesiastical power in the hands of the bishop and
forced priests to forgo much of what they considered to be the perquisites of
office (e.g., concubinage, reaping tithes without providing any service);
God in La Mancha: Religious Reform and the People of Cuenca, 1500–1650
42 Soares, Memorial, 375. This connection is all the more notable when one
considers that Saint Sebastian (King Sebastian’s namesake) was one of the
saints charged with protecting people from the plague; with Sebastian
gone, the community was left defenseless. For an example of St. Sebas-
tian’s importance in Spain in this period, see Nalle, God in La Mancha,
155–6, 176.
43 AHN, Estado, libro 77, fol. 3 ([20 Sept 1600]).
44 AHN, Estado, libro 77, fol. 4 ([20 Sept 1600]).
45 AHN, Estado, libro 77, fol. 4 ([20 Sep 1600]).
46 “El pueblo” is Spanish for the Portuguese “o povo”, meaning the people,
the nation. “Esta gente” translates as this people or these people. Al-
though he was technically supposed to do all of Portugal’s business in
Portuguese, Moura generally wrote his reports to Philip III in Castilian
(Spanish).
47 “ha sido la platica tan general, que chicos y grandes an entrado en ella,”
AHN, Estado, libro 77, fol. 9v (23 Oct [1600]).
48 Yves-Marie Bercé, *History of Peasant Revolts* (Ithaca, New York: 1990), 323–6. See also Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*. Since, in Hirschman’s terminology, the third estate had no voice or an extremely weak voice, they had little hope of changing the government or its burdens from within the system; to amplify their voice they therefore turned to forms of protest which threatened the existence of the system itself.

49 *ANTT, Corpo Cronolórgico*, parte II, maço 300, doc. 135 (24 Jan 1601).

50 *AGS, Estado, legajo 435, doc. 12* (28 Jul 1601).


52 “gente en esta ciudad y fuera della, se dauan dineros a quien los tomava, con tal condición que hauian de boluer otro tanto mas quando veniesse el mecias,” AHN, Estado, libro 77, fol. 9v (23 Oct [1600]); see also BNM, Mss. 2347, “Sucesso del Calabres quese fingió El Rey Don Sebastian,” fol. 13.

53 “que Vendria aquella persona [the man in Venice], y que esto seria muy breuemète,” AHN, Estado, libro 77, fol. 9v (23 Oct [1600]).


55 Benzion Netanyahu has argued in *The Origins of the Inquisition in Fifteenth Century Spain* (New York: 1995) and his earlier works that, by about 1500, the majority of the New Christian community in Spain had genuinely become Christian and that the activities of the Inquisition were not meant to root out heretical beliefs, that the crime of “judaizing” was merely an excuse to act (see pp. xiii–xxii). In Portugal, in the first half of the sixteenth-century at least, the situation was different, for expelled Spanish Jews formed approximately half of the Portuguese New Christian population – the very people who had held most firmly onto their Judaism. Therefore it is hard to believe, whatever the situation in Spain, that the majority of the New Christians in Portugal were trying at this time to assimilate to Christianity. Nevertheless, Netanyahu’s arguments about the racial, non-religious roots of the persecution may remain intact even in the case of Portugal.

56 From 1593 to Moura’s arrival in early 1600, Portugal was ruled by a council of five governors.


This suspicion continues to this day although in a more scholarly vein. In *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto* (New York: 1971), Yosef Yerushalmi speculates about the possible connections between Portuguese Sebastianism and Jewish Sabbatianism, basing this on the involvement of the Portuguese Marrano communities in the Ottoman Empire with Sabbatianism (306–13). However, in the case of the Calabrian Charlatan, no known documents from the Western Sephardic communities mention the man or his claims (Yosef Kaplan, personal communication, 1996).

“yo estoy much sospechoso de que tudas estas cosas son fingidas y echadas por christia Venezianos,” AHN, Estado, libro 77, fol. 3v ([20 Sep 1600]; apparently a draft copy).

AHN, Estado, libro 77, fol. 19 (26 May 1601).

