

**ESOTERIC REASON, OCCULT SCIENCE,  
AND RADICAL ENLIGHTENMENT:  
SEAMLESS PURSUITS IN THE WORK AND  
NETWORKS OF RAIMONDO DI SANGRO,  
THE PRINCE OF SAN SEVERO**

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ABSTRACT

This article argues for the inclusion of the Neapolitan Raimondo di Sangro, il Principe di San Severo (1710-1771) among those thinkers whose ideas, lifestyle, writings, networks and intellectual pursuits have been defined as radical. It explores the ways in which a little known Italian Radical Enlightenment thinker formed his ideas both through contact with the writings of proponents of Radical Enlightenment thought not only in England and Holland, but also in Italy and Switzerland where radical networks have been less visible to scholars. By charting the strategies for the spread and exchange of radical thought from Naples to Lausanne through heretofore unknown paths, new avenues for research are opened while the breadth and depth of the Radical Enlightenment are strengthened.

“[...] the Honourable Prince’s banned book is full of sentiments and expressions at the very least seriously suspicious of error in Catholic dogma, and too

favourable to the perverse and detestable systems of strong spirits, deists, Materialists, Cabbalists, etc.”

(Letter from Benedict XIV to Agostino Ricchini, Secretary of the Congregation of the Index, Rome, 12 February 1754<sup>1</sup>)

## 1. Introduction

Benedict XIV’s indictment of the ‘Honourable Prince’ referenced in the letter cited above constitutes a defining moment in the standoff between the Catholic Church and philosophical thinking in Italy, and more precisely, Naples, at the halfway point in the eighteenth century. Following a more than decade-long pushing of the delicate boundary separating the youthful bonds of friendship and the burdensome, public expectations of papal jurisdiction, “Enlightened Pope” Benedict XIV could turn neither a blind eye nor a deaf ear to the escalating visibility and public charisma of his former classmate and friend Raimondo di Sangro, the Prince of San Severo, who from 1743 to 1753 seemed an unstoppable force in the defiant tradition of Neapolitan philosophical inquiry. In *Radical Enlightenment, Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750*, Jonathan Israel has assembled a portion of that history in

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<sup>1</sup> The original reads: “[...] il Libro proscritto del Signor Principe è pieno di sentimenti ed espressioni per lo meno gravemente sospette d’errore nel dogma Cattolico, e troppo favorevoli ai perversi e detestabili sistemi de’ spiriti forti, deisti, Materialisti, Cabbalisti etc.” (Spruit 2002, 258).

‘Reaction of the Italian States’, a subsection of the chapter ‘Government and Philosophy’. However, the Neapolitan history of Radical Enlightenment thinkers is far more intricate and provocative when we examine the ideas, work, persona and reach of one of the least understood and misrepresented exponents of the Radical Enlightenment in Naples, Raimondo di Sangro, the Prince of San Severo.

It is our intention in this article to not only expand upon the arguments made for considering Di Sangro a pivotal purveyor of radical thought in Italy, but also to trace the far-reaching influence of his ideas and the publishing projects they spawned both at home and abroad. Each of the three areas of his activity considered here – anatomical inquiry, the dissemination of philosophical inquiry through encyclopaedism, and the writing of the *Lettera apologetica* to promote ancient Incan writing, together with all of his philosophical intuitions, combine to form what we argue to be a veritable radical manifesto. Di Sangro sought to disseminate his views, which supposed a thoroughly conflicting origin, purpose and future for mankind from the ones promoted by Catholicism.

As foremost Di Sangro scholar Leen Spruit has pointed out in his insightfully annotated and edited edition of Raimondo Di Sangro’s 1750 *Lettera apologetica dell’esercitato accademico della Crusca contenente la Difesa del Libro Intitolato Lettere d’una Peruana per rispetto alla supposizione de’ Quipu scritta alla duchessa di S\*\*\*\** (*Apologetic letter by the cultivated member of the Crusca Academy containing the Defence of the Book Entitled Letter of a Peruvian Woman with respect to her assumption about the Quipus, written to the Duchess S\*\*\*\**), the words “strong spirits” used to describe those of

the Prince's ilk in the citation that opens this article could mean only one thing: that the person in question was a follower of Spinoza.<sup>2</sup> We fully concur with Spruit's placement of Di Sangro among the proponents of Radical Enlightenment and share his purpose in establishing for the Prince of San Severo his rightful place in the historiography of the Neapolitan and European Radical Enlightenment. While Spruit presents a good deal of evidence for locating Raimondo di Sangro, the Prince of San Severo, among those persons of action and ideas whose profiles align them with proponents of the Radical Enlightenment, in this article it is my intention to reinforce Spruit's claims and to add to them by considering San Severo's reach, both in terms of the network of his influence and his erudite and scientific pursuits beyond the *Lettera Apologetica* that further serve to elucidate not only the radical purpose to which he subscribed, but also the far more intellectually and scientifically savvy milieu that was the Kingdom of Naples during the first half of the eighteenth century. Spruit has discussed Israel's tendency to exclude lesser-known areas of eighteenth-century Europe from agency in the practice and promotion of Radical Enlightenment, with particular focus on the short shrift given to Naples. Today, however, in the midst of a plethora of studies re-examining Naples' status in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century

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<sup>2</sup> Spruit 2002, 259.

Europe, renewed scholarly attention is warranted.<sup>3</sup> In light of the rapid and on-going deepening of our understanding about the Kingdom of Naples and its intellectual and political inventiveness, it is important to revisit Di Sangro as a proponent of the Radical Enlightenment in a collection of essays such as this whose goal is that of pushing our understanding of the people, places, and writings of the Radical Enlightenment, the connections among them and how the ideas of the Radical Enlightenment spread and were adapted to new contexts.

This expanded inquiry into the Radical Enlightenment, its roots and its reach, offers answers and continuity to the questions of idea transmission and knowledge transfer as practiced by any number of thinkers who have heretofore existed on the periphery of the traditional enlightenment as outliers. Instead, when studied from the perspective of the Radical Enlightenment, suddenly their ideas, activities, and the modes of dissemination they utilized point to bigger goals that are revealed only upon close examination of their networks and the ideas that connected them, including fundamental notions about the purpose of mankind, the value of society, and the institutions that served them. Raimondo di Sangro, the Prince of San Severo (1710-1771), founder of the first masonic lodge in Naples, is precisely the kind of pivotal figure whose ideas and activities may best be understood from the vantage point of the Radical Enlightenment. Indeed, Di Sangro

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<sup>3</sup> Among others, see Calaresu and Hills 2013, Naddeo 2012, Marino 2011, and Imbruglia 2000.

was highly successful at living the dialectic of enlightenment as both the social and intellectual phenomenon that Jonathan Israel has underscored as the hallmark of the Radical Enlightenment.<sup>4</sup>

Long considered a “quirky” “on-off” sort of thinker about whom an entire mythology has been created, with a growing bibliography on esoteric readings of his experiments, goals and interests, a systematic study has yet to be undertaken of his many publications and the connections among them. The Radical Enlightenment offers the ideal vantage point from which to engage in this research. The importance of the book that garnered the most visibility and notoriety for the Prince, the *Lettera Apologetica* (1750), discussed in the last part of this essay, was first analysed as a significant work of the Italian Enlightenment by Franco Venturi in *Settecento riformatore*, followed by Vincenzo Ferrone’s probing exploration of the text’s unique structure and baroque underpinnings in *I Profeti dell’illuminismo*, followed by Spruit’s treatment, which sheds new light on the matter thanks to its consideration of ancillary documents, as well as the precious library inventory, truly encyclopaedic in nature. It is also our intent to shed light on his vast reaching circles and to point out the radical thinking and practices of one of his most famous disciples, Fortunato Bartolomeo De Felice, whose own career, it is fair to say, would have never launched without the mentorship of San Severo. De Felice picks up the encyclopaedic mantle from Di Sangro, producing the *Encyclopédie* d’Yverdon in

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<sup>4</sup> Israel 2006, v.

Switzerland, where the Prince will send him when the politics of remaining in Naples as an openly Radical Enlightenment proponent were no longer favourable and it had become necessary to operate covertly. We will explore the extension of Severo's radical thought into Switzerland through his masonic friendship with the Baron Tschoudy who lived in Naples 1748-1769 and was a member of Severo's masonic lodge, his publishing business relationship with Vincenz Bernard von Tscharner, the Bernese patrician and freemason who orchestrated his escape from Italy on the Swiss end, and the founding of the *Encyclopédie d'Yverdon*, managed by Fortunato Bartolomeo De Felice, Di Sangro's protégé. The work of Gabriel Mingard, Vaudois pastor who had spent time in Naples and contributed controversial articles to the *Encyclopédie d'Yverdon* should also be mentioned in this regard and will be examined as well.

Evidence for San Severo's galvanizing abilities as a social and scientific firebrand can be found primarily Di Sangro's *Lettera Apologetica*, edited by Dutch scholar Leen Spruit. Spruit has suggested that Di Sangro's interest in origins, the life force, the preservation of life and hermetic traditions and practices that provide access to this wisdom can be traced to his ties with the radical branches of the Dutch and British Enlightenment.<sup>5</sup> In this article we will show the greater implications of these ties and their expansion.

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<sup>5</sup> Spruit 2002, 16-8.

