

# Corruption in pre-modern societies

CHALLENGES FOR HISTORICAL  
INTERPRETATIONS

Edited by  
MARIA FILOMENA COELHO  
LEANDRO DUARTE RUST



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# Corruption, for whom?

What the sources say, what historians see

ALÉCIO NUNES FERNANDES<sup>1</sup>

The number of ministers and officials of the Portuguese Holy Office denounced for various deviant behaviours is quite considerable, with many of them ultimately prosecuted by the Tribunal itself — over a hundred, as far as I have been able to ascertain thus far. A significant portion of these inquisitorial agents was accused of committing “crimes”, “offenses”, “faults”, or “guilts” that, in essence, could be associated with corrupt practices or moral deviations. However, depending on the set of documents analysed, the sources are not always clear enough to allow such association, which can only be perceived by comparing different typologies. On the other hand, even comparing different sets of documents — for example, on one hand, the inquisitorial regulations, and on the other hand, the processes — does not necessarily provide the historian with a ‘mathematical’ answer as to why certain practices of the inquisitorial agents were considered corrupt, while others — theoretically, with the same legal foundations — did not have the same outcome. Underlying those more properly legal questions, the political issues surrounding accusations of corruption do not always appear evident to the historian. If the goal is to understand how a particular institution dealt with accusations of corruption attributed to its agents — as is the case with this study — then the historian must exercise caution in their analyses, so as not to present as corrupt practices that, for various reasons, were not classified institutionally as such.

The discussions outlined here are part of an ongoing investigation aiming to analyse how the Portuguese Holy Office dealt with corruption of its agents throughout its history. The goal is to try to understand, not only in legal terms, but also politically, how the institution defined what was (or was not) classified as “corruption”.

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## I. The compass and the map

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges for historians studying the problem of corruption is precisely this: to list, in historical perspective, the possible meanings of the term — because, just as it happens today, in the past, the word corruption had more than one meaning. When read in isolation, some historical document records do not allow for a more precise definition of what characterized a practice as corrupt because, depending on the type of primary source, the word corruption was almost never recorded. Furthermore, present-day concepts also contribute to the difficulty of historically defining the term. Often, scholars encounter in primary sources many practices now understood as corrupt, which does not mean they were perceived in the same way by historical actors, at least not directly. On the other hand, what was conceptualized as corruption in a certain historical period does not necessarily find equivalence in current definitions shared by historians. All these considerations — which apply not only to the study of corruption in the Portuguese Holy Office but also to other research subjects with the same theme — entail important historical problems. Is there corruption when it is not named? Who defines what is or is not corruption? What do the sources say? What do historians see? Although I do not yet have answers to such questions, they serve as a compass for me in this research.

One of the challenges for historians interested in investigating cases of corruption attributed to inquisitorial agents is to cope with the enormous volume of data to analyse, dispersed across different sets of documents. In addition to the obvious need to delve into judicial processes, it is necessary to be attentive to other sources, many of which are produced by the Portuguese Inquisition itself; others, such as institutional correspondence from the Monarchy, are sometimes quite illuminating regarding the historical-political context surrounding certain actions of the Tribunal. Royal letters, prosecutor's notebooks (*cadernos do promotor*), inquisitorial regulations (*regimentos*), books of “way of proceeding in the Holy Office” (*modo de proceder no Santo Ofício*), lists of *autos-da-fé*, and records of inspection visits to district courts and the court of Goa are some of the documents I have analysed to trace what I will call the ‘corruption map’ of the Tribunal.

In methodological terms, I had to develop some strategies to attempt an approach to the meanings that the institution attributed to the term “corruption” — this is because, despite the long list of crimes that the Inquisition claimed to be within its

jurisdiction, corrupt practices attributed to its ministers and officials did not precisely feature as one of them, except indirectly. The main strategy has been the analysis and comparison of the different sets of documents that compose the present investigation, with partial results presented in this paper.

## II. The regulations of the Portuguese Holy Office

Directly and indirectly, the regulations referred to two modalities of corruption. One of them was related to witnesses and the quality of evidence presented in court<sup>2</sup>. The other — which interests me more here — pertained to its own ministers and officials.

Although indirectly, the 1640 Regulation addresses the corruption of inquisitorial agents in two points. In the first, it establishes punishments for those who corrupt ministers and officials — theoretically, even the attempt was punishable. However, even though it refers to the corruptors — because the criminal conduct is *corrupting ministers* —, from the following passage, the possibility of corruption — passive, as we would say today — of the inquisitorial agents becomes very clear:

Penalties for those who corrupt the ministers of the Holy Office  
And since **those who corrupt or attempt to corrupt the ministers and officials of the Holy Office, with entreaties, gifts, or bribes, are also hindrances and disturbers of the ministry of the Inquisition**, we order that, if any persons commit this crime, and what they seek to obtain from the ministers and officials of the Holy Office through this means is of a serious nature, they shall be sentenced to exile to one of the places of conquest of this kingdom for a period of two to five years, and if it is of a minor nature, the penalty shall be at the discretion of the inquisitors, who shall impose what seems appropriate, according to the quality of the guilty parties and the circumstances of their offenses.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> On this subject, see FERNANDES, Alécio Nunes. A corrupção na Mesa do Santo Ofício português. Algumas considerações. In: SANTOS, Camila dos; AGUIAR, Clarice Machado; e SILVA, Isabela Alves (orgs.). *Atas da II Jornada De Corruptione*. Brasília: Selo Caliandra, 2023, p. 92-102.