Soares, *Memorial*, 371. In this source he was called “capitão Febos” and was most likely the same person with whom Moura dealt. He was identified as a Venetian artillery captain who had accompanied Sebastian to Ksar-el-Kebir; thus he was someone who knew Sebastian and should have been able to identify him correctly. Soares also names him as the person who first brought to Lisbon the news of Sebastian’s imprisonment in Venice. The *Memorial* refers to the captain’s second arrest, but it is impossible to tell whether this was before, after, or the same as Moura’s apprehension.

Unfortunately, we do not know the ultimate fate of *El Febo*.

AHN, Estado, libro 77, fols 12–12v (1 Nov 1600).

AHN, Estado, libro 77, fol. 15 (7 Feb 1601).

“an buelto a resucitar.” AHN, Estado, libro 77, fol. 19 (26 May 1601).

“...y vienen a saber de my lo que siento destas cosas. y si hago caso dellas, y quanto mas burlo y tengo en poco lo que me dizan tanto buelven mas sospechosos entendiendo q es enuençion lo que hago.” AHN, Estado, libro 77, fol. 19v (26 May 1601).

The Hospital de Todos-os-Santos was located on the east side of the Rossio Plaza, one of the two major plazas in Lisbon at the time (the other being the Terreiro do Paço). See Fernando Castelo-Branco, *Lisboa Seiscentista*, 2nd ed. (Lisbon: 1957), 46–7, 49; see especially the plate between pp. 46 and 47 showing the façade of the Hospital with the stairs leading up to it.

Fortunately for the rest of Lisbon there was no wind and so the fire did not spread beyond the Hospital.


1 November.

In 1594, Father Cardoso had been prohibited from preaching at the Royal Chapel and banned from Lisbon by his provincial for his anti-Castilian sermons; apparently, sometime in the intervening seven years, he had been allowed to return to the Portuguese capital but had lost none of his anti-Castilian sentiments. See Marques, *Parenética*, 106; Soares, *Memorial*, 390.
5 Venice to Leghorn: Sanctifying the king


4 The story of Martin Guerre seems to have been widely known in early modern Europe: “….dient que ce n’est pas le premier affronteur. qu’en Flandre y a eu un Baudoin, en France un Martin Guerre, &c.”; Teixeira, *Adventure Admirable*, 109. On Martin Guerre, see Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge, MA: 1983).

5 Castro claims that Sebastian informed his Venetian judges, just before they released him, that someday they would regret their actions (Castro, *Discurso*, 89v); Teixeira’s account, which was written first, does not mention this.

6 Because the various names (i.e., King Sebastian, Marco Tulio Catizone, the Calabrian Charlatan) used by contemporaries to refer to the Venetians’ ex-prisoner depended more on their political partisanship than reality, it is difficult to settle on any one name. So, since this chapter centers on the purported Portuguese king and his supporters, we will defer to them in this chapter by referring to the ex-prisoner as Sebastian.


9 Filippo Strozzi was a Florentine relative of Catherine de’ Medici.


Peniche is a Portuguese coastal city about 75 km north of Lisbon. Apparently Norris landed there in the mistaken expectation that this part of the coast would be less well defended than areas nearer to Lisbon. For a view of this invasion from the English point of view, see Kenneth R. Andrews, *Drake’s Voyages: a Re-Assessment of their Place in Elizabethan Maritime Expansion* (London: 1967); and, R. B. Wernham, “Introduction,” in *The Expedition of Sir John Norris and Sir Francis Drake to Spain and Portugal*, 1589, ed. R. B. Wernham (1988).

These fears were not unreasonable. For instance, in late 1587 one of Dom António’s supporters was arrested in Lisbon as he was embarking for France. He was carrying two small caskets: one contained his travel funds and money for the Portuguese rebels, the other contained a letter of credit for António as well as letters from various merchants (and possibly high ranking nobles). These letters informed António that the Spanish Armada was about to depart and that following its departure would be the perfect time to arrive in Portugal at the head of an army; the letters assured him that the whole kingdom would rise in revolt. In his panic while being arrested, António’s supporter threw one of the caskets into the ocean. Unfortunately he chose the wrong one: instead of ridding himself of the incriminating evidence, he jettisoned his funds. (CSP Venetian, viii, docs 614, 616, 621). This event was not isolated. The Venetians noted similar anti-Spanish activities following António’s escape from Portugal in 1581 through to 1589, just prior to Drake’s arrival (see, *inter alia*, CSP Venetian, viii, docs 81, 257, 327, 428, 673, 828).