Di Sangro possessed the vision, charisma, and means to lead and promote radical thinking, as well as radical practice, which is more difficult to achieve. The tendency to downplay the Prince's role has much to do with his profound desire to act, by producing in his laboratory experiments that would make manifest the many ideas that circulated. No savant was more bent on tackling the historical dimensions of revelation and religious practice, not through words alone, but through myriad philosophical, scientific, literary, linguistic and medical experimentation that would provide concrete proof of the feebleness of religious claims and religious practices, while charting a new path of inspiration that sought strength in the dignity of mankind and its potential.<sup>6</sup> The Prince of San Severo had the means to launch scientific inquiry in a number of fields, which he did by building a private cabinet and personal museum where he displayed the findings of his experiments, results that he achieved by successfully recruiting some of the best minds of the Kingdom of Naples. Di Sangro was the quintessential enlightened nobleman who sought the erudition of learned men whom he welcomed into *palazzi* equipped with extensive libraries, laboratories, and cabinets of curiosities. Such individual spaces were increasingly placed at the service of the State as sites of intellectual exchange and advancement in kingdoms where the university system struggled to keep pace of developments in Northern Italy, England, France and Holland. Indeed, conditions in the Kingdom

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<sup>6</sup> Mortimer and Robertson 2012.



of Naples fostered numerous private/public exchanges. As we will see, Di Sangro believed that his findings were so self-evident, that the move from private to public would automatically win over the powers that be, whether ecclesiastical, monarchical, or intellectual. His almost childlike wonder before his findings and his joy in sharing them ultimately thwarted the public side of his program. Others would carry out some of his wishes.

## **2. Di Sangro's research activity: Masonic ambition, masonic inspiration**

Raimondo di Sangro embodied the salon model of sociability in his day-to-day life in Naples. His home became the locus for exchange of ideas in the 1740s, at a moment when reform of Neapolitan institutions, in particular the University, informed the discussions of an emerging elite of citizenry since Charles of Bourbon had become “the resident monarch of an autonomous kingdom.”<sup>7</sup> He founded the first Neapolitan lodge of Freemasons from the ranks of his friends and followers. Freemasons in eighteenth-century Europe sought new forms of knowledge through the exploration of innovative pathways about energy, life and the life force. They also believed that primitive peoples

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<sup>7</sup> Calaresu 2009, 66.

had at one time possessed much of this knowledge, but that it had either not been successfully transmitted or, even more likely, had been purposefully blocked by the Church (Spruit 40). The graphic, architectural and artistic signs and symbols of ancient and primitive cultures, a universal code that could decipher the secrets of the universe, fueled their desire to visit Italy's newly discovered archaeological sites. From the 1740s on, enlightened nobles in Rome and Naples who cultivated antiquarian interests entered into ever-greater contact with a cross-section of travellers who consulted with them for their antiquarian expertise. One of the most erudite and eclectic among them was Raimondo di Sangro, Prince of San Severo. Di Sangro was sent to Rome by his grandfather to acquire the best education available at the same Jesuit school attended by Pope Benedict XIV, who became his classmate and friend. In 1730 Raimondo returned to Naples where he jointly pursued intense study and experimentation in natural and scientific phenomena, political work, and military bravery. During this same time he became attracted to freemasonry. The confluence of these pursuits is documented in a rich collection of publications, printed in his cellar on the press that he himself invented for the impression of multi-coloured characters and images. Noteworthy are the books of a masonic-occultist bent,<sup>8</sup> not to mention

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<sup>8</sup> The most important of these works is *Dissertation sur une lampe antique trouvé à Munich en l'année 1753*.

the commissioning and printing of the Italian translation in 1753 of Chevalier Ramsay's masonic treatise *Voyages de Cyrus* 1727.

While we might tend to think of masonic activity as conducted secretly and underground, Di Sangro, instead sought to render public masonry's doctrines of fraternity and knowledge pursuit in an effort to galvanize Neapolitan society and to recruit as many interested parties as possible to take up the mantle with him.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Di Sangro's conduct matches perfectly the masonic ideal of the eighteenth century as described by Pierre-Yves Beaurepaire. These freemasons cross borders with ease, placing a high value on sociability and fraternal networks of exchange.<sup>10</sup>

Di Sangro's efforts were very successful. By 1749 he had recruited an impressive cross-section of Neapolitan nobility, clergy, artisans, and merchants into the burgeoning ranks of Italian Freemasons; among these ranks were to be found the Freemason from Metz of Swiss origin, Théodore Henri de Tschoudy, who had travelled to Naples to work in his Swiss uncle's regiment, where he entered Di Sangro's lodge. Raimondo Di Sangro, the Prince of San Severo believed that concentrated, sustained activity organized by the proponents of every

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<sup>9</sup> See di Castiglione 1988 for a description of Di Sangro's lodge and full biographies of its members, who represent an impressive cross-section of the most productive and innovative members of Neapolitan society from every privileged and professional walk of life.

<sup>10</sup> Beaurepaire 1998.

sector of society in Naples, including the many foreigners who lived there, was the only viable means for revitalizing the kingdom. Di Sangro fully embraced the notion of broad-based knowledge creation and the importance of engaging people locally to practice, disseminate, and innovate upon globally acquired knowledge. Di Sangro had access to much of this work as his library shows. His own hands on meshing of material culture with philosophy is very much in keeping with the kind of entrepreneurial spirit that H. J. Cook describes as emerging from the Dutch seventeenth century, “the new philosophy arose not from disembodied minds but from the passions and interests of mind and body united.”<sup>11</sup> Counting hundreds of new members from the moment he had assumed the rank of “Grande maestro” a few years before, the Prince began to envision a role for himself at the helm of Freemasonry in all of Europe as well as Naples and its kingdom. He sought the coordination of sites where new forms of knowledge could be transferred through masonic networks that were open, not clandestine as had been the practice due to ecclesiastical interference. Indeed, this ideal of openness in the fostering of masonic activity would ultimately bring about his downfall as a masonic leader, but during the heady years of the late 1740s and early 1750s, the potential for such problems was barely visible to him. Such was his exuberant character and network of protectors, which included King Charles III and Pope

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<sup>11</sup> Cook 2007, 42.

Benedict XIV, that he failed to see how the plans to put an end to his public, masonic persona, were slowly hatching.

Nevertheless, the quest for universal life through alchemical and scientific practices, prompted the Prince of San Severo to actively seek all sources of knowledge that might advance these goals. His acute mind, entrepreneurial spirit, and network of influential friends and collaborators all played a role in the creation of the ‘anatomical machines’ that constitute one of the most tangible product of his legacy from the time they first occupied a coveted place in the private laboratory that he named ‘La Fenice’, which he had built under the family chapel, where they are still on view today. Our research has revealed that far from being the science-fictionesque markers of a suspect criminal and cyborg-seeking individual, the anatomical machines were considered tangible results of the Prince’s lifelong pursuits in physiology to understand life and the life force. Considering the scrutiny he and his work underwent at the hands of the Pope and papal censors, it is surprising to discover that he had even garnered the accolades of Pope Clement XIV for precisely this work, as will be discussed in the following section of this article.

### **3. The anatomical machines and San Gennaro’s blood**

‘Anatomical machines’ is the term used to refer to the Raimondo di Sangro’s most notorious experiment, alleged for centuries to be the

skeletal remains of two of his servants, a male and a female, with all of their organs and vessels preserved through the technique of injection. Today, as we have mentioned, these anatomical machines are in full view in twin niches carved into plaster at the Cappella di San Severo, an oft-visited tourist spot, where the cadavers constitute one of the venue's main attractions. Recent analysis of these physiological artefacts has revealed them instead to indeed be the skeletons of a man and a woman; under scientific scrutiny, the heretofore believed to be embalmed and "living" organs and vessels are instead facsimiles fashioned with wire and wax. The research conducted by Renata Peters, conservationist of archaeological artefacts, and historian of medicine, Lucia Dacome, has settled one of the accounts related to this enigma, namely the true material make-up of the machines. This is important, as it finally clears the Prince of the macabre accusations of Mengele-like experimentation, making possible the more serious study of his ideal and work, with the potential of changing his legacy. Following upon this significant, game-changing research, then, let us move forward to answer the question that Peters and Dacome's research begets, which is why such suspicions arose in the first place. It behoves us to investigate the premises for the mythology surrounding the Prince, for these very premises document both the depth of his knowledge and the breadth of his networks, offering a nexus for his entire world view and the ideas that he shared internationally in what we deem to be Radical Enlightenment connections.

As we have stated, the two preserved cadavers known as the 'anatomical machines', flaunt a network of vessels carrying what appear

to be human bodily fluids, believed to have been chemical substances that were injected into the cadavers' venous, arterial and lymphatic systems to preserve a lifelike appearance. The cadavers were purportedly realized by Domenico Giuseppe Salerno, an anatomist from Palermo who had studied under Giuseppe Mastiani (1715-1756). Mastiani was trained by the Parisian anatomist of Danish origin, Jacques-Bénigne Winslow, in the dual arts of anatomical wood modelling and injecting the venous and arterial systems of corpses with life-like fluids of preservation.<sup>12</sup> Winslow had learned the techniques in Holland, where he had studied under Frederik Ruysch. Peters and Dacome allude to the practice of injection as performed and perfected in the late seventeenth century by the Dutch anatomists Reinier de Graaf, Frederik Ruysch, and Jan Swammerdam. However, they only reference anatomical injection as a promising method to be used in the interest of a line of research that we would consider traditional, i.e., that of investigating the inner body in order to glean medical information through visualization.<sup>13</sup> What they neglect to reference, however, is the strong interest that injection elicited among those who viewed it as a means of preserving life and understanding the life force, two distinctly heretical practices that contrasted with Catholic teachings through the inherent refutation of the canonical notion of afterlife that the goals of injection represented. This was surely the

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<sup>12</sup> See Winslow 1742.

