

# The Empire of the Future and the Chosen People: Father António Vieira and the Prophetic Tradition in the Hispanic World

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O milenarismo profético de Vieira tem sido abordado como fazendo parte da tradição profética portuguesa, especialmente no que se refere ao seu viés sebastianista, mas o próprio Vieira percebeu que, na Europa e particularmente na Península Ibérica, havia um discurso popular profético mais amplo que contextualizava seu pensamento. As ideias de Joaquim de Fiore e o vocabulário apocalíptico judaico-cristão forneciam um instrumental para o discurso político que era amplamente conhecido. Vieira, como outros teóricos, usava o “milagre de Ourique” para sacralizar a história. Em momentos de dificuldades políticas, como aquelas relativas à União Ibérica (1580-1640), com a dominação e posterior separação da Espanha, Vieira voltava-se para as tradições proféticas com vistas não só a defender a sobrevivência política do país mas também a projetar um papel milenarista para Portugal em uma nova era. Ele nacionalizou a “Cidade de Deus”: a complexa ligação entre os argumentos acerca da Razão de Estado e uma convicção religiosa profunda tornaram Vieira a síntese do pensamento barroco.

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Peoples create their mythical narratives to justify their actions, understand their present, to legitimate or resist power, and also to avoid political suicide. In this last case is found the rhetoric of hope, those theoretical illusions that act like an artificial lung for a dying man. In this sense, even non-heroic elements of history can be interpreted honorably, and if one has an optimistic conception of history, they can even be seen as leading to a glorious future. But we might ask: Can reality be based on a dream? Do historical conditions exist that promote collective chimeras? What function do they perform?

In this essay, I propose to examine one of the outstanding voices of seventeenth-century Portugal by concentrating on the millennial-theoretical edifice constructed by Father António Vieira in his *Esperanças de Portugal e Quinto Império do Mundo* (1659) and in the *Livro antepimeiro da História do Futuro* (1662-63). I hope to place the figure of Vieira not only within the political circumstances of his times, but also within both the Portuguese as well as a general European prophetic tradition.<sup>1</sup>

The multifaceted figure of António Vieira has been studied as a statesman and as a churchman, but to fully understand his actions and thought as a diplomat and political counselor, it is necessary to examine his religious convictions, especially his messianic and millenarian ideas. That is the principal objective of this essay. Moreover, I wish to emphasize that the prophetic discourse of Vieira has usually been studied within the context of the Portuguese national prophetic tradition that at times had projected the very foundation of Portugal as a divine act and its inhabitants as a chosen people, but as Vieira himself recognized, he also belonged to, and drew inspiration from a more general European, and particularly Iberian, current of prophetic thought.

Jewish, Islamic and Christian culture all shared a messianic vision of history. They all understood that evil and pain were not eternal and that a future of abundance and goodness lay

just beyond the horizon of the followers of their faith. The materialization of this golden age would be brought about or mediated by a savior, the Messiah or the Mahdi who would initiate the process of social cleansing necessary for the coming of the new age.<sup>2</sup> Human history is only a manifestation of providential will in which real events assume a transcendental significance beyond the events themselves. Nevertheless, the intellectual coordination between history and divine plan is a strictly human exercise of exegesis. The prophet or seer, nevertheless, will always present himself as a simple messenger of the enigmas of the future, and among them, the chimera of the golden age.

The fantasy of the Golden Age has initiated the action of many men and women unhappy with their historical present. The force of this idea rests on its power to stimulate the imagining of another world and to give coherence to an alternative program that can count on supernatural guarantees. We know the cultural importance of millenarian writings thanks to the existence of an extensive prophetic literature. That literature has moved some scholars to study millenarian discourse in isolation as merely rhetoric of persuasion.<sup>3</sup> For researchers like Bruce Barnes, however, the linguistic form is only a reflection of a type of "premodern" thought that seeks to understand social and political changes and integrate them into a transcendental system of meanings.<sup>4</sup>

Students of millenarianism seem to agree that economic, social, political, spiritual or natural causes tend to intensify this type of thought, especially in periods of rapid or abrupt change like invasions, natural disasters, or the loss of political power, when the ties of social solidarity are weakened.<sup>5</sup> In millenarian thinking, calamity is a symptom of supernatural anger for which a scapegoat must be found in the immanent plot of history. The result of such thought is an arsenal of prophetic narratives that seem to follow a particular pattern.

Take for example the transformation of the Sibylline Prophecies. Hellenized Jews took from the classical world the literary convention of the sibylline oracles, cleaned away their associations with pagan idolatry, and placed them within a monotheistic context. The use of the Greek format served the Jewish interest to express their political sentiments by means of a culturally acceptable vehicle.<sup>6</sup> Although there is no systematic study or collection of these writings, the presence of the sibylline verses abound in prophetic literature, like this one, for example:

Después de mil danzas,  
Juntos los pastores, Daran al lugar,  
al que fue dormindo;  
Vera-se el mundo en paz, muy unido;  
Y la Cruz muy alta cercada de flores.<sup>7</sup>

In the *História do Futuro*, Vieira makes a direct allusion to this genre of writing in order to emphasize that the world has never lacked for prophecies that might have been clarified but that the gentiles without divine inspiration lacked the ability to interpret them.<sup>8</sup>