<sup>3</sup> Regulation of 1640, book III, title XXI, § 10, emphasis mine. In the original, it was registered as: “Penas dos que corrompem os ministros do Santo Ofício. E porquanto os que corrompem ou intentam corromper os ministros e oficiais do Santo Ofício, com rogos, dádivas ou peitas, são também impedientes e perturbadores do ministério da Inquisição, ordenamos que, cometendo algumas pessoas este crime, se o que por esta via procurarem alcançar dos ministros e oficiais do Santo Ofício for em matéria grave, sejam condenados em degredo para um dos lugares das conquistas deste reino por tempo de dois até cinco anos e, sendo em matéria leve, ficará a pena ao arbítrio dos inquisidores, que imporão a que parecer que convém, conforme a qualidade dos culpados e circunstâncias de suas culpas”. I found a book of “way of proceeding in the Holy Office” where some defendants prosecuted for corrupting ministers and officials of the Tribunal are mentioned by name, along with their respective penalties. ANTT, TSO, CG, livro 41, folio 90. In some of these books, questions are prescribed to be asked in the *in genere* session, “for those who corrupt or attempt to corrupt the ministers and officials of the Holy Office”. See, for example, ANTT, TSO, IL, books 73 (folios 39v-40r) and 75 (folios 37v-38r); and ANTT, TSO, CG, books 382 (folio 100) and 51 (un-numbered folios; images 146 and 147, from the document digitized by Digitarq).



In a second moment, the 1640 Regulation is even clearer regarding the corruption of ministers and officials of the Tribunal. However, even so, the conduct in question — revealing secrets of the Holy Office — is referred to indirectly: corruption is a ‘hidden subject of the sentence’, materializing through “malice, entreaties, or bribes”:

Penalties for ministers and officials of the Holy Office who reveal the secret  
If any minister or official of the Holy Office should be so forgetful of their obligation that, **through malice, entreaties, or bribes**, they reveal the secret of the Holy Office or do anything else to the detriment of their ministry, hindering and disturbing it in this manner, if the fault committed is of a serious nature, being an ecclesiastical minister, they shall be deprived of the office they hold and excluded from the service of the Holy Office and shall suffer other arbitrary penalties appropriate to their person, for which respect shall be had to the circumstances of the fault. And if they are officials, besides losing the office they hold in the Inquisition and being excluded in the same manner, they shall be sentenced to flogging and exile to the galleys, for the time deemed appropriate. And if the fault committed by either party is of a minor nature, what is ordered in book I, title 3, § 47, shall be done,<sup>4</sup>

### III. The books of “way of proceeding in the Holy Office”

A second important point in the ‘corruption map’ being outlined here is the books of “way of proceeding in the Holy Office”. In these books, the corruption of inquisitorial agents is also associated with the crime of revealing secrets of the Tribunal, as in the Regulation of 1640. However, in such books, the corruption of ministers and officials takes on more dramatic contours, as it is elevated to the status of heresy. Revealing secrets of the Tribunal — a crime often committed in exchange for “gifts”, “bribes”, or even “money” terms frequently noted in denunciations of this nature — was conduct that had the power to transform feared representatives of Christian orthodoxy into dangerous suspects of feeling ill “towards our holy Catholic faith and the just proceedings of the Holy Office”:

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<sup>4</sup> Regulation of 1640, book III, title XXI, § 9, emphasis mine. In the original, it was registered as: “Penas dos ministros e oficiais do Santo Ofício que revelem o segredo. Se houver algum ministro ou oficial do Santo Ofício tão esquecido de sua obrigação que, por malícia, rogos ou peitas, revele o segredo do Santo Ofício ou faça qualquer outra coisa em prejuízo de seu ministério, impedindo-o e perturbando-o por este modo, se a culpa que houver cometido for em matéria grave, sendo ministro eclesiástico, será privado do cargo que tiver e excluído do serviço do Santo Ofício e terá as mais penas arbitrarias que couberem na qualidade de sua pessoa, para as quais se terá respeito às circunstâncias da culpa. E sendo oficial, além de perder o ofício que tiver na Inquisição e ser excluído na mesma forma, será condenado em pena de açoites e degredado para as galés, pelo tempo que parecer. E se a culpa que uns e outros cometerem for em matéria leve, se fará o que fica ordenado no livro I, título 3º, § 47”. Not coincidentally, this passage about the offense of *revealing secrets of the Holy Office* precedes the paragraph regarding the conduct of *corrupting ministers*.