Was this because Dom António’s movement held no real promise for the Portuguese people? After all, were he to have replaced Philip as ruler of Portugal, for most people little would have changed. António simply did not fulfill any millenarian expectations. In contrast, the English actively supported the Dutch rebellion. Unlike António, the leaders of the Dutch rebels proved capable of raising large segments of the Dutch population to fight the Spanish and for years forced Philip to spend immense quantities of his American treasure in trying to reestablish his control. See MacCaffrey, *War and Politics*, 249–98; Geoffrey Parker, *Dutch Revolt*.

It seems that only with the events of 1598 was Castro able to convince at least some of his fellow rebels of his arguments and that the return of King Sebastian would bring them the popular support they needed.

Botelho and Figueiredo, *Reposta*, 152.

For this section of Sebastian’s story and the internal conflicts between his supporters there are three basic sources. Each was a work of propaganda, destined for a particular audience; however, they were not the result of a coordinated rebel effort. [*Note continues...*]
The first was Father José Teixeira’s *Adventure Admirable*, published in Lyon in 1601. This book represented mainstream of thought among Dom António’s old supporters. They hoped to revitalize the old movement, using the appearance of Sebastian – and the popular reaction to him in Portugal – as a means of renewing and strengthening French and English support. For this reason Teixeira wrote in French and addressed his work to King Henri IV (p. 3). To capture the English audience, the French edition was followed that same year by an English translation (*The Strangest Adventure that Ever Happened*) published in London. In form the book was a discussion of a collection of letters, prophecies, and documents that showed that the man in Venice was the real King Sebastian. Originally, Teixeira probably hoped that his work would encourage the French and the English to apply diplomatic pressure on the Venetians in order to get them to release their prisoner. Then, just before the book was to be published, Father Teixeira received the miraculous news that Sebastian had been freed. This did not stop him from publishing, for this event lent added importance to establishing the prisoner’s identity as the long-lost King Sebastian. The issue at hand had shifted from obtaining Sebastian’s release from prison, to obtaining Portugal’s release from Spain.

The second work, published a year later in 1602, was João de Castro’s *Discourse on the life of the King Don Sebastian of Portugal (Discurso da vida de El Rey Dom Sebastiam de Portugal)*. Although Castro had long been one of Dom António’s supporters, by the time this book was published he had broken with his compatriots. With the many failures and disappointments of the previous twenty years, as well as the turn of events following Sebastian’s release from prison, he had given up on the other Portuguese exiles and their plans. He even dedicated one chapter to denouncing the actions of some of the major figures among the exiles after Dom António’s death. For instance, he claimed that soon after the Prior of Crato’s death in 1595 Diogo Botelho, António’s two sons, and others had abandoned Portugal to its fate and started negotiating with the Spanish in the hope of reaching an accommodation with the foreign regime (this was chapter XIV; fols 48v–53). Thus he questioned their dedication to Portuguese independence, essentially accusing them of fighting merely for personal gain. Still, this was only a peripheral issue, for, like Teixeira, Castro’s main goal was to show that the man in Venice was in fact King Sebastian. Although the two propagandists may have had the same basic goal, their purposes were different. Castro wrote to a completely different audience: he wrote in Portuguese and addressed his work “to the three Estates of the Kingdom of Portugal” (fol. 1). Drawing on the same prophecies and other texts that Father Teixeira had used to establish the identity of the man in Venice, Castro came to the same basic conclusion but took it one step further. Instead of calling on earthly princes for help, Castro called on the Portuguese people – of all estates – to believe in the return of Sebastian and to accept that this was part of a divinely ordained plan (fols 43–48). João de Castro prophesied that, if the Portuguese
heeded his call to belief and repentance, the sacred independence of Portugal would inevitably be restored.