The European Middle Ages and Renaissance witnessed a veritable irruption of messianic utopias. The insecurity of the medieval world, battered by plagues, the vagaries of agricultural production, the rise in prices of essential commodities, and, because of all this, a rise in social tensions, created conditions that fertilized the ground for a literature of discontent. Christianity recognized the explosive potential of these sentiments, but once it was established as the official religion under Constantine, it began to look with antipathy at the proliferation of millenarian prophecies. The Fathers of the Church helped to define this ideological turnabout, exhorting believers to make an anagogical reading of the Bible. The Book of Revelation was in this way converted into a spiritual allegory.<sup>9</sup>

In the twelfth century, in the heat of the Gregorian reform, new shoots of heterodoxy appeared in Europe. Many of the protagonists of these movements sought new forms of the apostolic life. They reacted especially against a Papacy that in its desire to extend the imperial reach of Christianity had become overly involved in secular matters. The concept of the Pope as the Vicar of Christ, and, therefore, the only source of absolute law and of civil authority was the culmination of this hegemonic desire. Political Augustinianism was its theoretic basis: the City of God became one with the Roman Church. The political result of this situation was the creation in Italy of two parties or factions—the Guelphs, the simple instrument of Papal politics and the Ghibellines, organized to support the cause of the Emperor.<sup>10</sup>

It was within this conjuncture of factions and the spirit of reform that the figure of Joachim de Fiore challenged the static conception of history that had emerged in the Church. Fiore (c. 1135-1202) was a Calabrian monk who joined the Cistercian order and eventually founded one of his own. He dedicated much of his time to biblical exegesis and within his lifetime earned a reputation as a prophet. For him, history followed a road upward toward a third and final epoch, that of the Holy Spirit, an age that would be characterized by peace and by an authentic spirituality. He believed that the Church of God could be perfected if it changed its materialistic course and if it destroyed the property on which the Church's power rested. Joachim de Fiore, whom Vieira considered an illumined prophet, was a moral reformer who believed in a type of gnoseology of grace: Christ administered revelation to the *virii spirituales* of furtive matters, the events of the final days.<sup>11</sup> This powerful theology of history invigorated millenarian expectations. The reformist branch of the Franciscan order, the spiritual Franciscans, spread these ideas, recognizing in them a way to express their ideal of extreme poverty in open opposition to the lifestyle of the ecclesiastical hierarchy.<sup>12</sup> In this political and ideological confrontation, we can discern some of the origins of the schism of the Reformation.

Life's vulnerability during the Medieval and Renaissance periods in Europe thus favored the reception of Joachim de Fiore and his followers. An impressive collection of prophecies accumulated promising the arrival of a new historical age headed by an "angelic Pope" (Joachimite tradition) or by an emperor (Sibylline tradition). Various European kingdoms claimed the temporal position, disputing which one would fill the role of spiritual liberator of the world. Spain was among them. A strong current of millenarian thought developed in the context of the Reconquest and the expansion to the Americas.<sup>13</sup> In this contest for power, Portugal was no exception. Its overseas maritime and military successes stimulated a sense of greatness and destiny. Echoes of these ideas can be seen in some of the official chroniclers like Zurara and João de Barros whose pens celebrated and sponsored the voyages.<sup>14</sup>

The Judeo-Christian tradition thus provided a narrative repertoire, a millennial and apocalyptic discourse that, given its wide oral and written circulation, was converted into a tool of political analysis as well as a way to represent the present. The process of exegesis took the history of events and integrated it into a transcendental schema of meanings, which the Bible provided. This was not simply a rhetorical device; for many people, and Vieira among them, it was a profound conviction and a way to understand the world.

The malleable and dynamic character of millenarian prophecy opened a space for action and legitimation for whole groups or for individuals with particular agendas, and this assured the migratory capacity of this ideology to spread across Europe and to the Americas.<sup>15</sup> Since these narratives were broadly familiar within European culture, they became a magnificent political weapon that could serve popular as well as elite culture because both could find a common identity in the beliefs and in the use of providentialist rhetoric. Nevertheless, for the humbler classes, these ideas in their simple and direct style seemed to be designed to fulfill a strictly practical function rather than satisfy any esthetic preoccupations.<sup>16</sup>

Portugal had its own prophetic repertoire. Gonçalo Anes, known as Bandarra, was a man of humble origins who, immersed in an atmosphere of prophetism, wrote verses full of

messianic promises. Historian João Lúcio de Azevedo has argued that Bandarra's *Trovas* were an "evangel of Sebastianism" that predicted a future of justice and equality in that:

All will have a love,  
Gentiles as well as pagans. . .  
They will serve a single Lord  
Jesus Christ will name him;  
All will believe that he has come,  
the anointed of the Lord.<sup>17</sup>

It appears that these writings circulated widely and were accepted by many during a period of social and economic crisis, the terrible sixteenth century. The powerful messianic message of the *Trovas* also had a special appeal for the New Christians, the recent converts from Judaism. The Inquisition forced Bandarra to abjure his ideas, but the promise of a savior king remained alive in the mental universe of various sectors of the Portuguese population, including Father Vieira himself.<sup>18</sup> In an attempt to offer an analysis of the "being" of the Portuguese nation, the poet Fernando Pessoa emphasized that Bandarra came to represent a "collective name," the "true patron" and master of the national soul and a promoter of imperial sentiments.<sup>19</sup> Bandarra seems to have taken the Spanish legend of the "Encubierto," or "Hidden One," a type of redemptory king, and then associated it with the military triumphs that an Infante of Portugal would gain over Charles V.<sup>20</sup> This Portuguese literature may in some sense reflect the insecurity within some Portuguese circles of the presence of a powerful neighboring monarchy disposed to increase its control by dynastic union or military means.<sup>21</sup>

