Current historiography on Portuguese Jesuits and Portuguese conversos (or New Christians) has rendered the subject even more enigmatic than before. Broadly speaking, the dominant narrative has been that Father António Vieira’s sympathetic attitude towards conversos and Jews in the 17th century was, within a sustained Portuguese Jesuit tradition of suspicion, rejection, and exclusion, rather exceptional. On the one hand, this perspective has been reinforced by recent contributions. These studies and others have confirmed that Portuguese Jesuits were instrumental in enforcing the exclusion of Christians of Jewish origin within the Society on ethnic grounds of “purity of blood” [limpieza de sangre, limpeza de sangue], and that they were staunch supporters of the Holy Office in its fight against converso “Judaizers.” A strong alliance between the Society of Jesus and the Portuguese Crown was made during John III’s reign (1521–57), becoming “organic” in the 1560s and 1570s, during the reigns of Cardinal-King Henry and King Sebastian. One of its consequences was a
growing involvement of Jesuits in the Inquisitorial machinery. Although the Society officially forbade their members to act as inquisitors, the close collaboration with the Portuguese Holy Office was unique within the Catholic world. For in Portugal, Jesuits acted as counselors on heresy (calificador), censors, preachers at Autors-da-Fe, and spiritual “assistants” of Inquisition detainees. Moreover, a few of them were members of the Inquisition’s highest instance, the General Council of the Holy Office (Conselho Geral do Santo Ofício). And during the “pardon negotiations” of 1605, the Jesuit Francisco Pereira, a counselor on heresy, was among the pro-Inquisitorial lobbyists who met with the king with the goal of preempting the granting of amnesty to conversos. This three-way alliance helps to explain the fact that Jesuits collaborated in concrete persecution on even an informal basis.3 Giuseppe Marcocci has brought the case of Father Luís da Cruz from the city of Bragança, who on 18 July 1588 violated the secrecy of confession by denouncing local New Christians to the Inquisition of Coimbra. Accordingly, Father da Cruz reported to the Holy Office that in 1587 the Bragançan Old Christian Luís de Paiva reported to him in confession some heretical expressions pronounced by his sister-in-law, the New Christian Leonor de Valhadolid. Father da Cruz justified his decision to apply to the inquisitors on the grounds that the bishop of Miranda did not intervene in the affair and that “there is no such secrecy that he couldn’t and mustn’t tell to your majesties,” for “all the more we must fulfill this obligation, since we feel that this land is plenty of deceit, truly having Jews.”4

On the other hand, expanding on a seminal study made by João Lúcio de Azevedo at the beginning of the 20th century, Israel Salvator Révah showed in the 1970s (as did others after him) that Father Vieira was far from alone in his behavior.5 During the 17th century, many other Portuguese Jesuits supported Vieira’s sustained campaign against New Christian social

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4 Arquivos Nacionais Torre do Tombo [ANTT], Inquisição de Coimbra, maço 58, doc. 95, quoted in Marcocci, “Inquisição, jesuitas e cristãos-novos em Portugal no século XVI,” 318; Marcocci, I custodi dell’ortodossia: Inquisizione e Chiesa nel Portogallo del Cinquecento (Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura: Roma, 2004), 189, 259.