*In genere session*

For the ministers of the Holy Office who reveal secrets

Ask if the Defendant knows that it is prohibited for all persons who have knowledge of the affairs and causes of the Holy Office and the resolutions taken therein, while still secret, to disclose such affairs, causes, and resolutions to anyone, **especially the ministers and officials of the Inquisition, who are bound by oath to this.**

[...] Ask if the Defendant remembers that on the day he was received into the service of the Inquisition, he promised to keep secret everything that, if revealed, could harm the Holy Office, and he obligated himself to this by oath.

Ask if the Defendant knows that warning guilty persons in matters of faith in the Holy Office gives them occasion to absent themselves, and they are not apprehended or punished for their faults, it favours their errors, and errors and shows that **he feels ill towards our holy Catholic faith and the procedures of the Holy Office.**

Ask if the Defendant disclosed to some persons the status of the cases of those who were imprisoned in the Inquisition for offenses against our holy Catholic faith, or others whose knowledge belongs to the Holy Office, and if he received any *reward* for this.

[...] It was said to him: and you are informed that at this Table there is information that you, the Defendant, after serving the Holy Office and having sworn to keep secret the matters that, if disclosed, could harm you, [revealed secrets of the Tribunal], from which arises a presumption of feeling ill towards our holy Catholic faith and the just procedures of the Holy Office.<sup>5</sup>

#### IV. The judicial proceedings of the Portuguese Holy Office

In shaping the ‘corruption map’ of inquisitorial agents, a fundamental strategy has been to search for ministers and officials denounced to the Inquisition on the digital platform of the National Archive of Torre do Tombo — Digitarq. Using keywords such as “familiar”, “commissioner”, “notary”, “guard”, “alcaide”, “bailiff’s man”, “revealing

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<sup>5</sup> ANTT, TSO, IL, book 73, folio 42, emphasis mine. In the original, it was registered as: “Sessão *in genere*. Para os ministros do Santo Ofício que revelam segredo. Perguntar se sabe ele Réu que está proibido a todas as pessoas que tiverem notícia dos negócios e causas do Santo Ofício e das resoluções que nele se tomam, estando ainda em segredo, descobrir os tais negócios, causas e resoluções a pessoa alguma, principalmente os ministros e oficiais da Inquisição, que com juramento disso se obrigam. [...] Perguntar se está ele Réu lembrado que no dia em que foi recebido ao serviço da Inquisição prometeu guardar segredo em tudo que, descobrindo-se, pudesse prejudicar o Santo Ofício, e a isso se obrigou com juramento. Perguntar se sabe ele Réu que avisar as pessoas culpadas no Santo Ofício em matérias da fé é dar-lhe[s] ocasião que se ausentem, e não sejam presas nem castigadas por suas culpas, é favorecer seus erros, e mostrar que sente mal de nossa santa fé católica e do procedimento do Santo Ofício. Perguntar se declarou ele Réu a algumas pessoas o estado das causas das que estavam presas na Inquisição por culpas contra nossa santa fé católica, ou outras cujo conhecimento pertence ao Santo Ofício, e se por isso recebeu algum prêmio. [...] Foi-lhe dito: e lhe fazem saber que nesta Mesa há informação que ele Réu, depois de servir o Santo Ofício e de haver prometido com juramento guardar segredo nas cousas que descobrindo-se lhe podiam prejudicar, [revelou segredos do Tribunal], de que resulta presunção de sentir mal de nossa santa fé católica e do justo procedimento do Santo Ofício”. Similar texts can be found in ANTT, TSO, IL, book 75, folios 39v-40r; and in ANTT, TSO, CG, books 382, folio 102, and 51 (unnumbered folios; images 150 and 151 from the digitalization carried out by Digitarq).

secrets”, among others, I have come across most of the names at my disposal, as well as the crimes they were accused of — albeit not without some setbacks<sup>6</sup>.

Specifically, regarding corrupt practices and moral deviations, the group composed of alcaides (wardens), and guards of the inquisitorial prisons seems to have been the most targeted not only by accusations but also by judicial proceedings<sup>7</sup>. Primary sources indicate that such agents received “bribes”, “gifts”, and “money” from imprisoned defendants, as well as from their relatives and friends, allowing them communication among themselves and with the outside world<sup>8</sup>. Some agents were denounced for facilitating the entry of prohibited food and objects into the inquisitorial prisons. At least two guards were prosecuted for aiding in the escape of imprisoned defendants<sup>9</sup>. Lastly, I draw attention to cases where inquisitorial guards were accused of advising defendants on what and how to confess or whom to denounce, revealing the alleged progress of certain proceedings, as well as engaging in “indecent touches” (*tocamentos desonestos*) with some female defendants and uttering “loving and lascivious words” (*palavras amorosas e lascivas*) to them, sometimes even promising to mitigate the torment to which they would be subjected, apparently in exchange for sexual favours.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to those inquisitorial agents directly involved in dealing with defendants imprisoned by the Portuguese Holy Office — most of them, if not the overwhelming majority, composed of New Christians, easy prey for corrupt agents — other ministers and officials were also targeted with accusations of corruption or moral deviations (or both), with some of them ending up being prosecuted by the