The Portuguese developed a national version of the legend of the "Encoberto" in the royal figure of Dom Sebastião. The idea of "*O Desejado*" had flourished at a moment of financial and political crisis during the reign of Dom João III when other European nations were already challenging Portugal's overseas territories. Fear of the Turk as well as commercial interests in Morocco also helped to spread the mystic created around this figure. Dom Sebastião would become the epic hero par excellence, lifeguard of the historic mission that Providence had ascribed to Portugal. It was, as Miguel D'antas stated, "the ideal of a cause." With the disappearance of the "captain of God" in the battle of Alcacer Quibir, without a trace left of his body, the illusion of his possible return was created.<sup>22</sup> A collective negative was given to the idea that the figure chosen (*elegido*) to assume a mission of great historical meaning had been killed. The mythic character subsequently created around his person was the product of a collective aspiration that refused to accept political decline. The belief in his return created a cultural milieu ideal for a series of picaresque fakers claiming to be Dom Sebastião.<sup>23</sup> It was a fantasy that mocked death and maintained eternally alive the hope for a better future. We can see its traces even among the most humble elements of society like Maria de Macedo, tried by the Inquisition in 1665, who claimed that Dom Sebastião would "reform the world," "conquer the Moors and Turks and convert the heretics and be emperor of the whole world."<sup>24</sup>

During the political crisis at the close of the sixteenth century, Sebastianism was converted into a symbol of national redemption. António Vieira, respecting the legendary and prophetic tradition of his predecessors, then reconverted and projected it onto the figure of the Duque of Bragança, Dom João IV. When that king died, Vieira opened the possibility that Dom João's successors could fill the vacancy within the sebastianist tradition. What remained essential was not the individual, but rather the need to eternalize the myth. Other European peoples created similar national deliriums, but what distinguished Portugal was the indelible mark that these left on the national consciousness, their durability, and their transfer and rebirth in the overseas colonies.<sup>25</sup>

For the small country that had come to dominate large parts of the world, the historical crisis of the close of the sixteenth century that resulted in the loss of its autonomy and its integration as part of the Spanish Hapsburg dominions came as a shock to Portugal. Various “patriotic” sectors of the population were ready to theoretically explain these events. Thus, during the sixty years of Spanish “captivity” (1580-1640) there existed in Portugal politico-religious interpretations that, using the old legends, sought to explain the present. These discourses offered ways to end the dual monarchy and some projected a millenarian future for the world under the banner of a Catholic faith that would be centered on Portugal.<sup>26</sup> We should note, however, that in Spain there existed a parallel incipient nationalist prophetism that gave Spain a fundamental role in the salvation of the world.<sup>27</sup>

The discourse of the Restoration (1640-1668) as represented by Vieira’s pen provides an example of literature in the service of political and ideological goals. Nevertheless, it would be an oversimplification to reduce Vieira’s thought to only this role. Millenarian ideology may well have been an effective weapon for keeping alive the sentiments of independence when threatened by its more powerful neighbor as well as a tool for the critical analysis of internal politics, but we cannot forget that it also represented a profound religious and millenarian mentality. These convictions are clearly apparent in his sermons and letters.<sup>28</sup> Vieira surely considered the moment of the union of the crowns in Portuguese history as a shameful but fleeting episode within a providential plan that was still to be realized. Millenarian rhetoric provided a safeguard against national reverses in Vieira, and it had done so long before Vieira.

Such thought went back to Portugal’s very origins. The “miracle of Ourique” was the mother legend that sacralized the kingdom of Portugal and offered it a messianic destiny in its history. One day prior to the battle of Ourique (1139) in the Alentejo where the Christian count of Portugal sought to stem the advance of Almohad Muslim forces, the Infante Dom Afonso Henriques debated with himself about what to do militarily in the face of such negative odds. But heaven’s favor was revealed to him in a prophetic dream and vision that provided him with an answer to his doubts:

take heart, for not only will you win  
this battle, but all the others that you  
make against the enemies of the Catholic  
Faith . . . , and in you and your descendants,  
I will establish for myself a kingdom by whose  
actions my name will be known to strange peoples.<sup>29</sup>

The battle resulted in a victory over the Muslims. This was an important moment in the historical process of the Reconquest. From this point forward Afonso was called king of Portugal and no longer remained dependent on the kingdom of León.<sup>30</sup> The battle had been a relatively minor affair, but it was subsequently converted into the founding moment of the Portuguese monarchy and surrounded with a myth of divine intervention.

The myth had its own history. Chroniclers and writers of the fifteenth century, influenced by Portugal’s greatness at the moment, were not reluctant to create national myths, probably persuaded that this act of divine grace was definite proof that the Portuguese were the chosen people, the *povo elegido*. In this way, they incorporated the history of Portugal’s origins into a divine plan. Duarte Galvão’s *Cronica de 1419* was among the first to sketch out the legend, which during the period of the Castilian annexation was also discussed by Portuguese religious authors seeking a justification for political survival.<sup>31</sup>