<sup>13</sup> Peters and Dacome 2007, 164.

purpose of Fredrik Ruysch and those who viewed his work, not the least of whom was the Czar Peter the Great who upon seeing one of Ruysch's most lifelike corpses, what appeared to be a sleeping baby, bent down to kiss its cheek.<sup>14</sup> And it was most certainly the purpose of Domenico Giuseppe Salerno and his rarely mentioned partner, Paolo Graffeo, also from Palermo. A contract that Di Sangro drew up for Domenico Salerno's activity in Naples bears only Salerno's signature, sources from the eighteenth-century to the present always mention Graffeo and Salerno in tandem. Since Salerno was, indeed, an expert injector, trained as he was in the techniques of the Dutch and Parisian schools, and since the anatomical models had been attributed to him, it stood to reason that the cadavers had been live specimens attended to immediately upon their death to preserve a lifelike appearance and that Di Sangro had brought Salerno to Naples, and worked with him to simulate and recreate bodily fluids, in particular the blood, through alchemical methods. Indeed, Di Sangro's fully equipped laboratory contained all the tools of the alchemist's trade. However, there is a great deal missing from this story, and while clear answers are not yet available, the retracing of the transfer of knowledge from Palermo to Naples brings us fully into the kind of transmission described by Bruno Latour which in the eighteenth century, connects global and local, with the intention of retransmitting the information globally again which was the intention of the Prince of San Severo.

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<sup>14</sup> Cook 2007, 101.



Sicily had long been known as a site deeply invested in embalming and cadaver preserving, to which the rows of Capuchin corpses in Messina bear ample witness. Bolognese scientist Marcello Malpighi was indeed recruited by Messina for a four-year sabbatical in which he taught the methods of preservation and injection that he had perfected.<sup>15</sup> In recognition of this tradition, in 1742 Charles III promulgated the new statute of the reformed Royal Palermitan Academy of Medicine, whose teaching function was officially recognized.<sup>16</sup> The Senate tasked Mastiani, who was still in Paris, with the purchase of over 50 surgical instruments for the newly reformed academy, making Mastiani the Chief of Staff upon his return in 1744. He died in 1756 and was replaced by Salvatore Pasquale, who had also been trained in France. Though young when he died, Mastiani had nonetheless succeeded in training his students, Domenico Giuseppe Salerno and Paolo Graffeo, who would create the anatomical models. Mid eighteenth century, Palermo's medical prowess far outshone that of Naples, creating an opportunity for a nobleman, such as Di Sangro, trained in the new philosophy, to play a role in advancing the discipline in Naples. The Prince's private laboratory became a potentially important site for the advancement of medical science. Indeed, the anatomical models that we view today in their twin niches in the Cappella di San Severo were transported from Palermo. The

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<sup>15</sup> Meli 2011.

<sup>16</sup> De Gregorio e russo 1761, 30.

transmission of the models from Palermo and Naples has been documented in an account that tells of the public showing of a cadaver before the Academy of Medicine at the hospital, where instruction in anatomy had become a staple.<sup>17</sup> Giuseppe De Gregorio e Russo (1703-1771), an illustrious doctor at the academy, has left a detailed account of how the cadavers, or anatomical machines, became a salient part of the Prince of San Severo's mystique. He refers to two kinds of cadavers in his report De Gregorio tells of the first time that a male cadaver was shown in Palermo at the Academy and the effect and impression it created: "the artificial liquid rendered the veins and arteries turgid, coloured in such a way that one might think that it was the body of a young man who was still alive."<sup>18</sup> This sounds like a cadaver preserved in the manner in which Ruysch preserved bodies, blurring the lines between life and death. However, he also talks about the public showing of the model to a restricted audience in Palermo, where Francesco Bonocore, "Il Protomedico," or head doctor from King Charles III's chambers was present for the viewing. In a letter to the Viceroy Fogliani, Bonocore gushed over the cadaver:

"I must honestly confess to Your Excellency that if the King of Denmark boasts as a miracle of anatomy the artificial skeleton with veins and arteries in white metal which he keeps in his cabinet in

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<sup>17</sup> Scinà 1859, 276.

<sup>18</sup> De Gregorio e Russo 1762, 246.

Copenhagen, the one our Father Salerno has shown deserves to be placed in one of the most famous galleries in all of Europe.”<sup>19</sup>

From these notes, it is clear that only one “machine” was shown. Following this demonstration, reports De Gregorio e Russo, the machine was swept from view and brought to Naples upon a decree from King Charles, where the King himself had arranged for their demonstration, an event to which Raimondo di Sangro, the Prince of San Severo, was personally invited and where, we might speculate, he saw the machine or the machines for the first time. De Gregorio e Russo also discusses the tradition of this kind of anatomical construction in Palermo. Though De Gregorio e Russo was not personally in attendance, we can only surmise that it was his colleague, Giuseppe Domenico Salerno himself who recounted to him what had transpired. De Gregorio and Russo reported that the King himself convened the meeting on November 27, 1756, discussing in an eloquent speech the glorious apparatus of the human body to a full audience of Neapolitans. It seems that he is talking about the models constructed with wire and wax, not injection. From the two accounts given by De Gregorio e Russo, we can surmise that Salerno and Graffeo were adept at both arts – that of preserving corpses in a lifelike state, as did Ruysch, and that of constructing anatomical models with skeletons, wires and wax. It is likely that Di Sangro wished to learn both arts from Salerno by hiring the Sicilian anatomist to work with him. Trained as he was by Winslow,

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<sup>19</sup> De Gregorio e Russo 1762, 246-47.

who had studied with Ruysch, Di Sangro was interested in how to preserve life and Salerno was the best person to learn from. Ruysch and his followers sought to preserve cadavers in such a lifelike way that spectators continually called into question whether death had really occurred. Ruysch and Winslow wrote eloquently about the grey zone between life and death, speculating philosophically and medically about characteristics and potential of the indefinable space and spectrum that ran between living and dying. Winslow's observations of Ruysch's preserved cadavers reveal the impressions they left on the young scholar during his visit to Ruysch's Amsterdam teaching theater in 1720:

I am very surprised upon my first view of the famous cabinet of Mr. Ruysch; I was even more surprised while attending a public demonstration during which he showed, among several handsome anatomical samples, two full childrens' bodies that he had preserved so well that they appeared to possess their full robustness and natural color.<sup>20</sup>

Severo's connection with blood and alchemy had an important dimension as well, one that was quintessentially Neapolitan and related to the ritual surrounding the biannual celebration of patron saint San Gennaro, whose blood, preserved in a vial and on a stone, would liquefy as an omen of prosperity and peace in the coming year. Appointed by Charles III to the most illustrious group of men who were the protectors

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<sup>20</sup> Gysel 1985, 153.

of San Gennaro's blood, Di Sangro came within close proximity to the 'miracle' every year, a veritable eyewitness to the liquefaction and a participant in the ritualistic preparations for the occurrence. Considering the importance of San Gennaro in the mythical and cultural life of Naples, and, among nobles the "keen vying for precedence and visibility in the rituals of the capital," the prominence of the Prince within the ranks of Neapolitan nobility is duly underscored by this prestigious appointment.<sup>21</sup> Yet Di Sangro's intellectual curiosity prompted him to move beyond the claims of miracle to understand the physical properties of this blood, or purported blood, in order, we speculate, to prove that what appeared to be a miracle was merely a reaction based upon scientific evidence. Such a bold attempt to debunk miracles, thus removing from the Catholic Church one of its primary means of control over the masses falls squarely into the kind of activity that can only be classified as radical. Here, too, the Prince's desire and ability to debunk and publicize widely demonstrates his confidence in the reception of such activities among an international, radical audience. When his alchemical experiments were discovered, he was relieved of his duties and accused of irreligion. Though condemned as a debunker of the miracle by the Church, he was sung as an enlightened, scientifically minded hero by Jérôme-Joseph de la Lande, renowned French astronomer and Freemason who wrote of his visit to Di Sangro in his *Voyage en Italie* where he hailed him as the most enlightened

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<sup>21</sup> Naddeo 2012, 17.

figure in the Kingdom. The anatomical machines, Ruysch, Pietro Giannone, another debunker of the miracle of San Gennaro, and the miracle itself all appear in *Encyclopédie d'Yverdon* articles written by Fortunato Bartolomeo De Felice, the Prince's protégé, while Gabriel Mingard also wrote about the saint in one of his articles for the *Encyclopédie d'Yverdon* that we will analyse further on in this article.