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<sup>6</sup> There is a large amount number of documents under the custody of Tombo Tower in Lisbon that are yet to be digitized (or whose digitization has not been made available to the public). Regarding those from the Portuguese Holy Office, it seems that an exception is the processes of the Lisbon Inquisition, almost all of which have been digitized/made available. On the other hand, even in-person consultation of documents is not always possible, as many of them are in poor condition or undergoing restoration — at least that’s the claim that many researchers often receive when their document access is denied. Lastly, one must be attentive to the classifications adopted in Digitarq, as they often do not coincide with those used in the Holy Office and recorded in the documents. For example, there are several documents classified as “process” by the digital platform of Torre do Tombo, but which consists of accusations against a particular defendant — which evidently does not diminish the historical value of the documents.

<sup>7</sup> João Furtado Martins studied several cases of corruption within the Holy Office, most of them involving alcaides and guards of the inquisitorial prisons. MARTINS, João Furtado. *Corrupção e incúria no Santo Ofício: ministros e oficiais sob suspeita e julgamento*. Lisboa: Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Centro de Estudos de História Religiosa, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> Cases such as that of Baltasar Teixeira, guard of the Inquisition of Lisbon, ANTT, TSO, IL, proc. 5107; Gaspar Francisco Ribeiro, guard of the Holy Office of Évora, ANTT, TSO, IE, proc. 528; and the warden of the prison of the Inquisition of Lisbon, Heitor Teixeira, ANTT, TSO, IL, proc. 8115.

<sup>9</sup> One of them was Domingos Gomes, guard of the Inquisition of Lisbon, ANTT, TSO, IL, proc. 12998.

<sup>10</sup> One of these cases is the process of João Álvares, guard of the Inquisition of Lisbon, ANTT, TSO, IL, proc. 11681.



institution. This includes some commissioners<sup>11</sup>, familiars<sup>12</sup>, and notaries<sup>13</sup>. However, what stands out most in this list is the absence of a specific group of Tribunal ministers.

Among the more than a hundred inquisitorial agents I found accused of various crimes, not only of corrupt practices or moral deviations, what caught my attention was the fact that there were — as far as I could ascertain — no deputies or inquisitors listed among those prosecuted by the Holy Office<sup>14</sup>. Such absence by no means suggests that the judges of the Tribunal were exempt from the temptations of the world, whether those related to the pleasures of the flesh or the lust for wealth and power.

The Inquisition was aware of the existence of corrupt judges within its ranks, not to mention those who sometimes exceeded in carrying out their duties, committing abuses that were not necessarily classified as corrupt practices — which is evidenced by records made by the institution in different documentary sets, such as prosecutor’s notebooks, inspection visit books, and inquisitorial correspondence.

On the other hand, when addressing the faults committed by ministers and officials of the institution, neither the Regulation of 1640 nor the books of “way of proceeding in the Holy Office” excluded the possibility of the judges of the Tribunal themselves being punished for any deviations.

A clue that might help understand the possible absence of cases against judges of the Tribunal is presented in the *Directorium Inquisitorum*, where it was argued that there were only three reasons for the removal of an inquisitor, but it was

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<sup>11</sup> Regarding accusations of corruption against inquisitorial commissioners, see OLIVAL, Fernanda. Quando o Santo Ofício Processava os seus Comissários (Portugal, 1600-1773). In: GARRIDO, Álvaro; COSTA, Leonor Freire; DUARTE, Luís Miguel (orgs.). *Estudos em Homenagem a Joaquim Romero Magalhães: Economia, Instituições e Império*. Lisboa: Almedina, 2012, p. 179-195.

<sup>12</sup> Regarding corruption of familiars, see CALAINHO, Daniela Buono. *Agentes da fé: familiares da Inquisição portuguesa no Brasil colonial*. Bauru, SP: Edusc, 2006 (especially chapter 3).

<sup>13</sup> So far, I have found five cases against notaries of the Portuguese Holy Office. At least four of these agents were accused of practices that, directly or indirectly, the institution considered corrupt. I draw attention to two cases, that of Gaspar Clemente Botelho and that of Adrião da Fonseca, both notaries of the Inquisition of Lisbon. In a rare occurrence, the term “corruption” appears explicitly in the case against Gaspar Clemente Botelho, attributed to the behaviors imputed to the defendant. ANTT, TSO, IL, proc. 10793. Adrião da Fonseca, on the other hand, was the target of serious accusations. One of them is that, in exchange for money, he would have revealed secrets of the Tribunal to several New Christians. Additionally, Adrião would have given “eighty or one hundred doubloons” as a bribe to Belchior Veloso, servant of D. Fernão Martins Mascarenhas, at the time, general inquisitor — the accusation was made by a New Christian defendant who was imprisoned in the inquisitorial prisons. ANTT, TSO, IL, proc. 6918.