Vieira incorporated the legend of Ourique within his millenarian vision in order to maintain alive in the collective memory of his Spanish and Portuguese contemporaries the sacralization of Portuguese history. Vieira could not question this origin myth of the Portuguese

monarchy because it served the great spiritual, political, and national goals. The ideology of the "empire of grace" served like a protective wall of nationalist sentiment against Castilian political aspirations as well as a way of legitimating the new Bragança dynasty. This use of a "legendary" defense could be used against any political or military attempt to dominate the "chosen people" (*povo eleito*), and it served as a rhetorical device well suited to periods of crisis and national threat like the later Napoleonic invasion of Portugal.<sup>32</sup> In addition, this strategy also established the theoretical foundations for maritime expansion by emphasizing the divine right granted to Portugal for the task of universal evangelization. As Camões phrased it, the expansion of Portugal in Africa and Asia was "the fatal marvel of our age," granted by God.<sup>33</sup> Some students of the millenarian phenomenon have noted that other participants in the drama of maritime expansion like Columbus also believed that they were divine messengers chosen to seek out the new skies and lands referred to in the Bible, thus placing the great enterprise in the hands of Spain.<sup>34</sup> It seems that for many people the discovery of America marked the "kairós" for the realization of millenarian prophecy.

Nevertheless, for the "prophet of the future," as António Vieira called himself, God's decree was clear: Portugal was the kingdom of God called upon to "make Christian the whole world." Using a baroque image, Vieira held that the world was "a comedy of God" whose script could be read by a combination of divine mercy and exegetical effort. He understood that history and the world had two hemispheres; one visible, the past, and one invisible, the future, and from the present one could detect the signs of God's favor and the end of the world. Arguing that he enjoyed divine inspiration, Vieira presented the *Libro antepimeiro* to his readers as if he was a copyist who brought light to God's plan through his reading of providential history, which was always applicable to temporal history. The perspective of Vieira was favorable to the prophets that had preceded him, including popular voices like that of Bandarra. They constituted a kind of warehouse or stock of prophetic revelation, and he maintained this democratic view of the prophetic gift as a critique of the more restrictive official position of the Church.<sup>35</sup> Vieira understood that prophetic knowledge was cumulative, and he believed that since he was closer to the final days of the world he would be able to make clearer interpretations. He lamented the disregard in his time for the exercise of prophecy. Individual prophetic expressions that many times tended to be on the theological margins of orthodoxy or expressed by socially marginal persons had become uncomfortable for the Counter-Reformation Church. Still, in Early Modern Europe there existed an ambiguous attitude toward the prediction of great events that allowed for the understanding or possibility of other worlds within the linguistic framework of prophecy. The Italian historian, Ottavia Niccoli, noted that despite its perceived potential dangers, this practice was not fully suppressed in Europe.<sup>36</sup>

Vieira did not hesitate to note with irony the self-satisfaction of his contemporaries and the limits of their knowledge. He remarked that the fourth part of the world, created at the same time as the other continents, was "new for us who are the learned men, but for those barbarians, their inhabitants, old and very ancient."<sup>37</sup> He also made clear the limitations of the cosmographic knowledge of the Fathers of the Church. The existence of the Antipodes revealed the limits of their thought.<sup>38</sup> Vieira sought to legitimate the truth implicit in his book by means of a careful process of selection and manipulation of biblical passages. Toward historical sources he maintained a suspicious attitude that questioned the reliability of this kind of information. He raised questions about the exercise of the historians' craft that left too much latitude to subjectivity and caprice. Such writings, he thought, sprang from falsehood and interest more than from the authentic love of relating that which actually happened.<sup>39</sup> What he really respected was the prophetic tradition because of its didactic and lenitive effects. That "gift of Heaven" should be taken most seriously. These messages were a theoretical scaffolding for a challenge to any dark period and a panacea against time. The *Libro Antepimeiro* was a

tenacious denial of an irreversible process of decline and a challenge to those “sons of distrust” who refused to accept the prophetic message.<sup>40</sup> Such positions brought Vieira to the attention of the Inquisition.<sup>41</sup>

Vieira’s exposition of prophecy included a theoretical exorcism of the sad page of history that was the domination by Spain. He rejected the discourse of decline and instead saw the period of Spanish rule as part of a larger plan. Portugal had recovered its independence and had reconquered from the Dutch those American territories that had been taken away. The period of subjugation to the Spanish monarchy had been prophesized in both Portugal and in Spain and represented a necessary step of historical purging prior to the beginning of a new age. Vieira reacted with particular fury against Spain and even cited the words of an ambassador who had exclaimed, “better to surrender (Portugal) to the Turk than to Castile.”<sup>42</sup> This was a strange position for a Jesuit to take, preferring to hand over his country to infidels rather than to a tyrannical power, even though it was Catholic. As a writer, Vieira was both rational but terribly emotional. At a moment when the Spanish monarchy continued its military and diplomatic efforts to retain the Portuguese crown, Vieira’s message was clear: Spanish military efforts were doomed to failure because they had been predetermined in a celestial script. He warned, “Castile should look and know what God has promised to Portugal and then it will take notice of the vanity that its hopes have promised.” He added: “it would be easier to conquer Europe, the world, or the sky than to conquer and subject Portugal.”<sup>43</sup> The dramatic tone of millenarian rhetoric was a propagandistic resource to console and at the same time to unify and impassion his contemporaries, in this case, against the pretensions of Spain.