#### **4. Networks of radical influence: Giannone, Di Sangro, De Felice, Mingard, and the *Encyclopédie* d'Yverdon**

Network theory posits that the connection between local sites of knowledge through people and publication ultimately means that knowledge networks come into contact and transmission takes place. In the relationship between the Prince of San Severo in Naples and Switzerland, especially Berne and Yverdon-les-Bains, a little studied example between two local networks in the history of the radical enlightenment may be observed. The ties between Raimondo di Sangro, the Prince of San Severo and Switzerland pass through the brotherhood of Freemasonry, but just as importantly the authority of scientific networks. Let us begin with Freemasonry. Among the Freemasons identified as belonging to Raimondo di Sangro's grand lodge in Naples, Fortunato Bartolomeo De Felice figures among those who attended regular meetings, but whose membership among the ranks could not be

thoroughly verified, though deemed to appear likely. According to De Felice's first biographer, Eugène Maccabez, De Felice left abruptly a position teaching philosophy in Rome, where he concentrated on Leibniz and Newton, to take up a university post arranged for him by Celestino Galiani and friends, where he was responsible for teaching experimental physics and mathematics.<sup>22</sup> It is highly likely that the Prince of San Severo was to be counted among those friends securing his arrival in Naples, for Di Sangro had become intent upon learning as much as he could about Newtonianism as Spruit has reported and De Felice was the person who could instruct him, though Spruit makes no mention of De Felice in his preface to the *Lettera apologetica*. De Felice quickly impressed with his erudition, however, and the newcomer was immediately charged with the translation of works by Galileo and others in a series called the *Scelta de' migliori opuscoli* of which only one would appear in 1753. His translation of Arbuthnot's *An Essay concerning the Effects of Air on Human Bodies* into Latin in 1753 attracted the attention of Albrecht von Haller, who quoted it extensively in his *Elements of Physiology* (1757-1766). As a prominent member of Bernese society, Albrecht von Haller strove to improve the cultural life in Berne. With Bernese patrician, Vincenz Bernard von Tscharnner, Haller sought to attract new talent to the capital of the Bernese territories. A letter from the Prince of San Severo to Tscharnner in 1756 reveals the joint interest that the two Freemasons held in placing Fortunato Bartolomeo De Felice

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<sup>22</sup> Maccabez 1903, 1.

out of harm's way in Switzerland, for Naples had suddenly become a dangerous place for the Newtonian. By this date, The Prince was under scrutiny for the *Lettera Apologetica*, his experiments, Freemasonry, and irreligion. Felice referenced his relationship to the Prince in his autobiography, as "l'homme le plus savant de l'Italie," with whom he claimed he had begun "to shake off the despotic yoke of superstition and the exterior and empty religious practices of Roman Catholicism."<sup>23</sup> De Felice would eventually become the managing editor of a 56-volume encyclopaedia, know familiarly as the *Encyclopédie d'Yverdon*, to distinguish it from Diderot and D'Alembert's *Encyclopédie de Paris*. This encyclopaedia, its managing editor, De Felice, and one of its most important and prolific contributors, the pastor Gabriel Mingard all reflect the influence of the interests and pursuits of Raimondo di Sangro's principles and ideas.

When we study Raimondo di Sangro's anticlericalism and his desire to rebuild Naples, and Europe as well, based on philosophical principles, his fate of being silenced by the Church ran parallel in many ways to that of one of the most radical Italian figures, also from Naples. The figure and legacy of Pietro Giannone (1676-1748), anticlerical lawyer, historian and papal critic in Naples whose 1723 *Istoria civile del regno di Napoli* (*Civil History of Naples*) would precede San Severo's *Lettera Apologetica* on the *Index librorum prohibitorum* offers a curious nexus of intersecting radical interests, people, situations, and, ultimately,

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<sup>23</sup> Maccabez 1903, 5.



unifying vision around which the next section of this article is organized. We fully concur with Spruit who finds that while Israel's collocation of Giambattista Vico (1668-1744) and Paolo Mattia Doria (1662-1746) among the proponents of Radical Enlightenment might be something of a stretch due to the decidedly conservative tenor of their writings, there can be no doubt, instead, of Giannone's full-fledged presence among the ranks of Southern radical thinkers. Let us consider Giannone's life and how he provides a link from Di Sangro to Switzerland. Giannone's history of Naples' civil institutions and its examination of them as independent from Church history followed in the tradition of Venetian Paolo Sarpi's 1619 *Historia del Concilio Tridentino* (*History of the Council of Trent*), first published in London, and greatly admired in Protestant circles as unmasking curial interests and the temporal strategies designed to perpetuate strife. While the fiercely independent Veneto upheld Paolo Sarpi's principles, in the seventeenth century, Giannone, whose civil history of Naples was intended as a blueprint for political action when it was written in 1723, delineated a three-pronged purpose to inspire Neapolitans to keep the church out of politics, to cast off the feudal encroachment of the Spanish crown; and to reform the State, holding back nothing in its critique of papal interference and thus breaking with the time honoured tradition of protecting ecclesiastical history from emerging with a tarnished image once its dealings in political history had brought to the fore. The Kingdom of Naples was ripe for political unrest as dissatisfaction with two centuries of Spanish rule escalated, receiving reinforcements from nascent reform movements as well in other parts of Catholic Europe.

Giannone's book appeared at a time of growing discontent with the clergy.

As Pasquale Palmieri has shown, anticlerical sentiment had been building from the end of the seventeenth century, running unabated after the arrival of the Austrians in 1707 and further exacerbated following the advent of Charles III in 1734 with the enactment of a series of measures designed to restore dignity to the clergy.<sup>24</sup> The intellectual life of the kingdom provided a rallying point for various sectors of the kingdom, while developing a synergy between the evolution of radical ideas such as tolerance, freedom of the press, and sexual freedom in limiting ecclesiastical interference in concubinage and radical ideas from other parts of Europe, most especially those of the English Deists such as Toland, Collins and Tindal. Pietro Giannone's *Istoria Civile di Napoli* in 1723 constituted a culminating moment of everything that the Church had been fighting to suppress in Naples and the reaction against it was swift. The volume was burned and Giannone had to flee to Vienna in order to save himself from imprisonment. However, the legacy of Giannone's work, not to mention that of Tommaso Campanella in Naples before him, had left an important radical ideology intact, ripe for continuity in the figure of Raimondo di Sangro, the Prince of San Severo. Indeed, the *Lettera Apologetica*, with references to Toland, its overt critique of the Curia, its discussion of San Gennaro's blood and how it might be explained outside of the confines

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<sup>24</sup> Palmieri 2011, 4.

of the miracle designation that had been attributed to it, among the many digressions that spiralled off from the defence of the Peruvian writing system in knotted threads known as the quipus, was seen as a likely call to radical action in 1750. At this point in his career, the Prince saw the possibility of disseminating from Naples radical thinking and action into the rest of Europe through publication. An encyclopaedia figured prominently among his disseminating plans for the future, and his protégé, Fortunato Bartolomeo De Felice, was to be his collaborator on this project. Only seven years later, however, Di Sangro's position in Naples had undergone a dramatic change. The placement of the *Lettera Apologetica* on the *Index* significantly tempered the Prince's desire for increased visibility both at home and abroad. Despite Di Sangro's attempts to refute the charges in the *Supplica*, a work, incidentally, that only served to implicate him further in the subversive activities of which he had been accused, his star continued to decline. The Vatican closed in on Freemasonry in Naples, Di Sangro's lodge in particular, forcing the Prince to reveal the names of the masons he had mentored. He thenceforth assumed a position of silence, renouncing, on the surface at least, his former public persona as a fearless and unabashed instrument of change. In reality though, Di Sangro's commitment to the radical cause merely went underground. Privately, he used his network of Freemasons to procure safe passage for De Felice into Switzerland following the death of Benedict XIV and the inevitable shift away from the enlightened and open dialogue of his papacy – albeit increasingly limited towards its end – that had nonetheless defined it. How, then, was Di Sangro's radical worldview to make its mark in absence of its

leader? The encyclopaedic compilation was to be that organ of diffusion, and its principal architect Fortunato Bartolomeo De Felice, the brilliant young mind whom Di Sangro had taken in as a member of his inner circle.