The final work was Diogo Botelho’s and Ciprião de Figueiredo’s *Response that the Three Estates of the Kingdom of Portugal sent to Dom João de Castro, concerning a Discourse he wrote to them, about the coming and appearance of the King Don Sebastian (Reposta que os tres Estados do Reino de Portugal mandarão a Dom Ioam de Castro, sobre hun Discurso lhes dirigio, sobre a vinda e apparecimento do Rey Dom Sebastiam)*. Published in 1603, this work – as its title states – was a response to Castro’s book and was directed at the same audience. In it Botelho and Figueiredo defended themselves, Dom Cristóvão, Dom Manuel, and other of António’s supporters from Castro’s attacks on their patriotism. Although they disagreed with Castro about their role and motivations in the struggle for Portuguese independence, they fully agreed with him about the central fact that King Sebastian had indeed returned. The argument with Castro was essentially over which group – Castro or his former compatriots – had persevered in the struggle for Portuguese independence. By abandoning Dom António’s heirs, Botelho and Figueiredo claimed, Castro had weakened the Portuguese cause, causing fissures which the Spanish had eagerly and successfully exploited.


21 As shown in chapter 3, at least leaders and major figures of this particular group of Portuguese rebels knew that they were not meeting with the real Sebastian (see p. 62).

22 “…lancouse aos seus pes reconhecendo ho pello seu verdadeiro Rey & senhor.” Castro, *Discurso*, 90v. Teixeira neglects to mention this incident in his account and instead portrays Sebastian’s recognition by the various people present as having been more dignified, with Castro’s actions no different from those of his companions.

23 “Portugais vous avez faict un tres grand bien à vostre patrie, & signalé seruice a moy qui suis vostre Roy & seigneur; vous estes mes vassaux & subiets. Puisque vous avez faict ce que debuiez à Dieu & à vostre obligation, je n’en seray point ingrat. Je suis vostre Pere, & vous estes mes enfans.” Teixeira, *Adventure Admirable*, 100.


26 “Mostrou a ferida da cabeça que recebera em Africa: tomado as maõs a algũns & fazendoa apalpar. Mostrou o dente quixal menos: mostrou as pernas, os bracos, ate se assentar de goelhos metendo huãa chinella de baxo dũ delles pera mostrar como era mais curto de huãa parte.” Castro, *Discurso*, 91v. Teixeira gives a parallel, but less detailed, account; Teixeira, *Adventure Admirable*, 102–3.

28 The Holy Day of the Finding of the Cross is 3 May; this feast celebrated the fourth- or fifth-century tradition concerning the discovery of the true cross in Jerusalem by St. Helena (the Emperor Constantine’s mother). The Mother Prioress was María de la Visitación.
29 This was the day of the week and the hour in which Jesus was crucified and wounded in his side.
30 Fray Luis de Granada (1504–88) was a Spanish mystic and author of various books on faith and mysticism. Since he was well known and living in Lisbon, he was probably brought in by the Prioress’s superiors as an expert on mysticism qualified to make a judgement in her case. See Melquíades Andrés, Historia de la Mística de la Edad de Oro en España y América (Madrid: 1994): 302–5.
32 The Carmelite Fray Juan de la Cruz (1542–91) was Fray Luis de Granada’s “friend and collaborator,” as well as a mystic in his own right; see Andrés, Mística, 303. Note that the friar’s name is given as “Juan de la Curuas” in the news-letter; “The Nun of Lisbon,” Fugger News-Letters, 114.
37 Note that the Prioress’s claims were eventually proven fraudulent; John A. Moore, Fray Luis de Granada (Boston: 1977), 37, 124–5.
38 Protestantism was most likely the “evil [that] reigneth.”
39 E. W. Bovill, The Battle of Alcazar: an Account of the Defeat of Don Sebastian of Portugal at El-Ksar el-Kebir (London: 1952), 155–6. Castro’s account of Sebastian’s escape (Discurso, 59v–67) does not explicitly state this detail; however, it is clear that he was expanding on this rumor.
40 The Algarve is the southernmost region of Portugal. They probably would have disembarked at Lagos, the major port there.
41 “Vio toda Europa : muy grande parte da Asia : & algúa de Africa : estando no Preste Ioão, & noutros reynos pelo interior della.” Castro, Discurso, 61. At this point Castro dropped any mention of Sebastian’s companions; perhaps they perished in battle.
42 The myth of Prester John was of a great Christian empire beyond Muslim territory; the hope was that by finding this ruler and his empire the European Christians would find an ally with whom they could at last decisively defeat Islam. This part of Castro’s story is particularly notable since, by finding and visiting Prester John’s kingdom, Sebastian had accomplished a feat that had eluded the Portuguese for centuries. In addition, this event meant that Sebastian was once again guiding Portugal back to God’s plan of using Portugal for the expansion of Christendom. See Bailey W. Diffie and George D. Winius, Foundations of the Portuguese Empire 1415–1580 (Minneapolis: 1977), 36.
43 Castro, Discurso, 60–64v.
43 Castro, Discurso, 66v.
45 Castro, *Discurso*, 64–66v.
47 This is not to say that such issues were always left unresolved. Where rulers perceived them as a direct threat to their sovereign power (for example, the spread of the Reformation in the Netherlands), such issues were pursued with vigor. Where they were not, rulers placed their attention and resources elsewhere.