This expert of biblical exegesis constructed a dream of imperial hegemony and universal ecumenism that filled the space created by Daniel’s prophecy of a Fifth Empire. Vieira accepted the totality of the Judaic prophetic tradition and assumed a tone of tolerance noting that the Jews had “only erred” in not accepting Christ as the Messiah.<sup>44</sup> He took up the image of the disturbing dream of Nebuchadnezzar about the statue to explain that the separation of the stone pedestal represented the political division between two Roman peoples, Portugal and Spain, the former, of course, being the most robust. This political separation did not keep Vieira from lamenting that Christianity’s defense had become more difficult because of it. The biblical hecatomb predicted to precede the coming of the new empire is presented by Vieira once again to explain the precariousness of the Portuguese kingdom. The image of the metamorphosis of the stone into a mountain that represents the qualitative growth of the Christian people explains Vieira’s faith in, and the urgency of, the missionary enterprise, a project that must be consummated on earth before the coming of the Great Liberator.<sup>45</sup> The new empire Vieira described would be both national and supranational.

António Vieira consistently held to a millenarian logic that joined a present of adversity to a future of glory. This new earthly empire would, of course, be Christian, but how could the empire of Christ be placed within historical time? Here Vieira sharpened his argument. Earthly dominion would be an opportunity to distinguish this empire from other temporal powers by making its objectives nontemporal. This empire would be “a heroic act of humanity and modesty,” because its use of universal power would be characterized by its disuse. The union of body and spirit that is Christ would be historically materialized before the end of days as the most worthy example of moral teaching offered to mankind.<sup>46</sup>

One of the most interesting aspects of Vieira’s millenarian thought was the special role he ascribed to Jews and New Christians as keys to the evangelical project. He viewed them as a people inclined to commerce by nature who because of this characteristic could have an important place in the propagation of religion. He believed that God worked in mysterious ways by making commerce the entryway for religion.<sup>47</sup> In the *História do futuro* Vieira reaffirmed his pro-mercantile policy as a viable solution to the problems confronting the country. For him, the religious mission was inseparable from the need for capital that could be obtained from New

Christians or from those Jews of the "Portuguese nation" that had immigrated to Amsterdam and had invested in the Dutch West India Company. To ignore them was political folly. This "realist" policy earned Vieira powerful enemies among sectors of the nobility wedded to their own interests and to the aristocratic ideals and among the inquisitorial hierarchy.<sup>48</sup> Vieira's tolerance toward the New Christians was one of the issues that brought him to the attention of the Inquisition. Portugal like Spain had developed a consistent policy of discrimination and exclusion based on the concept of "cleanliness of blood" toward certain social groups—Moors and Jews (New Christians)—but in Portugal, unlike Spain, the problem of Judaism had almost monopolized the Holy Office's attention.<sup>49</sup> Vieira, despite his theological concerns, never separated them from his mercantilist perspective, in which the New Christians played a vital role.

Vieira sought to harmonize philosophy and political practicality with the divine plan, taking guidance from the Bible (especially the Old Testament) and applying these elements in the changing political panorama of the Europe of his time. Is it possible that a man of such political clarity and practicality, a royal advisor and a diplomat, could suffer from what in Spain was called "miraculous megalomania" (*megalomania milagrosa*)? Such men saw the history of the world as a divine allegory and they sometimes succumbed to the myths of their own creation. Alfredo Bosi has written, and correctly, I believe, that Vieira was a type of baroque figure capable of creating, "a singular symbiosis between biblical allegory and political and mercantilist thought."<sup>50</sup>

The midday clarity of Vieira's words about the motives for the conquest of both the West and East Indies speak for themselves: "silver, gold, rubies, diamonds, emeralds, and brazilwood" from these lands naturally blessed with riches provoke the desire to penetrate them.<sup>51</sup> That reality was framed within the prophetic promises of Isaiah. This movement of exegesis from the concrete to the divine was not only a characteristic of Vieira but was the general style of prophetic logic. Other Jesuits employed it finding in Scripture evidence of Amazonian fauna or of the native peoples of the Americas. Vieira made a particular reading of biblical symbols, especially from the Book of Daniel, and then reconciled it with Portugal's destiny, contributing in this way to the country's mythogenetic production. By doing this he sought to coordinate an historical with a suprahistorical program. Vieira's theoretic edifice brought together biblical and national legends with apologetic aspects of the chroniclers of the era of expansion within the context of a prophetic vision seasoned by the perceptions of a statesman. In this effort to frame historical experience within a divine script Vieira was certainly not an isolated figure. The Dutch challenge to Portugal in the Indian Ocean had also awakened the millenarian imagination of the Catholic missionaries in Asia. Francis Xavier and his followers had tried to explain the political reverses of Portugal within this millenarian context. The Theatine priest, António Ardizzone Spinola, an Italian but naturalized as a Portuguese while serving in Portuguese India beginning in the 1640s, believed that fortune had turned against Portugal because of its own errors. In his sermons, this noted preacher admonished his listeners (and later his readers), that God was angry at policies that discriminated against the new converts in Asia and denied the sacraments to black slaves. Like Vieira, Ardizzone and others of his time were immersed in an atmosphere of political mysticism. In the midst of political crisis, their sermons offered a message of optimism just as the ideologues of the Portuguese Restoration had done even during the darkest days of that struggle.<sup>52</sup> From the perspective of both Asia and Brazil, the preoccupation of both Vieira and Ardizzone Spinola was similar: to stop the loss of the Portuguese empire and thus preserve the ecumenical ideal of the Fifth Empire. Curiously, in the effort to explain the series of military defeats, both of these authors did not hesitate to find fault in the failure of colonial officers or in Portugal's own errors.

