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

H. Eric R. Olsen
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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.

My many other debts are less visible. Financially, the University of Pennsylvania has been more than generous. They funded the first five years of my doctoral program with a Benjamin Franklin Fellowship. The Graduate Group in History provided a Summer Dissertation Workshop stipend and a research travel grant. Where the University’s funding fell short, my mother invariably provided me with a special Food and Shelter Grant.

I am also indebted to many scholars, some of whose work appears in my footnotes. Others aided me more informally. For instance, I wrote letters to various historians that I did not know and invariably
received helpful replies. When I was first trying to find an appropriate dissertation topic I wrote to John H. Elliott in England. Given my interests, he put me in contact with Fernando J. Bouza-Álvarez in Madrid. It was Dr. Bouza-Álvarez who first suggested the general topic of the dissertation, told me where the major archival sources were located, and lent me various relevant books. Other scholars read and commented on drafts of various chapters. Of particular note are Tony Fuentez (who carefully read and commented on every portion as it became available), Lee Cassanelli (one of my committee members), and several of my fellow graduate students at the University of Pennsylvania (especially those in Tom Safley’s Early Modern Europe Dissertation Group and his Early Modern Europe Seminars).

In the various archives and libraries that I visited, I almost always found extraordinarily helpful archivists and librarians. Of particular note were the staffs at the Biblioteca-Archivio Renato Maestro (Comunità Ebraica di Venezia) and the Biblioteca Marciana in Venice; in both places the librarians patiently listened to an explanation of my project in Italianized Spanish and then spent the rest of the day inundating me with potential materials and leads. I was most disappointed when neither library proved to have materials I needed for my project.

At another level I am grateful to many people for simply providing me with an environment in which I could work. In Madrid, I invariably stayed with my friends Jesús Valle Bernedo and Aurora Guerra Barrón; in Lisbon, Carlos Hazakís was always welcoming; in Venice, although I was staying in a pension, Pino Zenaro ensured that I saw more of Venice than dusty documents and also made sure that I got over a nasty and miserable week of influenza; and, in the States, various friends and family members patiently put up with my crazy project at different times.

Almost as soon as he finished signing my dissertation, Tom Safley began to push me to publish it. For what must have seemed like the hundredth time, he reread the entire text. In the resulting comments he noted points where the theoretical threads seemed weak or had disappeared from view. His criticisms greatly improved this version.

Many others also helped turn my doctoral project into a book. As usual, my friend Tony Fuentez pressed me to hone my thinking on nationalism. Tom Cohen’s comments echoed many of Tom Safley’s, thus helping to convince me to make various needed changes. My
mother, my brother Char, Reva Rosenband, and Yvonne Oliva made observations and asked questions which helped ensure that non-specialists might fruitfully read the Calabrian Charlatan’s story. Indeed, I wish to acknowledge a great debt to my mother and to Reva Rosenband. Over the years, both kept up their gentle nagging to finish. Without them, I would probably still be working on chapter one. Gary Lapreziosa edited the completed text, thus making it much more readable (and, I hope, curing me of making far too many convoluted parenthetical comments). Throughout it all, family and friends again tolerated the Charlatan imposed on their lives.

I also owe a great debt to the people who have been and are guiding this project through Palgrave: Ed Muir, Rab Houston, and Luciana O’Flaherty. After reading my first post-dissertation draft, Ed became the book’s advocate. In addition, it was Ed who selected Palgrave’s anonymous readers, including one who proved invaluable. This reader “rashly” edited the whole typescript and thus greatly improved the text by introducing a modicum of British precision into an American voice.

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.

King of Prussia, Pennsylvania
March 2002