Correspondence between Di Sangro and Bernese Patrician and Freemason Bernard Vincenz von Tscharner confirms the coordinated efforts that led to De Felice's clandestine escape from Italy into Switzerland, not to mention a reference to a high ranking officer in Switzerland who was most likely Baron Tschoudy in the *Lettera Apologetica*.<sup>25</sup> Tscharner would play a pivotal role in De Felice's career in Switzerland, and, we might speculate, saw him as the conduit for realizing a certain number of goals that were consonant with Freemasonry and the Radical Enlightenment. Tscharner oversaw De Felice's years of adaptation to life in Berne, placing him on a distinct publishing trajectory, including, first, the editing of two periodicals, 1758-1762, during which time he would eventually move to the small town of Yverdon-les-Bains, where he would set up a publishing house financed by Berne where the *Encyclopédie d'Yverdon* was published (1770-1780), but also where works of a decidedly radical bent were published, not the least of which was a 1768 edition of *Les Trois Imposteurs* and two editions of Jacques-Philibert Rousselot de Surgy's, *Mélanges intéressans et curieux our Abrégé d'histoire naturelle, morale, civile et politique de l'Asie, l'Afrique, l'Amérique et des terres polaires*, the first

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<sup>25</sup> Donato 2005, 108.

published in 12 volumes 1764-67 and the second in six volumes in 1767.<sup>26</sup>

The *Encyclopédie* d'Yverdon offers an ideal vantage point from which to analyse Di Sangro's radical networks diachronically. The idea to create an encyclopaedia to counterbalance the *Encyclopédie* de Paris, the French summa of the state of knowledge mid eighteenth century, was actually developed while De Felice was in Naples, as discussed in the four-page article about the Prince of San Severo signed by De Felice himself in the Yverdon encyclopaedia. Expounding on Di Sangro's multi-faceted erudition, De Felice also expresses regret over the missing voice of Di Sangro as a collaborator in the enterprise. Following praise for every aspect of the Prince's abilities in the "useful arts," De Felice minces no word in his condemnation of the "insects" who prompted Di Sangro's demise as a public figure:

Un si grand homme parmi une noblesse aussi ignorante que la Napolitaine, devait exciter dans ces petits génies de la jalousie, et le prince de *San-Severo* devait être en butte à leur calomnie. En effet, il fut représenté comme un homme dangereux et sans religion, parce qu'il faisait trop de bien et trop d'honneur à son ordre, et qu'il n'étoit pas un fanatique ignorant. Mais *San-Severo* content des ressources immenses de son génie et de son cœur, méprisait souverainement les faibles efforts de ces petits insectes, qui ne furent jamais capables d'éclipser un seul

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<sup>26</sup> Perret 1945, 424-425.

moment son humeur gaie et communément uniforme, ni de détourner son cœur de la bienfaisance envers ceux même qui étoient les plus animés contre son grand mérite. Je ne quittais jamais cet homme estimable, sans en rapporter des connaissances précieuses, et sans être pénétré de cette bonté éclairée et solide de son cœur, qui faisait l'admiration de tous ceux qui avoient l'honneur de l'approcher.<sup>27</sup>

Despite the fact that the Prince penned none of the articles, there are traces of him throughout the work, including the article “Naples” which mentions Di Sangro’s scientific work on San Gennaro’s blood and his debunking of the purported miracle; it also describes the art of the alchemist, Di Sangro, in his quest to replicate the characteristics of human blood:

Il y a cependant à *Naples* aujourd’hui plusieurs incrédules et quelques personnes qui croient que le miracle de S. Janvier n’est qu’une préparation chimique. Un grand savant napolitain, aussi illustre par sa naissance, que par ses lumières, fit faire un ostensor ou reliquaire, semblable à celui de S. Janvier, avec des fioles ou ampoules de même forme, remplies d’un amalgame d’or et de mercure avec du cinabre, qui imite par sa couleur le sang coagulé; pour rendre cet amalgame fluide, il y a dans le creux de la bordure ou de l’entourage du reliquaire un réservoir de mercure coulant, avec une soupape, qui en

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<sup>27</sup> De Felice 1770-1780, XXX, 484-85.

tournant le reliquaire, s'ouvre pour laisser entrer du mercure dans la fiole. L'amalgame devient alors coulant et imite la liquéfaction [...].<sup>28</sup>

The article goes on to explain how this vessel was fitted with a reservoir of liquid mercury, with a small opening that allowed a bit of mercury to enter the flask. The amalgamation thus became runny, imitating the liquefaction of the blood: "Voilà le fameux miracle de S. Janvier. Grand Dieu! votre sainte religion a-t-elle besoin de pareilles fourberies de prêtres?"<sup>29</sup>

The *Encyclopédie* d'Yverdon article describes in minute detail the liquefying of the blood for Di Sangro as a chemical process – not a miracle, but also as a matter of investigation into life, generation and regeneration as transformative processes. He is thinking about blood, its properties, what substances might replace it and exhibit the same functions as real blood while, at the same time, preserving life. Di Sangro is immediately intrigued by how things appear. The closer they look to life, the closer they might be to life. Where did Di Sangro's ideas come from and what are his sources? Until present, it has been difficult to link Di Sangro to any particular school of anatomical study, as this part of his activity was kept quiet, engendering legends of the sort previously mentioned. However, as Leen Spruit has suggested, Di

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<sup>28</sup> De Felice 1770-1780, XXX, 40.

<sup>29</sup> De Felice 1770-1780, XXX, 45.

Sangro's interest in origins, life force, the preservation of life and hermetic traditions and practices that provide access to this wisdom can be traced to his ties with the radical branches of the Dutch and British Enlightenment, and, I would add, his contacts with Dutch and British freemasonry in the 1740s.

Di Sangro's experiments and the goals of his research bear an uncanny resemblance to those of Frederic Ruysch (1638-1731), cited by Israel as one of the most important figures of Holland's scientific flowering. In early eighteenth-century Leiden, Ruysch's posed cadavers and preserved bodies, fully in line with Di Sangro's interests in the practices of the Palermo Academy and his desire to learn from Domenico Salerno. Building on Swammerdam's methods, Ruysch earned renown for his skill in preserving and displaying anatomical organisms as well as other physiological and entomological specimens. Although Israel makes no explicit connections between the scientific work of Ruysch, Swammerdam and the Radical Enlightenment, in *The Dutch Republic*, he is certainly presenting the massive intellectual and scientific flowering that created a context within which such enlightened ideas could take hold. There is no doubt that Ruysch' experimentation at the interstices of life and death, not to mention those of Swammerdam and Van Leeuwenhoek as well, constitute a celebration of the body as matter. These aspects of the Dutch Radical Enlightenment are transmitted through articles in the *Encyclopédie* d'Yverdon, in particular, a lengthy article on Ruysch. If we think about the transmission of Ruysch's methods to Winslow, then to Mastiani who brought them to Palermo and trained Domenico Salerno, it is not



surprising to find this discussion of Ruysch, his techniques, and the fine line between life and death that his preserved cadavers conjured up for those who saw them.

Ruysch had surpassed his master Swammerdam in his use of preparations injected into the vessels in order to preserve them, but he had surpassed Robert Boyle as well. Boyle had fashioned lifelike substances with plaster and gelatin; these were further improved up on by Marcello Malpighi and De Graaf, both of whom employed various coloured inks in their observations of the kidney and male genitalia. Ruysch' work, however, moves us most clearly into the metaphysical, for he spares no detail in his attempt to remind us of the tenuous relationship between life and death in the way he presents the bodies he has preserved. Indeed, these preserved bodies tell a story, "with babies preserved in their baptismal clothes as though they were asleep, and embryonic skeletons playing minute violins."<sup>30</sup> He devoted himself to making anatomical preparations and became a master in the technique of preservation; he conserved organs and entire corpses by injecting them with preserving fluids. His anatomical and zoological cabinet became a major attraction for foreign visitors. In 1691 Ruysch edited a catalogue of his cabinet's contents in both Dutch and Latin. He described his preparations and findings extensively in his ten-volume *Thesaurus Anatomicus*. Ruysch' collection consisted of curiosities with medical and scientific significance that highlighted the delicate

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<sup>30</sup> Cobb 2006, 104.

relationship between life and death, inviting speculation about these two states.

The fact that *Encyclopédie d'Yverdon* contains a long, article outlining Ruysch' experiments, lavish in detail about the injection process and the preparations used to preserve the cadavers, is not a coincidence. It bears the mark of San Severo's influence and interest in anatomical matters, especially the lessons that had been learned from Ruysch through Salerno. Though the article is not signed, stylistically it belongs to De Felice:

Sa principale occupation, celle qui consumoit la plus grande partie de son tems, c'étoit la dissection. Il poussa l'anatomie a un point de perfection auquel elle n'avoit point encore atteint. Les anatomistes s'en étoient tenus pendant long-temps aux instrumens qu'ils jugeoient nécessaires pour la séparation des parties solides, dont ils se proposoient de connoître la structure particuliere et les rapports mutuels, Reignier de Graff, intime ami de *Ruysch*, fut le premier, qui pour découvrir le mouvement du sang dans les vaisseaux & les routes différentes qu'il prend pendant que l'automate vit, inventa une seringue d'une espece nouvelle, à l'aide de laquelle il remplit les vaisseaux d'une substance colorée qui faisait distinguer les routes qu'elle avoit suivies [...]. Par consequent que le sang suivoit à sa place, lorsque l'animal étoit vivant.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> De Felice 1770-1780, XXXVII, 298.

Swammerdam perfected these experiments so that he could: “rendre sensibles les artères capillaires et les veines du visage.” However, the article explains that Swammerdam quickly abandoned his experiments because of religious guilt. Nevertheless, he passed his results on to his friend Ruysch, who found nothing in them that could offend God. Unfettered by religion, Ruysch moved forward with science in ways that were radical and deemed heretical:

Le succes repondit a ses premiers essais, & il débuta vraisemblablement par quelque chose de beaucoup plus parfait que ce que Swammerdam avoit fait. L'injection des vaisseaux étoit telle, que les parties les plus éloignées de leurs ramifications, celles qui étoient aussi déliées que les fils des toiles d'araignées, devinrent sensibles; & ce qui'il y a de singulier, c'est qu'elle ne l'étoient quelques fois qu'à l'aide du microscope. On découvrit par ce moyen des ramifications qu'on n'avoit point encore aperçues, soit en considérant des corps vivans, soit en dissequant des corps d'hommes morts depuis peu de tems.<sup>32</sup>

The article describes the injection of several children's bodies, addressing the difficulties of having sufficient numbers of adults for experimentation. It emphasizes both the life-like feel of these treated cadavers, their gradual acquisition of beauty, and their sweet smell:

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<sup>32</sup> De Felice 1770-1780, XXXVII, 298.