The "illness of the sacred" as Roger Bastide called this messianic fever has long been a subject on which Portuguese intellectuals have reflected. Historian Oliveira Martins called



sebastianism an “abdication to history” of a people anchored to the legend of an enchanted king who would rise to lead it on a heroic mission, a belief that led to an indifference to the real world.<sup>53</sup> The poet Fernando Pessoa saw this historical fixation as part of the Portuguese soul and the character of a people in which imagination predominated over intelligence, a people always “pregnant with divinity (*gravida do divino*).”<sup>54</sup> For Eduardo Lourenço, mythmaking has been a vital activity that allowed the Portuguese to maintain an unreal relationship with themselves, a way to avoid the appreciation of their “diminished existence,” or the realization that their greatness was a fiction. Despite pretensions, he said, the Portuguese were “always second-class colonialists.”<sup>55</sup>

In this self-reflection, the Portuguese sought to find their true image. Bandarra, sebastianism, and the Fifth Empire were an expression of a collective sentiment against extinction. But for Vieira, his theological convictions never displaced his political actions. His sermons and writings are an excellent example of his capacity to integrate life and ideas. He remained a man of his age, faithful to a providentialist conception of history, and his millenarianism prevented him from accepting the possibility of collective tragedy. At a moment when the balance of power in Europe was not favorable to Portugal, Vieira manipulated biblical passages and national legends so that the divine plan coincided with the dream of political victory, “the triumph of Sacred History.”<sup>56</sup> To the ideology of expansion, he added a Portuguese corollary. In this sense he continued the national and European millenarian traditions. The Judeo-Christian millenarian tradition could not have a pessimistic view of history. The task of an exegete, like Vieira, was always to reconcile the negative reality of the moment with an optimistic vision of history. Adversity was a providential index of change and the rhetorical possibilities for positive interpretation were endless.

Vieira’s writings were not without effect on his society. In 1688, Vicente Gomes Coelho was arrested in Havana for remarks he had made that Dom Sebastião was living on an island and, mounted on a white steed, would return to Portugal, “stealing hearts.” Coelho was a Portuguese penal exile that had lived in Angola and India. Although he could read, he had never been to university. He may have been a New Christian and in Jamaica he had even associated with Jews. He was sent to the Inquisition in Cartagena de Indias, where he was asked about his knowledge of Dom Sebastião. He told the inquisitors that he knew of the prophecies of San Isidoro and the “Encubierto” because they had been “brought to light” by Padre António Vieira. The inquisitors, guardians of order and orthodoxy, found these ideas schismatic.<sup>57</sup>

Even in the Age of Enlightenment, Portugal continued to witness sebastianist irruptions. In the nineteenth century, historian Alexandre Herculano suffered harsh criticism when he sought to demystify the legend of Ourique. He responded that a strong people did not need to invent legends.<sup>58</sup> At each moment of crisis, the messianic belief that Lúcio de Azevedo calculated had lasted for three centuries was reinvigorated. How to explain its durability? It is common to believe in a sociology of hope when reality is one of repression or despair. Millenarianism is a phenomenon that the ancient world gave to the modern world and which forms part of the collective mentality of many peoples. Its appeal rests on its facile adaptation to any ideology. This plasticity of structure allows it to be employed generally with many uses. It can serve as a panacea, a platform of political programs, and has also been a vehicle of public opinion with a strong social impact that brings together various groups with agendas against the predominant ideology. In the hands of a writer and preacher like Vieira, both a believer and a creator of millenarian discourse, it offered political, social, and eschatological hopes at a moment of national crisis, but it also implied a series of social reforms and heterodox millenarian interpretations that found powerful opponents.<sup>59</sup> Vieira applied this vision to Portugal’s historical role in God’s plan—he nationalized it—but to do so he continually drew from the well of European and Hispanic millenarian thought.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In speaking of messianic expectation, an English diplomat referring to Portugal in the sixteenth century stated that there was no need to worry about a country in which half the population was still awaiting a messiah and the other half awaited the return of Dom Sebastião. See Robert Folz, *The Concept of Empire in Western Europe from the Fifth to the Fourteenth Century* (London: Edward Arnold, 1969), 98-116.

<sup>2</sup> H. W. Parke, *Sibyls and Sibylline Prophecy in Classical Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 1988), 13-14; Abdulaziz Abdulhussein Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism: The Idea of the Mahdi in Twelver Shi'ism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1881), 1-38.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen O'Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse: A Theory of Millennial Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 1-16.

<sup>4</sup> Robin Bruce Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis: Apocalypticism in the Wake of the Lutheran Reformation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 18

<sup>5</sup> Richard K. Emmerson and Bernard McGinn, *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); Bruce Barnes, *Prophecy*; Ottavia Niccoli, *Prophecy and People in Renaissance Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); Michael Barkun, *Disaster and the Millennium* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

<sup>6</sup> Parke, *Sibyls*, 1-20.

<sup>7</sup> Vaticínios varios. Códice 137, prof. 2, Coleção Lamego, Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros (São Paulo).

<sup>8</sup> António Vieira, *História do Futuro*, Maria Leonor Carvalhão Buescu, ed., 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Lisbon: Casa da Moeda, 1992), 340-345.

<sup>9</sup> Robert E. Lerner, "The Medieval Return of the Thousand Year Sabbath," *The Apocalypse*, 51-69.

<sup>10</sup> Folz, *The Concept*, 75-89.

<sup>11</sup> Delno C. West and Sandra Zimdars-Swartz, *Joachim of Fiore: A Study in Spiritual Perception and History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 41-77.