6 Florence, Naples, and Sanlúcar: Descent into Purgatory

2 For a particularly graphic example of an early modern state, a salutary tale, and innocents caught in the middle, see Michael Kunze, *Highroad to the Stake: a Tale of Witchcraft* (Chicago: 1987).
4 AGS, Estado-K, legajo 1677, doc. 82 (9 Dec 1600).
5 De Vera’s informant was Nuno da Costa. AGS, Estado-K, legajo 1677, doc. 101 (3 Mar 1601), doc. 90 (6 Jan 1601).
7 This was confirmed much later by the Calabrian Charlatan himself. He stated that, in order to save money after two nights in a Florentine inn, Fra Crisóstomo had arranged for them to stay in a monastery; they planned to wait there for the arrival of the other Portuguese rebels. Unfortunately, Crisóstomo introduced his companion as King Sebastian
of Portugal and thus they came to the attention of a Spanish friar who subsequently turned them in. AGS, Estado, legajo 197, “Relación de lo que Marco Tulio Carçon declaró en el tormento sobre la inuención de aber usurpado nombre del Sr Rey don Sebastián.”

8 While a lack of evidence to the contrary hardly proves the point, it seems significant that the surviving reports from Francisco de Vera never mentioned Fray Crisóstomo as a source of help in the matter; in contrast, de Vera does specifically mention his informant Nuno da Costa and requests, in effect, a pardon as reward for the information de Costa occasionally passed to the ambassador. AGS, Estado-K, legajo 1677, doc. 101 (3 Mar 1601).

9 Castro, Discurso, 103–8.

10 After discovering that Ferdinando refused to meet with them, the Portuguese conspirators left Florence and headed north to seek French, English, Dutch, and even German help; Castro, Discurso, 116–18; AGS, Estado, legajo 1677, doc. 93 (20 Jan 1601).

11 “… protettione di questa casa, stato, et figli.” AGS, Estado, legajo 1453 (4 Mar 1600 [1601 N.S.]); see also letters of 6 May 1601.

12 AGS, Estado, legajo 1097, doc. 108 (22 Mar 1601). AGS, Estado, legajos 1097–8 form the main archival foundation for the Charlatan’s trial in Naples. However, note that the documents in these legajos do not consist of the original trial transcripts; instead they are the viceroy’s summarized reports back to Madrid (all written in Castilian). Note also, however, that it is clear from his report that the viceroy was present at most of the proceedings and not working second-hand.

13 AGS, Estado, legajo 1097, doc. 121 (8 May 1601).


15 Castro apparently thought De Cruz was a Sephardic Jew.

16 These delays were claimed in a later interrogation to have consisted of six years in a Persian prison; AGS, Estado, legajo 1097, doc. 119 (10 May 1601).

17 The man would remain in Spanish custody until May 1602 by which time, in spite of torture, nothing had been found with which to charge him. AGS, Estado, legajo 1098, doc. 64 (10 May 1602).

18 That would have been about 1594. With this fact in hand, the viceroy must have wondered why de Cruz had not delivered the dispatch from 1593 as well.