Tous les cadavres qu'il a injectés, ont le lustre, l'éclat & la fraîcheur de la jeunesse; on les prendroit pour des personnes vivantes, profondément endormies; & a considérer les membres articulés, on les croiroit prêts a marcher; Enfin, on pourroit presque dire, que Ruysch avoit découvert le secret de rescusciter les morts, Ses momies étoient un spectacle de vie, au lieu que celles des Egyptiens n'offroient que l'image de la mort. L'homme sembloit continuer de vivre dans les unes, & continuer de mourir dans les autres.<sup>33</sup>

This description of Ruysch' work corresponds perfectly to the mapping of the tangle of inner pathways preserved by the Prince of San Severo in his cadavers. The fact that these injections needed to be done while the subject was alive, or very shortly after death, reminds us of the popular rumours about Di Sangro, accused as he was of injecting the humans who make up his anatomical machines while they were still alive. Though we know this is not the case, the relationship is evident.

## 5. Gabriel Mingard

We have mentioned Gabriel Mingard, author of the article on Pietro Giannone in the *Encyclopédie* d'Yverdon and we have seen the nature of this article and how it advocated for the ideas and teachings of Giannone and his radical views. However, the article on Pietro Giannone

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<sup>33</sup> De Felice 1770-1780, XXXVII, 299.

is only one of more than 400 articles signed by Mingard that address any number of issues and positions that Israel has classified as essential to a Radical Enlightenment outlook, among them sexual freedom, pantheism, anticlericalism, human rights, and censorship. A full analysis of these articles is not within the scope of this study, however, we may make a few points about the general contours of Mingard's contributions, how they fit the definition of the Radical Enlightenment, and how Mingard, as De Felice's closest collaborator and encyclopaedically, became the instrument of continuity, together with De Felice, of the Prince of San Severo's ideas.

Gabriel Mingard came from a long line of Vaudois pastors and was consecrated pastor himself in 1754. In 1756 he travelled to Naples, where he most likely met Fortunato Bartolomeo De Felice and, we might speculate, Raimondo di Sangro, the Prince of San Severo. From 1756 to 1763, he was pastor at the Walloon Church of Breda. While little is known about the years he spent in Holland, he did marry Everardine-Henriette van Schinne while there on November 9 1762.<sup>34</sup> She was born in Batavia, daughter of the mayor of Amsterdam who had also assumed the presidency of the Board of Directors of the Dutch East India Company. Mingard became affluent as a result of his marriage, which enabled him to purchase a large lake-side home once he returned to Lausanne.

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<sup>34</sup> Hofmann 1996, 86.

The trip to Naples in 1756 prompted him to reflect on the so-called miracle of San Gennaro, which he recalls in the article ‘Polythéisme’, which he penned for the *Encyclopédie* d’Yverdon. Here, he deftly compares the deification of men who had lived among other men in antiquity with the canonization of what he refers to as “our” saints in the present day. His condemnation of the worship of these modern gods takes a particularly vehement turn as he recalls the worship of saints in France, Italy, and Spain who have become the object of the public’s obsession, fomented by the clergy. His most pointed comments, however are reserved for the worship of San Gennaro in Naples, who the Neapolitans have promoted to the status of sole god. He comments freely on the duping of the Neapolitan populace as they pray for the liquefaction of San Gennaro’s blood, quoting, verbatim, their chant:

Mais dira-t-on, comment ces héros, tels que Thésée, Hercule, Odin, Osiris & Isis, &c. sont-ils devenus les dieux suprêmes? par la meme raison qu’à Paris Sainte Genvieve, à Naples S. Janvier, en Irlande S. Patrick, à Sienne sainte Catherine, à Compostelle saint Jacques, sont plus respectés que Dieu, par le bas people, & que pour peu qu’on voulût s’y prêter, on verroit la populace oublier Dieu & ne penser plus à adorer que son saint. Laissez faire les moines grossiers & ignorans, & la populace de Naples, & bientôt il ne sera plus question de Dieu dans leur culte mais uniquement de S. Janvier. En 1756, j’ai oui ce people faire de Dieu un intercesseur au près de ce saint. & pendant qu’il attendoit la liquéfaction du sang, s’écrier, *Domendio! Prega san*

*Gennaro che faccia il miracolo; ainsi le héros déifié devint la divinité tutélaire, & bientôt la seul divinité d'un people.*<sup>35</sup>

Mingard's connections with Italy, his citing in Italian, and his scholarly output in translation confirm mastery of the Italian language. He claims having read Giannone's works *in* Italian in the article he wrote on Giannone for the *Encyclopédie* d'Yverdon; his mastery of Italian and his desire to promote Italian enlightenment figures can be seen in his translation of Pietro Verri's *Meditazioni sulla felicità* (1763) into French. He appears to have strong ties to the Radical Enlightenment in Italy and to its Swiss interlocutors, for he mentions having seen the manuscript for Giannone's work in Rome. While we do not know whether Mingard ever had any direct contact with Di Sangro, his defence of De Felice and of Italy's radical trajectory of erudition alludes directly to the Prince of San Severo in the 'Lettre du traducteur' signed G. M. that prefaces his translation of Pietro Verri's *Meditazioni sull'economia politica* (1771). Published in 1773, Mingard's translation or "revisions made to someone else's translation" which is how he explains his relationship with the translation of Verri that he is offering to his fellow members of the Société littéraire de Lausanne – though he probably did the translation himself if we consider his translation of Verri's *Meditazioni sulla felicità* some five years earlier in 1768. His reasons for not wanting to assume full ownership of the translation are thoroughly in line with much of

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<sup>35</sup> De Felice 1770-1780, XXXIV, 261.

the mystery surrounding Mingard's intellectual activity and his need to avoid notoriety. We know that this need is not merely something he perceived, and that indeed, his activity as a collaborator on the Yverdon *Encyclopédie* had made him a target for scrutiny among the censors of the work, so much so that De Felice was forced to assign him a second set of initials with which to acknowledge his authorship of articles in the *Encyclopédie* d'Yverdon, thus articles penned by Mingard appear under the initials 'G. M.' or 'M. D. B.' In the preface to volume III of the *Encyclopédie* d'Yverdon, De Felice explains why it had been necessary to protect the identity of Mingard as the author of certain contributions. We suspect, as well, that many unsigned articles are also by him, for as De Felice has indicated, his ideas were perceived as heretical to the Swiss protestant "sainte religion:"

Les talents de M. Mingard ayant été admirés, s'attirèrent nécessairement des envieux qui commencerent à repandre qu'on trouvoit dans les articles (G. M.) des endroits qui n'étoient pas conformes à l'orthodoxie de notre sainte religion, mais bien éloigné de continuer à nourrir leur jalousie, prit le sage parti d'employer deux marques. Il continua la première (G. M.) pour les articles qui n'avoient point de rapport à la religion, et fit usage de (M. D. B.), marque tiré du nom de sa campagne près de Lausanne, pour signer les articles qui pourroient donner prise aux clameurs ridicules des bigots. Dès lors les articles ont été trouvés très orthodoxes, parce qu'on n'a plus reconnu M. Mingard à cette marque. Quelle arme pour ceux qui



regardent les theologiens comme des titres dangereux dans la société!<sup>36</sup>

In the *Lettre du traducteur à les amis de la Société Littéraire de Lausanne*, signed G. M., Mingard alludes to his absence from their meetings, explaining that he was busy with other projects, though, indirectly, he is referring to his role as author of articles for the *Encyclopédie d'Yverdon*. Indeed, by the time Mingard's translation is published in 1773, the bulk of Mingard's writing for the 58-volume encyclopaedia had been completed. However, he alludes to these activities in such a way that it appears he was on a secret mission, carried out for the good of a larger constituency:

Messieurs, Des longtems je suis en arriere avec vous; je devois vous fournir aussi ma portion de dissertations & de mémoires sur les questions proposées à notre examen dans nos assemblées; mais par des circonstances qui vous sont connues, j'ai dû consacrer tout mon tems à des ouvrages qui ne vous étoient pas directement destinés, que je n'ai pas toujours pû vous communiquer, & dont quelques-uns n'étoient pas de nature à faire l'objet de nos conversations, Vous avez bien voulu par ces considérations me pardonner une oisiveté apparente, que, sans ces circonstances, vous auriez eu le droit de me reprocher comme l'effet d'une paresse blâmable, & de condamner comme la preuve d'une honteuse indifférence pour

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<sup>36</sup> De Felice 1770-1780, III, 'Avis'.

les objets intéressans & agréables, dont par notre institution nous devons nous occuper.<sup>37</sup>

He continues in his letter with a very explicit statement of his goals in presenting such a volume to the Société, while declaring how the volume is in line with the Literary Society's purpose, an explanation of why he had found Verri's *Meditazioni* to be worthy of a French edition, and in particular, worthy of a society like the Société littéraire de Lausanne, whose full title is Société littéraire et morale de Lausanne. His declaration of this society's mission to promote the good of humanity regardless of rank, class or religion is telling:

