António Vieira’s literary work is vast and provides his reader with the feeling of being in the presence of a very special author. In the words of H. Cidade:

(...) The life of Vieira (...) began in the cloister of the Colégio of Bahia, elapses during his activity as a missionary in the Amazonia plagues or as diplomat at the European courts, to end loaded with culture and experience; utopian contradicted at each step by reality, man of apostolic and political action (...).

In other words, the Jesuit did not let any issue escape from his hands. Vieira was essentially a man committed to one cause: the supremacy of the Portuguese kingdom. Therefore, as a profound believer in biblical prophecy, he believed that a Fifth Empire destined to anticipate the establishment of the divine kingdom and led by a Portuguese emperor was imminent. We begin to find clear traces of this type of belief in his earlier works, but Vieira keeps that hope alive in his writings until his death. In fact, he complains about the fact that the edition of his Sermons, assigned to him by the Superior General of the Company, was stealing from him precious time that he should have been devoting instead to his opus magnum: the Clavis prophetarum.

Although the majority of his work is well known, it is almost impossible to be certain when this type of eschatological and messianic speech appeared for the first time in his works. His biographers have raised a question to which we can give a straightforward answer. They wonder whether his eschatological and messianic references were simply the result of Vieira the political man, or whether the theologian and the missionary had had some sort of influence on it. We shall say that although eschatological references are noticeable, particularly in the sermons first preached in Lisbon after his arrival, and although they resulted from his need to please the king by promoting the

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1 “a vida de Vieira (...) começa no claustro do Colégio da Baía, decorre na actividade de missionário nas plagas amazónicas ou de diplomata nas Cortes europeias, para acabar carregada de cultura e experiência; utopista a cada passo desmentido pela realidade, homem de acção apostólica e política.” In Cidade, Padre António Vieira, p. 117.
solidification of his fragile kingship, it appears possible to affirm that what we have before us is a much more elaborate construction. We can even consider that this is a systematic construction, probably the result of many years of personal questioning about why the promised kingdom had not yet happened. The apparent imminence of the end of time that every commentator seems to have emphasized has been, if we go back as far as the time of the edition of Daniel, delayed for about 1800 years. Therefore, the search for signs that may verify the authenticity of the prophecy is easily understood. At the same time, the world’s sin is cited here as a reason for such a delay. Moreover, the fact that the world was not yet completely evangelized, together with the existence of several religions/sects rather than one global union under Christianity, also plays an important role. Therefore, it is clear that Vieira’s personal convictions were present in his systematization since the beginning, although we cannot separate them from the interests of the Portuguese crown. Nevertheless, it is important to underline how Vieira’s theorization regarding the Fifth Empire appears to reach further than a simple political theory.

Before moving forward, it is important to emphasize the distance that divides the 21st century from the 17th century. It is especially important to stress that in the 17th century, distinguishing among historical, mythological, and eschatological time was not as straightforward as it is today. The fact that Vieira lived during the 17th century rather than in the 21st century may be helpful in explaining the basis of his eschatological theorization. In fact, the epoch in which the Jesuit lived understood daily events as part of a divine eschatological plan. The world was getting ready for the imminent advent of the Kingdom of God and for the Last Judgement. Therefore, the world was understood in accordance with the sequence of empires described in the book of Daniel. This probably represents one of the explanations for Vieira’s mention of a Fifth Empire, a concept that he fully analyses, because what Christianity was expecting before the end and the Last Judgement was the kingship of the antichrist and not an earthly kingdom. Daniel becomes, as S. Peloso writes, an “examplar image of a ‘mundi historia’ and, in particular, of political history, creating philosophies and interpretation systems of the historical events,” which defines the

2 “imagem exemplar de uma “mundi historia” e em especial da história política, criando filosofias e sistemas de explicação dos acontecimentos históricos,” in Peloso,