<sup>14</sup> However, it is important to emphasize that, in addition to crimes against the Catholic faith, the Holy Office was also the competent forum for judging civil and criminal cases involving its ministers and officials — including those of the deputies of the General Council. Giovanna Nardini transcribed an important source for the study of these proceedings. NARDINI, Giovanna. O privilégio de foro no Santo Ofício português: “Índice dos processos cíveis e crime” julgados pela Inquisição (1583-1703). *Revista de fontes*, Guarulhos, v. 09, n. 16, jul. de 2022, p. 1-80.

recommended to avoid punishing the transgressing judge, even in cases of corruption:

It is convenient to group into three the reasons for removal. The inquisitor can be removed due to incapacity, negligence, and iniquity. *In the case of iniquity (understood as corruption for money, advantages, accumulation of goods or properties)*, it is the responsibility, currently [16th century], of the cardinals inquisitors general to remove the guilty inquisitor and condemn him to a penalty. In Spain, this power to remove and condemn lies in the hands of the president of the Inquisition (called the “Grand Inquisitor”). However, it is within the competence of the Pope, as holder of delegated authority, to directly remove without having to respect the lower instances. However, agreeing with St. Thomas (2.2.q.70, art. 2. ad arg.3), *let us remember that it is always better to avoid punishing the inquisitors, because with punishment, it is the institution that is affected: thus, it will no longer be respected and feared by the ignorant populace (populo stulto)*<sup>15</sup>.

In any case, especially concerning the corruption of inquisitorial judges, it is necessary to broaden the field of analysis to other documents beyond just judicial proceedings, inquisitorial regulations, or books of “way of proceeding in the Holy Office”.

## V. Inspection visits

An important aspect of the ‘corruption map’ within the Holy Office is the records related to inspection visits conducted in the district tribunals (of Coimbra, Évora, and Lisbon) as well as in the Inquisition of Goa, which were periodically determined by the General Council. These sources of invaluable worth enable us to catch a glimpse of “the virtues and miseries of the men who served the tribunals”<sup>16</sup> — more these than those, as demonstrated by the sources. Perhaps more than any other, this set of documents allows us to perceive how inquisitorial agents were subject to the weaknesses of the flesh and spirit, as well as to the temptations of the world. In this type of primary source, an interesting reversal occurs, especially concerning deputies and inquisitors: the judges of the Portuguese Holy Office not only become witnesses

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<sup>15</sup> EYMERICH, Nicolau. *Directorium Inquisitorum*: Manual dos Inquisidores: Escrito por Nicolau Eymerich em 1376, revisto e ampliado por Francisco de La Peña em 1578. Rio de Janeiro: Rosa dos Ventos, Brasília: Fundação Universidade de Brasília, 1993, p. 188, emphasis mine. In the original, it was registered as: “convém agrupar em três os motivos da destituição. O inquisidor pode ser destituído por incapacidade, negligência e iniquidade. Em caso de iniquidade (entendendo-se por isto a corrupção por dinheiro, vantagens, acumulação de bens ou imóveis), cabe, atualmente [séc. XVI], aos cardeais inquisidores gerais destituir o inquisidor culpado e condenar-lhe a uma pena. Na Espanha, esse poder de destituir e condenar está nas mãos do presidente da Inquisição (chamado o “Grande Inquisidor”). Mas é da competência do Papa, enquanto detentor da autoridade delegada, poder destituir diretamente, sem ter que respeitar as instâncias inferiores. Porém, concordando com Santo Tomás (2.2.q.70, art. 2. ad arg.3), lembremos que é sempre melhor evitar punir os inquisidores, porque, com a punição, é a instituição que é atingida: logo ela não será mais respeitada e temida pela plebe ignara (*populo stulto*).

<sup>16</sup> PEREIRA, Isaias da Rosa. *Visitações à Inquisição de Lisboa nos meados do século XVII*. (Separata). *Anais da Academia Portuguesa de História*, 2a série, v. 29, Lisboa, 1984, p. 141.

but also accused individuals. As witnesses, sometimes they lie even under oath, concealing the faults of their peers of which they are aware, even if such faults are “scandalous” and of “public fame” — and when caught lying, they offer what today we would call ‘flimsy excuses’ to justify their omissions and lies. As accused individuals, they reveal all their humanity — understood here in a broad sense —, being presented in the sources in images quite different from those that the Holy Office sought to promote of its key ministers.