Nous avons choisi pour objets de nos conversations, tout ce qui se publie ou que nous écrivons nous-mêmes qui est de nature à intéresser un homme de lettres, un esprit qui cherche le vrai, un coeur qui aime la vertu, une ame honnête; tout ce en general, qui peut être utile à tous les hommes dans quelque tems qu'ils vivent, sous quelque climat qu'ils respirent, & quelle que soit leur condition. Tout ce qui porte ces caracteres, nous les lisons avec réflexion, nous l'examinons avec une entiere liberté, nous les critiquons avec une franchise amicable qui qui en soit l'auteur; mais cela, dans la seule vue de nous instruire, & de perfectionner notre raison. C'est d'après ces principes que

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<sup>37</sup> 'Lettre du traducteur' in Verri 1795, III-IV. This is the third edition of this work. The title of the first edition is *Réflexions sur l'economie politique*. The "Lettre du traducteur" in both editions is signed G.M.

vous avez voulu que notre Société fut ouverte à tout ami du vrai, du bon, du beau, sans nous mettre en peine quelle est sa croyance religieuse, son rang dans la société, ses intérêts politiques, & sa profession; pourvu que son caractere moral soît digne de l'estime des amis de la vertu. [...] C'est d'après ces principes, bases & règles de notre société, que j'ai cru pouvoir me faire un mérite de vous offrir comme ma part de contribution la traduction des *Meditazioni sulla economia politica*, ouvrage qui m'a paru excellent, & digne de l'attention de tout bon citoyen par l'importance des sujets que l'auteur y traite avec precision & sans verbiage, par le jour qu'il répand sur chacun d'eux, par la connoissance profonde qu'il a de son objet & de ses dépendances, par la solidité de ses raisonnemens, par la modestie de ses décisions, par cet amour du vrai & du bien qui caractérise l'honnête homme; & par cette philanthropie, par ce désir du Bonheur de l'humanité qui le rend cher à tous ceux dont le coeur est bon, & qui lui assure l'estime des ames droites.<sup>38</sup>

The content of this long quote presents in concise form the tenor of the more than 400 articles that Mingard wrote for the *Encyclopédie d'Yverdon*. Most importantly, however, in the ensuing 31 pages of this preface, Mingard not only praises the Italians for their contributions to this line of liberal thought, but also recognizes them as its creators. To

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<sup>38</sup> Verri 1795, VII-X.

make this point, he corrects a common view about the Renaissance that credited the Greeks with Renaissance thought:

Les Grecs savoient moins que les Italiens qui les accueillirent dans leur désastre: ces derniers n’aprirent d’eux que la langue grecque [...]. Lorsque ces fugitifs arrivèrent en Italie, y apporterent-ils le goût des bonnes connoissances? Non ils l’y trouverent déjà subsistant.<sup>39</sup>

Mingard, instead, speaks eloquently about the originality of the “Three Crowns,” Dante, Boccaccio and Petrarca, the brilliance and perfection reached by the Italian language some three centuries before French had acquired stability and eloquence.<sup>40</sup> He continues through the Medici, Galileo and Paolo Sarpi, as well as the many enlightened men and women active in small principalities who promoted letters and science despite the attempts of the Vatican to hold back erudition. He returns to this theme again in his discussion of Antonio Genovesi in Naples, whom he mentions as “being supported, protected and encouraged by powerful friends,” most certainly a reference to the Prince of San Severo, who was one of Genovesi’s greatest promoters and who had aided him in his reform of the university. In his autobiography, Genovesi left behind a flattering portrait of the Prince. Mingard emphasizes Di Sangro’s protection of Genovesi once again, without

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<sup>39</sup> Verri 1795, XV-XVI.

<sup>40</sup> Verri 1795, XIII-XIV.

naming the Prince directly, but rather, by citing the protection he received when he published a course on “philosophie raisonnée,” better, in Mingard’s opinion, than any other ever offered in Italy or published in the 60 years prior:

Il a eu besoin, il est vrai, de cette protection contre une superstition ignorante, opiniâtre, jalousie & malicieuse: mains enfin il a eu cette protection, & c’est à elle que nous devons ce corps de philosophie, dans le quel les vrais principes sont clairement développés. Vraisemblablement, ce bon genie a eu des bons disciples; que n’auroit-on pas à attendre des efforts de leur genie penetrant & actif, tel qu’est celui des Napolitains, si une liberté raisonnable lui permettoit de se developer sans gêne.<sup>41</sup>

This reference to Di Sangro’s milieu and the charge to continue this work through the *Encyclopédie* d’Yverdon culminates in the paragraph following the discussion of Genovesi:

C’est de l’Italie que nous est venu le savant & laborieux éditeur de l’Encyclopedie d’Yverdon, homme qui gene par mille entraves dans sa patrie, n’y auroit peut-être jamais fait connoitre son genie; mais qui mis en liberté par son séjour parmi nous, s’est montré tel qu’il est, éclairé, philosophe, doué de la plus grande penetration, & digne d’avoir été l’ami de

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<sup>41</sup> Verri 1795, XXVIII-XIX.

Genovese. Ce n'est pas là, je le sais, le langage d'une foule de gens; mais je sais aussi que l'envie, la jalousie, & des oppositions d'intérêt à l'occasion de son entreprise, font parler plusieurs personnes non en gens de lettres, mais en libraires.<sup>42</sup>

Mingard has now focused our attention on the transmission of knowledge from Naples into Switzerland. Genovese and Di Sangro, not mentioned explicitly but easily read into the definition of “protector” emphasized twice by Mingard, De Felice and now Mingard become the line of transmission. Mingard also sings the praises of De Felice, but laments the poor treatment he has received from many. Mingard warns his colleagues about the danger of thinking like “book dealers,” i.e., “libraires” rather than “gens de lettres” when they think about De Felice. He references one of De Felice’s biggest challenges once he moved to Switzerland and began managing the Yverdon publishing house where his scholarly contributions to the *Encyclopédie d’Yverdon* were overshadowed by his managerial duties.

At this juncture in his preface he presents the Milanese Enlightenment, having discussed the brilliance of the Neapolitan enlightenment that continued to leave its mark in Switzerland through Fortunato Bartolomeo De Felice and his encyclopaedia. De Felice himself was potentially the link between Mingard and Verri, for he had collaborated with Verri on the publication of the Italian periodical

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<sup>42</sup> Verri 1795, XXX.

*Estratto della letteratura europea* (1758-1762) first produced in Berne, and later in Milan with Milanese publisher Giuseppe Galleazzi. Mingard has now fully inserted Pietro Verri into a longstanding Italian tradition in excellence not only in philosophical thought, but also in the provocatively modern views not heretofore credited to Italians that challenged authority and pushed for reform. He waxes eloquently about Cesare Beccaria's *Dei delitti e delle pene* as well as his *Ricerche intorno alla natura dello stile*, not to mention the first work he translated by Pietro Verri, *Meditazioni sulla felicità*. He offers these works as the culmination of a long process of erudition and useful science for everyone that originated in Italy and that should be read and emulated by all:

Heureusement pour l'humanité, qu'il se trouve encore un nombre de vrais philosophes qui ne dégradent pas un si beau nom, mais qui sachant à quoi est destiné la philosophie s'efforcent de la ramener à sa vraie destination, & travaillent à la faire constamment marcher à côté du théologien, du juriconsulte, du moraliste, de l'homme d'état, du législateur, & du prince, pour que son flambeau pur & sans nuage artificiel éclaire tous leurs pas & les mène à la source du vrai Bonheur des peuples.<sup>43</sup>

A rapid perusal of the articles penned by Mingard in the *Encyclopédie* d'Yverdon expand upon the ideas that have been delineated in the

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<sup>43</sup> Verri 1795, XXXIX-XL.

prefatory letter we have just examined. The 380 articles he wrote belong to a discrete set of categories under which all articles are classified, the classification appearing after the title. Many of the Italians he cites in this letter are those whose biographies he penned for the volumes of the *Encyclopédie* d'Yverdon, an indication that he was specifically selected to establish and create a radical corpus for the Swiss compilation, as well as follow through with a further consideration of Italy's contribution to radical thinking in his lengthy discussion of Italian erudition in this letter serving as preface to the translated volume.<sup>44</sup>

## 6. Zilia's Quipus: Madame de Graffigny's *Lettres d'une peruvienne* as a screen for masonic interests

One of the least known chapters in the phenomenal European success of Madame de Graffigny's 1747 epistolary novel *Les Lettres d'une peruvienne* is Raimondo Di Sangro's *Lettera apologetica*.<sup>45</sup> Published in 1751, some three years prior to the publication of the first Italian translation of

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<sup>44</sup> De Felice 1770-1780, XXXVII, 298.

<sup>45</sup> For an overview of Graffigny in Italy, see Kulesa 1997, 135-37; and on the specific topic of Graffigny and the "querelle des femmes," see Kulesa forthcoming.