19 AGS, Estado, legajo 1097, doc. 118 (8 May 1601). For more on the Armenian, see also AGS Estado, legajo 1097, doc. 119 (10 May 1601), doc. 120 (6 May 1601), doc. 162 (4 Aug 1601), doc. 207 (21 Dec 1601), and doc. 208 (21 Dec 1601).
This interview took place sometime during the week between 1 and 8 May 1601.

“un insensato sin entendimiento ninguno”; AGS, Estado, legajo 1097, doc. 121 (8 May 1601).

“una persona docta”; AGS, Estado, legajo 1097, doc. 121 (8 May 1601).

AGS, Estado, legajo 1097, doc. 121 (8 May 1601).

Why Lemos chose these two towns as his starting points is not apparent from the records. AGS, Estado, legajo 1097, doc. 121 (8 May 1601).

This was Julio Francisco de Ponte, the Marquis of Moricón.

AGS, Estado, legajo 1097, doc. 124 (10 May 1601).

In some documents Catizone was referred to as Carzon or simply Marco Tulio. Magisano (or Machisano as rendered in the viceroy’s report) is just to the east of Taverna, in the mountains of the modern province of Catanzaro, in the region of Calabria.

AGS, Estado, legajo 1097, doc. 124 (10 May 1601).

Lemos gives her name as “Cortes”; it is not clear if this should have been an Italian “Cortesi” or if Catizone’s mother was indeed Spanish.

“que era el Rey, ó el Diablo en su figura”; AGS, Estado, legajo 1097, doc. 124 (10 May 1601).

AGS, Estado, legajo 1097, doc. 124 (10 May 1601).

The Spanish ambassador in Venice at this time was Francisco de Vera y Aragón; see chapter 5.

The viceroy also planned to print an account of the investigation that could be disseminated throughout Europe. If this was done, the account seems not to have survived.

AGS, Estado, legajo 1097, doc. 124 (10 May 1601).

AGS, Estado, legajo 1097, doc. 126 (6 Jun 1601). The two letters (AGS, Estado, legajo 1097, docs 127–8) are included with Lemos’s report. Unlike his reports, the letters are both written in Italian, in someone else’s writing, and on different paper.

AGS, Estado, legajo 1097, doc. 127 (5 Sep 1598).

AGS, Estado, legajo 1097, doc. 128 (5 Sep 1598).

In reading the Spanish documents relating to the matter of the Calabrian Charlatan, there is the sense that the Spanish were interested in discovering who was behind the impostor, not simply in exposing and convicting him. In fact, for the Spanish the whole exercise was almost pointless if they could not also identify and round up the Portuguese conspirators who were the real source of trouble.

AGS, Estado, legajo 1097, docs 124 (10 May 1601), 127 (5 Sep 1598), 128 (5 Sep 1598).

AGS, Estado, legajo 1097, docs 124 (10 May 1601), 127 (5 Sep 1598), 128 (5 Sep 1598); AGS, Estado-K, legajo 1677 (11 Jul 1598).

AGS, Estado, legajo 1097, doc. 124 (10 May 1601).

AGS, Estado, legajo 1097, doc. 152 (17 Jul 1601). Note that this account is drawn from Lemos’s description (in Castilian) of the encounter in his report to Philip, not a transcript of legal proceedings.
“i la suegra le dixo mil cosas”; AGS, Estado, legajo 1097, doc. 152 (17 Jul 1601).

“gran vellaco embusteró”; AGS, Estado, legajo 1097, doc. 152 (17 Jul 1601).

AGS, Estado, legajo 1097, doc. 152 (17 Jul 1601).

By this time the viceroy had changed: the Count of Lemos died in the fall of 1601 and his son, Francisco de Castro, had taken his place as regent (1601–03) and wrote the reports to the king. See AGS, Estado, legajo 1097, docs 194 (8 Nov 1601), 207 (21 Dec 1601).

“locura ignorancia”; AGS, Estado, legajo 1098, doc. 66 (10 May 1602).

AGS, Estado, legajo 1098, docs 10 (15 Jan 1602), 66 (10 May 1602).

AGS, Estado, legajo 1098, doc. 66 (10 May 1602).