<sup>12</sup> Margarida Garcez Ventura, *O messias de Lisboa. Um estudo de mitologia política (1383-1415)* (Lisbon: Edições Cosmos, 1992). This book offers a good summary of the presence of Franciscan Joachinism in Portugal. On the spiritual Franciscans and their relation to Joachinism see the summary in Malcolm Lambert, *Medieval Heresy*, 3d ed. (London: Blackwell, 2002), 208-35. For the connection between the Jesuits and the tradition of prophetic Joachinism, see Marjorie Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1993), 274-290.

<sup>13</sup> John Leddy Phelan, *The Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans in the New World*, University of California Publications in History, n. 52 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956). For the earlier period see, Jose Maria Pou y Marti, *Visionarios, beguinos y fraticelos catalanes* (Madrid: Colegio Cardenal Cisneros, 1991); José Guadalajara Medina, *Las profecías del anticristo en la edad media* (Madrid: Gredos, 1996), 191-217.

<sup>14</sup> Maria Tarracha Ferreira, ed., *Literatura dos Descobrimentos e da expansão portuguesa* (Lisbon: Ulisseia, 1993). Cf. Diogo Ramada Curto, "A literatura e o império: Entre o espírito cavaleiroso, as trocas da corte e o humanismo cívico," in F. Bethancourt and K. Chauduri, eds. *História da expansão portuguesa*, 5 vols. (Lisbon: Circulo dos Leitores, 1998-99), I, 434-55.

<sup>15</sup> In the case of millenarian groups in America, often this discourse served as a form of cultural resistance. See, Mario Morales, *Milenarismo: Mito y realidad del fin de los tiempos* (Barcelona: Gedisa, 1980), 47-62.

<sup>16</sup> A discussion and example of the popular use of prophecy in Spain can be found in María Jordán Arroyo, "'Nacerá un romero en vuestras casas': Retórica e imaginación en los

sueños de una madreleña en el siglo xvi,” PhD thesis, University of Minnesota, 1998). See also, Richard Kagan, *Lucrecia's Dreams* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

<sup>17</sup> Todos terão um amor,  
Gentios como pagãos,...  
Servirão um só senhor,  
Jesus Cristo que nomeio  
Todos crerão que já veio  
O ungido do Senhor.”

João Lúcio de Azevedo, *A Evolução do Sebastianismo* (Lisboa: Livraria Clássica, 1947), 15. See also, José van den Besselaar, *O sebastianismo-História sumária*. Biblioteca Breve, n. 110 (Lisbon: Instituto de Cultura e Língua Portuguesa, 1987).

<sup>18</sup> Azevedo, *A Evolução*, 15-16; 29.

<sup>19</sup> Portugal, Sebastianismo e Quinto Império. (Obra em prosa de Fernando Pessoa) (Lisboa: Europa-América, 1986), 110-122.

<sup>20</sup> Yvette Centeno, “O padre António Vieira e o segundo corpo do rei,” *A Memória da Nação*, Francisco Bethancourt and Diogo Ramada Curto, eds. (Lisboa: Livraria Sá da Costa, 1991), 295-318. See especially, Alain Milhou, *Colón y su mentalidad mesiánica en el ambiente franciscanista español* (Valladolid: Casa-Museo de Colón, 1983), 303-09. The medieval literature on the Antichrist, in many cases escatological and messianic, includes references to the Encubierto. See the documentary appendix in Guadalajara Medina, *Las profecías del anticristo en la Edad Media*, 405-25. See Ricardo García Cárcel, *Orígenes de la inquisición española* (Barcelona: Península, 1976).

<sup>21</sup> There are other paths for the study of prophecy in Portugal. See, José Adriano de F. Carvalho, “Um profeta de corte na Corte: o caso (1562-1576) de ‘Simão Gomes, o Sapateiro Santo’ (1516-1576),” *Revista da Faculdade de Letras-Linguas e Literaturas. Anexo V — Espiritualidade e corte em Portugal, sécs. xvi, xvii, xviii* (Porto, 1993), 233-260; João Francisco Marques, *A Parenética Portuguesa e a Restauração 1640-1668* (Oporto: Instituto Nacional da Investigação Científica, 1989), 170-9.

<sup>22</sup> Azevedo, *A Evolução*, 22-24; José Honório Rodrigues, *Historiografia del Brasil* (México City: Panamerican Union, 1957), 177-219.

<sup>23</sup> Miguel D’antas, *Os falsos D. Sebastião* (Odivelas: Heuris, 1988). See also the important work of Lucette Valensi, *Fables de la memoire. La glorieuse bataille des trois rois* (Paris: Seuil, 1992), and in a comparative framework Yves-marie Bercé, *Le roi caché* (Paris: Fayard, 1990). A short summary of the Portuguese prophetic tradition in a broader context is provided by Jean Delumeau, *Mil anos de felicidade* (Lisbon: Terramar, 1997), 217-236.

<sup>24</sup> Trial of Maria de Macedo, ANTT, Inq. Lisboa 4404.

<sup>25</sup> In the Germanic countries a similar legend was created around the figure of Frederick II. See Folz, *The Concept*, 162-7. On millenarianism in Brazil, see Morales, *Milenarismo*, 63-72; 111-122.

<sup>26</sup> Luís Filipe Thomaz y Jorge Santos Alges, “Da cruzada ao Quinto Império,” in *A Memória da Nação*, Francisco Bethencourt e Diogo Ramada Curto, eds. (Lisbon: Sá da Costa, 1987), 81-168.

<sup>27</sup> Milhou, *Colón*, 294.