Although we may not always have the record of the list of questions that should be asked to the witnesses in each of the visits — either because they were lost or not textually noted —, from the answers given by inquisitorial agents, it is possible to know some of the themes that concerned the General Council regarding the behaviour of ministers and officials. There is no doubt that corruption was one of them. This is because the agents were asked if they had any knowledge that any minister or official received “bribes” or revealed secrets<sup>17</sup> — practices that were almost never separate, as inferred by the analysis of both inquisitorial regulations and the books of “way of proceeding in the Holy Office”. On the other hand, the possibility that ministers and officials had Jewish ancestry or even friendship with New Christians is a recurring topic in the records of the visits: throughout the history of the Tribunal, this group was the main target of the institution’s judicial proceedings. Hence, it was not uncommon for suspicions of favouritism towards defendants classified as such to weigh on those who were accused of having “Jewish race” or close relations with New Christians, which presupposed the revelation of secrets of the institution, almost always in exchange for “bribes” or even “money”.

In the first visit made by the General Council to the Inquisition of Lisbon in 1571, the deputy Antonio Martins was accused of having “friendship” with New Christians, some of whom were, in turn, friends or relatives of defendants whose cases were being processed in the Lisbon tribunal — the deputy even allegedly attempted to directly favour at least one defendant; according to witnesses, Antonio Martins

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<sup>17</sup> The concern about corruption among ministers and officials was also a common feature in the inspection visits conducted by the Spanish Inquisition. It is interesting to note that in the visit to the Inquisition of Barcelona in 1560, “nineteen questions (43%) were aimed at investigating whether there had been venality or bribes among the officials, whether there had been concealment of assets subject to confiscation, procedural irregularities due to favouritism, scams or thefts related to the receiver and his ministers, falsification or neglect in the books corresponding to the treasury, etc.”. MORENO, Doris. La Inquisición vista desde dentro. La visita del licenciado Cervantes al Tribunal del Santo Oficio en Barcelona (1560). *Historia Social*, nº 32, 1998, p. 78.



engaged in trade with the Island of São Tomé through his New Christian contacts<sup>18</sup>. The notary João Velho was also accused of being “friend of New Christians”, with whom he ate, drank, and had “conversation” — one witness even stated that João Velho’s house resembled “a synagogue”. The notary was also denounced for allegedly revealing secrets of the Tribunal, as well as for having “dishonest conversation” (*conversação desonesta*) with a woman (or two, depending on the versions), which was “public” and “scandalous”.<sup>19</sup> There were also allegations that some officials received “bribes” to facilitate communication among prisoners and with the outside world. Finally, some of these officials were accused of being friends with and taking loans from New Christians, loans that were almost never repaid — generally, it was noted that the officials were poorly remunerated for their services in the Tribunal. It is interesting to note that, especially regarding the most serious accusations, there was no record of punishment against the deputy Antonio Martins or the notary João Velho — in the document where the actions to be taken as a consequence of the visit were recorded, only general recommendations were registered, and not punishments, seemingly “because this was the first visit that was ordered to be made in the said city [of Lisbon]”.<sup>20</sup> However, Deputy Antonio Martins seems not to have advanced in his inquisitorial career.<sup>21</sup>

During the visit to the Inquisition of Goa in 1632,<sup>22</sup> by far the main target of the accusations was João Delgado Figueira, the principal inquisitor of that tribunal — political issues played an important role in the accusations presented during the inspection<sup>23</sup>. According to Francisco Bethencourt,

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<sup>18</sup> DIAS FARINHA, Maria do Carmo Jasmins. A primeira visita do Conselho Geral à Inquisição de Lisboa. *Cadernos História & Crítica*, Lisboa, 1988, p. 26-27.

<sup>19</sup> DIAS FARINHA, *op. cit.*, p. 44-46.

<sup>20</sup> I highlight two of these recommendations: “all other officials shall be warned not to have conversation with New Christians, nor take credit or borrow from them [...]. The inquisitors shall warn the bailiff Damião Mendes that, from now on, he shall not take goods on credit from New Christians or suspicious persons, and if anything is owed, he shall pay it [...], and he should know that if he does the opposite, he will be punished for it, from which punishment we exempt him for now”. DIAS FARINHA, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

<sup>21</sup> His name appears only in the list of deputies of the Inquisition of Lisbon: “Antonio Martins, [became deputy] on December 10, 1565”. FALBEL, Nachman. *O catálogo dos inquisidores de frei Pedro Monteiro e sua complementação por um autor desconhecido*. São Paulo: Centro de Estudos Judaicos, 1980, p. 86.

<sup>22</sup> According to Célia Tavares, “there are records of visitations to the tribunal of Goa in 1583, 1591, 1608, and 1632. Regarding the first three, there is not much information available, except for the names of the visitors: Friar Gaspar de Melo, Father Pedro Martins, bishop of Japan, and Archbishop Dom Aleixo, respectively”. TAVARES, Célia Cristina da Silva. Inquisição ao avesso: a trajetória de um inquisidor a partir dos registros da Visitação ao Tribunal de Goa. *Topoi*, v. 10, n. 19, jul.-dez. 2009, p. 23.