Madame de Graffigny's novel in Venice in 1754, San Severo's exposure to the novel in the original French and his focus on the Peruvian writing system of knotted threads, the quipus, raises a number of questions about this work, not the least of which is how Graffigny's epistolary novel of female agency and self-determination in a transcultural setting became the fodder for Di Sangro's controversial work. For Graffigny, the quipus function as an exotic device in the *advertisement* to the novel to explain how she, Graffigny, as the protagonist's "messenger," brought Zilia's letters to the attention of the public. The historical-exotic twist comes precisely from the writing in knots, the quipus, reported by Garcilaso de la Vega, son of a Spanish conquistador and an Incan princess, in *Royal Commentaries of Peru and General History of the Incas*, one of Madame de Graffigny's primary sources. Interest and trepidation about the quipus date from Pizarro himself, who commented on them in 1533; subsequently, Jesuit José de Acosta wrote about them in his work on indigenous scripts, participating, as well, in the subsequent ban placed on their use by the Catholic Church in Lima in 1583.

The timing of the publication of Di Sangro's *Lettera apologetica* is important, as it was planned as a culminating moment in the Prince's rising masonic star. For Freemasons from London to Amsterdam to Berlin, the ritual path to Masonic enlightenment drew on symbols from the ancient world. Di Sangro had studied the production of symbolic systems of communication in conjunction with the origins of man. When he purchased a sixteenth-century Jesuit manuscript that both depicted and deciphered the Incan quipus, Di Sangro knew he had an

important element to add to the Masonic mix. Desirous of promoting the universalist ideas that European Freemasonry believed to be embedded in the symbols of ancient Egypt, Etruria, Greece, Persia, and now, the Incan Empire, Di Sangro wrote the *Lettera apologetica* in 1751 to make public his discovery of the manuscript on quipus. Di Sangro was a seeker and a disseminator. Thus he touted his book as a new Masonic catechism, intending first, to capture the Italian Masonic imagination, and second, to reach European freemasonry in England, France, Holland and the German States, where he had many contacts.

It is important to underscore the date of publication, 1751. As we discussed in the first part of this essay, Di Sangro, in the burgeoning, public years of his career, operated openly, fully confident that he was performing useful work to society as a whole, work whose positive results, he believed, were recognized by both Church and State alike. However, no sooner did the work issue from his personal presses, than it was placed on the *Index*, prompting the Church to place Madame de Graffigny's highly popular novel in its numerous Italian translations on the index as well, though this aspect of the Italian reception of de Graffigny's *Lettres d'une peruvienne* has never been treated before. Di Sangro's *Lettera apologetica* and the manuscript he purchased are being studied by archeologists today as the most precious source texts we have on Peruvian quipus and their possible meanings.

As we have said, the unabashed tracing of conjoined beginnings for man, symbols, and signs in the *Lettera apologetica* features Raimondo Di Sangro, the Prince of San Severo, at the height of his powers, confidently staging a controversy of heterodoxy through the

publication of this work. The impact was all the more pronounced thanks to the popularity of Mme de Graffigny's novel. Di Sangro not only believed he would emerge unscathed, but what is more important, he actually believed himself sufficiently powerful to wage the battle of heresy with the Church and win.

Di Sangro's intuition about the depth and scope of the quipus and the singular importance of the manuscript for his contemporaries and for posterity was uncannily accurate, as the ongoing analysis today of its contents by scholars of every stripe amply demonstrates. First, the Prince correctly surmised that knotted threads were denser and richer in meaning than the mere counting function that had been assigned to them by chroniclers who had tried to downplay their potential. Anthropologists view the very manuscript that Di Sangro is credited with saving as the 'Rosetta Stone' for quipus as they begin to comprehend their narrative function, the extent of their expressive capacity and the embodiment of a highly sophisticated representation of the world and beyond. One of the most intriguing recent analyses comes from anthropologist Gary Urton, who has likened the system of knots to the binary system of ASCII code. Urton's work seeks to demonstrate that the quipus could be read by anyone trained to interpret them, and that the knots, when deciphered, are comparable to a precise system, like the alphabet. Indeed, their communicative power made the missionaries wary; in his work, Urton specifically cites the fear that the quipus instilled in the Spaniard *conquistadores* and missionaries, who believed them to be inspired by the devil. Fortunately, renegade Jesuit Blas Valera thought differently, preserving

and transmitting in his manuscript the key which is finally allowing scholars to restore indigenous historical memory and to investigate non-alphabetic communication systems.

The contents of Raimondo Di Sangro's library offer evidence of intense documentation on symbolic representations, alphabets, histories of civilization, in particular, histories of Peru and the Incas, travel accounts, histories of the Jesuits, and critiques of Jesuit activity. The collection of these works, their complementary and overlapping domains, offer insight into Di Sangro's hypotheses, fulfilled by the discovery of the quipus, and the documentation he used to establish the new genealogy of signs, symbols and forms of communication among people and gods through time. Of particular interest is his copy of Pierio Valeriano's (1477-1560) *Hieroglyphica*, first published in Basel in 1556, translated and reprinted numerous times – Di Sangro's copy is an Italian translation published in Venice in 1625. Both a Renaissance dictionary of symbols and a work of comparative ancient sources, the *Hieroglyphica* served as inspiration to Di Sangro with its collation of Egyptian, Greek, Roman, and medieval symbolic systems, plus commentary. Di Sangro, in the *Lettera apologetica*, now adds the quipus. Just as Valierano's text was amply illustrated, so too is Di Sangro's text, with full colour fold out pages of the quipus, intended, it would appear, to be read and examined in tandem with Valeriano, as a confirmation from another cultural and historical reality of symbolic references emerging from yet to be explained contexts. Di Sangro's documentation of Latin American history and culture is reflected in three texts: the French translation of Garcilaso de la Vega's *Commentarios reales de los Incas* – the 1715 *Histoire*

des Yncas Rois du Perou, translated by J. Baudoin, edition published in Amsterdam, Augustín de Zárate's *Historia del descubrimiento y conquista de la provincia del Perú*, – possibly the 1714 edition, Antonio De Solis, *Storia della Conquista del Messico* – possibly the 1704 edition published in Venice and translated by a member of the Crusca Academy.<sup>46</sup> The works in question all document the period when power passed from the indigenous populations to the conquistadors, told by Spanish as well as indigenous chroniclers. Di Sangro sought information about the destruction of indigenous culture, sympathetic representations and assessments of native languages and cultures, and possible sites where remnants of those cultures might have been preserved. Noteworthy as well in Di Sangro's collection are numerous histories of the Jesuits and critical assessments of their activity. Di Sangro's interest in the Jesuits stems from their proselytizing mandate and their subsequent travels throughout the globe, resulting in some of the very histories and cultural reflections that populated his library. Di Sangro knew that the Jesuits, would be the ones, if any, who might have acquired true insight and appreciation for indigenous cultures, signs and belief systems, on the front line of contact, as they were, with indigenous peoples.

The Prince of San Severo would find exactly the kind of knowledge transmission about indigenous cultures from a Jesuit source, Pedro de Illares, who sold him the manuscript *Historia et Rudimenta Linguae*

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<sup>46</sup> See Spruit 2002, 262-79, for the partial list of the books appearing in Di Sangro's library.

*Piruanorum*. This document, Illares reports in his section of the three-part manuscript, is what remains of “the ‘Jerusalem’ through which the Conquistadores passed.” Indeed, the document, Illares claimed, was handed to him in a bag with a few other items including a rosary, and its subsequent sale to Di Sangro, constitutes the continuity of a transmission process among like-minded Jesuits who fought to preserve indigenous culture and sought, in their writings, to tell a different story of conquest and what had been lost. Di Sangro saw himself as the next in this chain of transmission, his *Lettera apologetica* being a moment of transmission, diffusion and revelation of the quipus and their universal function. When he read the account signed by Jesuit Juan Anello Oliva, told to him purportedly by an Incan Sage, Di Sangro knew he had found what he was looking for:

The Indian sage commented that Christ’s words, written in the Bible, were irrelevant, because writing with pen and paper was useless; quipus, he claimed, were the ‘true writing, because, containing both spirit and thought, they bind God and man together’.<sup>47</sup>

What better culminating message in a text meant to trace the history of transmission of the human sacred than the addition of the quipus?

The crackdown of the Church was swift and brutal, due in great part to the text’s potential for success, riding as it were, on Madame de

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<sup>47</sup> Hyland 2003, 201.

Graffigny's coattails. Certainly, Di Sangro's visibility as the leader of Neapolitan Freemasonry played a major role in the banning of the book, exacerbated by Di Sangro's identification with the missionary work of the condemned heretic Blas Valera. On the surface, San Severo's rise and demise as a visible and vibrant cultural figure appears rapid. However, a deeper perspective, one that traces the extent of his erudition and his strategic plans and projects for their dissemination with the goal of enlightening his peers, points to yet another Enlightenment context, that of the Radical Enlightenment, and a branch of the Radical Enlightenment that not only continued in the tradition begun by Giannone, Vico and Doria as discussed by Israel as important motors of the Italian context, but also moved the agenda forward to encompass a far richer set of cases where radical thought and action could be expressed, from the linguistic, to the scientific, to the medical, to the social, to the religious, to the political, to the educational. Dismissed for too long as the offbeat product of the local, little understood culture of eighteenth-century Naples and its kingdom, today, thanks to the emerging importance of the Radical Enlightenment, we can begin to see how Di Sangro's pursuits and ideas were perfectly in line with others like him and how they formed a nucleus of radical thinking that had built within it plans for expansion, which were carried out in Switzerland through the network that has been described in this article.

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