<sup>28</sup> António Vieira, *Obras escolhidas*, IV, António Sérgio and Hernâni Cidade, ed., (Lisbon: Livraria Sá da Costa, 1951).

<sup>29</sup> ... tem confiança, porque não só vencerás  
esta batalha, mas todas as mais que deres  
aos inimigos da Fé Catholica..., y en ti  
y tua geração quero fundar para mi hum  
Reyno, por cuja industria será meu nome

notificado a gentes estranhas.

Frei António Brandão, *Monarquia Lusitana* (Lisbon: Craesbeeckiana, 1632), 119-120. The best study of Ourique is found in Margarida Vieira Mendes, "Ledice e esforço: O visionarismo barroco em relatos do milagre de Ourique," *Romântica. Revista de Literatura* (1992-93), 183-195.

<sup>30</sup> H. V. Livermore, *A History of Portugal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947).

<sup>31</sup> Centeno, "O padre," *A Memória*, 295-6.

<sup>32</sup> Lúcio de Azevedo, *A Evolução*, 95-115.

<sup>33</sup> Luís de Camões, *Os Lusíadas*, Emanuel Paulo Ramos, ed., 3a ed. (Oporto: Porto Editora 1974), canto I, 71-98.

<sup>34</sup> Djelal Kadir, *Columbus and the Ends of the Earth: Europe's Prophetic Rhetoric As Conquering Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 40-104.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas Cohen, *The Fire of Tongues: António Vieira and the Christian Mission in Brazil*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997). See also Thomas Cohen, "Millenarian Themes in the Writings of Antonio Vieira," *Luso-Brazilian Review*, 28:1 (1991), 23-46.

<sup>36</sup> Niccoli, *Prophecy*, 192. Among the causes she offers for the decline of prophecy in Italy was the exhaustion of the prophetic tradition as well as its repression.

<sup>37</sup> António Vieira, *Livro anteprimeiro da história do futuro*, José van den Besselaar, ed. (Lisbon: Biblioteca Nacional, 1983), 123. On how Vieira fit into the prophetic tradition, see Jean Delumeau, "Uma travessia do milenarismo ocidental," *A descoberta do homem e do mundo*, Adauto Novaes, ed. (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras-Funarte, 1998), 441-52.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* 134-6

<sup>39</sup> Vieira, *Livro anteprimeiro*, 101.

<sup>40</sup> Vieira used the expression, "filhos de desconfiança." See, Vieira, *Livro anteprimeiro*, 55-64; 123; 101.

<sup>41</sup> Charles R. Boxer, *A Great Luso-Brazilian Figure. Padre António Vieira, S.J. 1608-1697*. 4th Canning House Annual Lecture (London: Canning House, 1957).

<sup>42</sup> Vieira, *Livro Anteprimeiro*, 67.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>44</sup> Vieira, *História*, 272.

<sup>45</sup> Vieira, *História*, 279-282. See also Paulo Alexandre Esteves Borges, *A plenificação da história em Padre António Vieira* (Lisbon: Casa da Moeda, 1995).

<sup>46</sup> Vieira, *História*, 347.

<sup>47</sup> Vieira, *História*, 305-55.

<sup>48</sup> Stuart B. Schwartz, "The Voyage of the Vassals: Royal Power, Noble Obligations, and Merchant Capital before the Portuguese Restoration of Independence, 1624-1640," *American Historical Review*, 96:3 (June 1991), 735-762.

<sup>49</sup> Francisco Bethencourt, *História das Inquisições: Portugal, Espanha e Itália* (Lisbon: Círculo dos Leitores, 1994), 362-4.

<sup>50</sup> Alfredo Bosi, "Vieira, ou a cruz da desigualdade," *Novos Estudos* (CEBRAP), 25 (Outubre 1989), 28-49.

<sup>51</sup> Vieira, *Libro Anteprimeiro*, 143.

<sup>52</sup> António Ardizzone Spinola, *Cordel Triplicado de Amor a Christo Jesu Sacramentado (1680)* is described in G. D. Winius, "Millenarianism and Empire: Portugese Asian Decline and the 'Crise de Conscience' of the Missionaries," *Itinerario*, 11:2 (1987), 37-51. See also, Fernando Jesús Bouza Alvarez, "'Clarins de Iericho.' Oratoria sagrada y publicística en la Restauração portuguesa," *Cuadernos de Historia Moderna y Contemporanea*, 7 (1986), 13-30.

<sup>53</sup> Centeno, "O Padre," *A Memória*, 318.

<sup>54</sup> Pessoa, *Portugal, sebastianismo*, 40-115. On Pessoa's familial origins see Anita Novinsky, "Fernando Pessoa-o poeta marrano," *Revista Portuguesa da História*, 33 (1999), 699-711.

<sup>55</sup> Eduardo Lourenço, *O labirinto da saudade* (Lisbon, Biblioteca Dom Quixote, 1978), 1-51.

<sup>56</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Mito y realidad* (Barcelona, Editorial Labor, 1992), 12.

<sup>57</sup> Archivo Histórico Nacional (Madrid), Inquisición lib. 1023, f. 426-33v.

<sup>58</sup> Ana Isabel Buescu, *O Milagre de Ourique e a História de Portugal de Alexandre Herculano. Uma polémica oitocentista* (Lisbon: Instituto Nacional da Investigação Científica, 1987).

<sup>59</sup> On the contemporary opposition to Vieira and its political context see José van den Besselaar, *António Vieira. Profecia e polémica* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora da Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, 2002).