<sup>23</sup> In addition to the text cited in the previous note, see also TAVIM, José Alberto Rodrigues da Silva. Um inquisidor inquirido: João Delgado Figueira e o seu *Reportorio*, no contexto da “documentação sobre a Inquisição de Goa”. *Leituras: Rev. Bibl. Nac. Lisboa*, S. 3, n. 1. Abril-Out. 1997, p. 183-193.

*João Delgado Figueira was accused of more than a hundred infractions, including abuse of power towards prisoners and officials, improperly taking money from the treasury, possessing secret documents of the tribunal in his house, arbitrarily imprisoning personal enemies, constantly provoking conflicts with civil authorities, and interfering in the elections of provincial leaders of religious orders.*<sup>24</sup>

It is important to emphasize that, despite the gravity of the accusations levelled against him, João Delgado does not seem to have suffered any punishment, having pursued an important career in the Holy Office and even beyond it.

Among the various questions formulated during the inspection visits, agents of the Portuguese Holy Office were asked about the “life, honesty, and integrity of their ministers”.<sup>25</sup> Regarding the visitation from 1649 to 1651 to the Inquisition of Lisbon, Isaías da Rosa Pereira draws attention to the cases of two judges of the Tribunal “suspected of leading a morally questionable life”.<sup>26</sup> One of them, the inquisitor Luís Álvares da Rocha, was denounced for having an “illicit relationship” (*trato ilícito*) with Juliana Pereira, a baker of the Inquisition, with whom he allegedly had a daughter<sup>27</sup> — among the ministers of the Lisbon Holy Office, there was much “murmuring” about this relationship.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, the deputy Martim Afonso de Melo was accused of maintaining an “illicit conversation” (*ilícita conversação*) with a woman, who was suspected of being the mother of at least one of his children.<sup>29</sup> Both cases were, apparently, scandalous, as at least two inquisitors, one deputy, and the prosecutor of the Inquisition of Lisbon were said to be aware of them. According to the Portuguese historian, “no resolution of the General Council regarding such serious and delicate matters is known”,<sup>30</sup> and it is possible that they were treated secretly. However, it is known that both Martim Afonso de Melo and Luís Álvares da Rocha continued to

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<sup>24</sup> BETHENCOURT, Francisco. *História das Inquisições: Portugal, Espanha e Itália. Séculos XIV-XIX*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2004, p. 194-195, emphasis mine.

<sup>25</sup> PEREIRA, Isaías da Rosa, *op. cit.*, p. 161. Referring to the Spanish Holy Office, Francisco Bethencourt lists some of the questions that were asked to inquisitorial agents during inspection visits: “**which inquisitors have concubines or violate the vow of chastity, who discovered the secrets of the tribunal, who received gifts to favour the accused, who warned the relatives of the detainees, whether there are officials who embezzle confiscated goods, if the employees respect the established schedules**”. BETHENCOURT, Francisco, *op. cit.*, p. 191, emphasis mine. It is likely that similar questions were also formulated during inspection visits promoted by the Portuguese Inquisition.

<sup>26</sup> PEREIRA, Isaías da Rosa, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

<sup>27</sup> PEREIRA, Isaías da Rosa, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

<sup>28</sup> PEREIRA, Isaías da Rosa, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

<sup>29</sup> PEREIRA, Isaías da Rosa, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

<sup>30</sup> PEREIRA, Isaías da Rosa, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

perform their functions in the Holy Office of Lisbon — the latter even became a deputy of the General Council in January 1656.<sup>31</sup>

Regarding the inspection visit conducted between 1658 and 1659, also to the Inquisition of Lisbon, Isaiás da Rosa Pereira draws attention to an accusation made by the inquisitor Cristóvão de Andrade against his colleague from the Inquisition of Coimbra, Alexandre da Silva: there was “public rumour” that the inquisitor “suffered from a defect in blood purity”<sup>32</sup> — in other words, the accusation was that New Christian blood ran in the veins of inquisitor Alexandre da Silva, which, according to the informant, could be confirmed by several people from different places. Regarding this accusation, the General Council decided that: “when visiting that Inquisition [of Coimbra], the visitor shall be entrusted to, with the caution required, investigate this matter”<sup>33</sup> — the institution was aware of the existence of ministers and officials with socially recognized New Christian ancestry, as pointed out by various sets of documents. However, there is no record of the inquisitor suffering any punishment. Quite the opposite. He had a successful career within the hierarchy of the Tribunal, even reaching the prestigious position of deputy of the General Council<sup>34</sup> — joining the inquisitorial career was one way to ‘cleanse’ the blood of members of more important families, with political power to do so.

