A. The Content and the Background of this Work

António Vieira’s major biographer, J. L. de Azevedo, described the Clavis prophetarum as part of the last period of Vieira’s life, one during which Vieira is normally described as “beaten.” But, on the other hand, this same period represents his intellectual climax.¹ Curiously, Azevedo also writes that it was during this period that the basis of his work was “pure mysticism and theology.”² This affirmation poses, however, the question of whether Azevedo was not once more falling into a defective and minimalistic interpretation of Vieira’s work.

Questions aside, Azevedo reaffirms how Vieira contemplated the content of this work throughout his entire life, and therefore it should be considered the corollary of an intellectual life. This consequently obliges the reader to consider it as a product written in places such as the Brazilian jungle, the Inquisitional Court, Rome, Lisbon, and later once again in Brazil. This interpretation offers us a very large chronological span regarding the creation of this work. However, some scholars do not agree with it. For example, M. Vieira Mendes, who provided the major impetus behind the translation of book III of the Clavis prophetarum, affirms that Vieira would have written it during the time of his stay in Rome, i.e., between 1669 and 1675.³ However, references concerning the fact that he had begun considering these things 50 years ago⁴ immediately take us back to the early 1650s as its starting moment. Silvano Peloso resumes the latter date in his recent book

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¹ The biography of António Vieira as it was written by J. L. de Azevedo divides the life of the Jesuit into six main periods: the religious, the political, the missionary, the seer, the rebel, and the beaten.
³ Margarida Vieira Mendes, “‘Chave dos profetas’: A edição em curso,” in Vieira Mendes et al., eds., Vieira escritor, p. 32.
in an attempt to demonstrate that the book had been started c.1646.\textsuperscript{5} In truth, loose data such as some letters or even references in Vieira’s defense before the Inquisition are the basis of our knowledge concerning the \textit{Clavis prophetarum} and its writing. Therefore, today we still do not know with exactitude what the structure was that Vieira had in mind when he started the book, nor can we say that it was written during a determined period. What we can and will say is that there is no apparent doubt regarding the fact that Vieira thought about this book and its content for several years, if not decades.

From Vieira’s own words, we can assume that he was considering a set of four books, but again the evidence is misleading, and we are far from reaching absolute knowledge. Fr Bonucci, Vieira’s secretary, appears to agree about the existence of four books. However, how are we to explain that the same Bonucci, when sending a copy to Rome in 1699, had only sent the three volumes that today comprise the Ms. Casanatense 706? Could it be because Bonucci was holding the work of Vieira’s last months of life, as S. Peloso appears to assume?\textsuperscript{6} Of this set sent to Rome, the first book is divided into different chapters, the second only contains three identified chapters, and the last does not contain a division in chapters.

The division of the \textit{Clavis prophetarum} into three books appears more similar to the copy that was given to Casnedi\textsuperscript{7} to be examined while answering the Roman Inquisition remarks through order of the General Inquisitor, the Cardinal D. Nuno da Cunha.\textsuperscript{8} Could this difference in number be explained by the disorganized way in which the manuscript arrived in Lisbon?\textsuperscript{9} However, how are we supposed to interpret the words of Bonucci, who was Vieira’s secretary and was even in charge of finishing the book? One thing appears certain: since we do not currently have the original document written by Vieira’s

\textsuperscript{5} Peloso, \textit{Antonio Vieira e l'impero universale: La Clavis prophetarum e i documenti Inquisitoriali}, p. 57ff.
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., chapter VI, passim.
\textsuperscript{7} For a more complete description of the work of Carlo Casnedi and how he attempted to answer the notes made by the Roman Inquisitors, see Espírito Santo, “Censuras da \textit{Clavis prophetarum} do Padre António Vieira”.
\textsuperscript{8} For all of the references to the summary done by Fr António Casnedi, S.J., as ordered by the General Inquisitor, see what is published in the appendix of Azevedo, \textit{História de António Vieira}, vol. I, pp. 375–84.