AGS, Estado, legajo 193, dated 29 Jun 1603.

AGS, Estado, legajo 193 and legajo 197. With these two legajos (the documentary foundation for events at Sanlúcar de Barrameda), we are dealing with the trial transcripts themselves and not just summarized reports.

This part of the trial – the Spanish legal formalities begun after most of the facts in the case were already well established – goes beyond the scope of this work.

El Puerto de Santa María is the Spanish port a few kilometers from Sanlúcar de Barrameda where Catizone was briefly held prior to his transfer to Sanlúcar.

AGS, Estado, legajo 197, “Relación de lo que Marco Tulio Carçon declaró…”

AGS, Estado, legajo 193, dated 29 Jun 1603; AGS, Estado, legajo 197, “Relación de lo que Marco Tulio Carçon declaró…”

AGS, Estado, legajo 197, “Relación de lo que Marco Tulio Carçon declaró…”

AGS, Estado, legajo 197, “Relación de lo que Marco Tulio Carçon declaro…”

AGS, Estado, legajo 1097, docs 127 (5 Sep 1598), 128 (5 Sep 1598).

“phebo”; AGS, Estado, legajo 197, “Relación de lo que Marco Tulio Carçon declaro…”

AHN, Estado, libro 77, fol. 12v (1 Nov 1600); Pedro Rodrigues Soares, *Memorial de Pero Roiz Soares*, ed. M. Lopes de Almeida (Coimbra: 1953), 371. I only have references to Captain Febo in the three sources presented here; they, unfortunately, give us no more information.


Recall that the Spanish apparently first noticed – but ignored – the Calabrian Charlatan in early July 1598; AGS, Estado-K, legajo 1677 (11 Jul 1598).

“…por toda a minha industria e vida em esperar Portugal por alguns me[j]os, abrindolhe os olhos…” BNL, Codex 4389, “Discurso Falando com El Rey D. Sebastião” (Paris: 1588), 4.
Recall Castro’s patriotic appeal to his readers to “take a Portuguese resolution with a Portuguese King”; Castro, *Discurso*, fols 130–130v.

The source of resistance was probably António’s desire to be the King of Portugal: if Sebastian returned, António’s hopes to sit on the Portuguese throne would be thwarted.

It is impossible to tell exactly what the conspirators were aiming for. Did they want an oath to Sebastian? Did they want a period of delay and confusion in which they could introduce one of Dom António’s sons (as regent for Sebastian, of course)?

Prophecy is not random and bereft of all reason; it follows its own, internal logic. If one accepts – on faith – the initial prophetic assumptions, then much of the rest of a body of doctrine follows quite logically for the believer.

Even if we were to suppose that chance dictated the location through the fortuitous appearance of Catizone, we still have to ask the question: “Why Venice?” After all, after recruiting Catizone to play his part, the conspirators could very well have spirited him off to Paris, London, or Lisbon to launch his claims long before the Spanish even became aware of the man. If we accept a conspiracy, we have to ask why Venice was considered the right place.

**Conclusion**

2. AGS, Estado, legajo 193 (23 Sep 1603). Although this took care of many of those involved, several loose ends remained; one of these was a Portuguese friar named António Tavares to whom, over the next year, the Spanish devoted a great deal of effort to track down and capture; see, *inter alia*, AGS, Estado, legajo 198.
3. “El dicho Marco Tulio Calabres fue arastrado cortada la mano derecha y hahorcad o y hecho quartos puestos por los caminos y su causesa [cabeza] puesta en lugar publico y lo mismo la mano derecha”; AGS, Estado, legajo 193 (23 Sep 1603).
4. Note that order was the important factor here; justice – in the modern sense of sorting out right from wrong, innocent from guilty – was secondary and often left to God.
5. ASVen, Collegio, Exposizioni Principi, filza 10 (7 Nov 1598).
Epilogue

1 AHN, Estado, libro 77, fol. 135v (16 Aug 1603).
3 AHN, Estado, libro 77, fols 135–136v (16 Aug 1603).
5 João was the grandson of Catherine of Braganza, the woman who had been Philip II’s chief rival in the genealogical contest over who was Sebastian’s real heir.
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