Finally, it is important to say a few words about a visit made to the Coimbra inquisition, a visit that became known in historiography through the writings of António Baião. Some examples seem to illustrate well that, depending on the perspective, the same practice could be considered condemnable or, in a different sense, understood as licit. One of the witnesses heard in the investigation denounced that it was “public voice and fame that Dom Miguel de Castro, an inquisitor who was in this Mesa [of Coimbra], and now [is] in the Mesa of the General Council of the Holy Office, has and possesses the library that belonged to Mateus Lopes, doctor, canon, relaxed to a statue”. He also denounced that, “by order of the general inquisitor bishop [at the time, Dom Fernão Martins Mascarenhas]”, for many years the library that belonged to António Homem — one of the most famous defendants of the

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<sup>31</sup> FALBEL, Nachman, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

<sup>32</sup> PEREIRA, Isaiás da Rosa, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

<sup>33</sup> PEREIRA, Isaiás da Rosa, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

<sup>34</sup> “Alexandre da Silva, Canon of Braga, Deputy, and Prosecutor in Lisbon on January 11, 1648. He was an Inquisitor of Coimbra, Deputy of the General Council and Bishop of Elvas”. FALBEL, Nachman, *op. cit.*, p. 92.



Portuguese Inquisition — was kept in the Royal College of São Paulo of the University of Coimbra<sup>35</sup>. Another witness stated that the library that belonged to the defendant Francisco Vaz de Gouveia was in the possession of Sebastião César, a deputy of the Holy Office. These examples are sufficient for the argument to be constructed here: specifically in the case of the defendants' libraries, it is possible that such practices were not institutionally seen as corrupt. It seems that, in the eyes of the Tribunal, the fact that the institution seized the assets of those classified as heretics was considered a licit practice — which does not mean that any potential abuses went unpunished. And such an interpretation was shared by the Monarchy, as can be inferred from a letter sent to the Holy Office by the Portuguese monarch:

Reverend Bishop, Inquisitor-General, my friend. I, the King, send you greetings. I have understood that from the libraries of some individuals whose assets were confiscated by sentences of the Holy Office, the Patriarch and Bishops of Ethiopia may be accommodated with the books they need for their mission, and because it will be pleasing to me and will bring me contentment for this to be done, it seemed appropriate to inform you of this by means of this letter and to request that, in the best manner possible, you endeavour to provide them with the necessary books and inform me of what is done, sending me a record of all that is given to them. Written in Madrid on February 23, [1]623.<sup>36</sup>

## VI. The correspondence of the Tribunal

Historiography appears to still lack complete data on the inspection visits that occurred in the district courts and in the Inquisition of Goa<sup>37</sup>, even though it is certain that the periodicity established in the Regulations of the General Council for the execution of such visits has not been respected — theoretically, they should occur every three years. However, it is possible to know about the existence of some of them through another set of documents, which also compose the here outlined 'map of corruption'. This set of documents is the correspondence of the Tribunal.

Through the letters exchanged between the Inquisition and the Portuguese

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<sup>35</sup> BAIÃO, António. *A devassa de 1628: Inquisição Coimbrã (Separata)*. *Arquivo de história e bibliografia*, vol. 1. Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade, 1923, p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> PEREIRA, Isaías da Rosa, *op. cit.*, p. 128. In the original, it was registered as: “Reverendo Bispo Inquisidor-Geral, amigo. Eu El Rei vos envio muito saudar. Tenho entendido que das livrarias de algumas pessoas cujos bens foram confiscados por sentenças dos Santo Ofício se podem acomodar o Patriarca e Bispos de Etiópia dos livros que hão mister para sua missão, e porque eu me haverei por servido e receberei contentamento de que se faça assim, me pareceu dizer-vo-lo [sic] por esta carta e encomendar-vos que na melhor forma que houver lugar, procureis provê-los dos livros que são necessários e me aviseis do que se fizer, enviando-me memória de todos os que se lhe derem. Escrita em Madrid a 23 de Fevereiro de [1]623”.

<sup>37</sup> Francisco Bethencourt provides an overview of the available numbers. BETHENCOURT, Francisco, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

Monarchy, we learn that inspection visits could also occur due to political pressure from certain groups on the monarch, who in turn pressured the Tribunal<sup>38</sup>. Some of these letters record that, between 1630 and 1632, Dom Francisco de Castro, at the time the inquisitor general of the Holy Office, personally visited the three inquisitions of the kingdom. I draw attention to a particular point of these visits: the possible punishments imposed on deputies and inquisitors, who, in the view of the inquisitor general, had committed “faults”, precisely because of their humanity:

During the visit to the courts, it was conveyed to me through extensive discussions that the Regulations and practices of the Holy Office were entirely in accordance with the law, and that the norm in all inquisitions was to uphold them with great desire for correctness. **However, since these Tribunals, although holy, consist of men, I found in some of them certain faults**, which I will explain below, addressing the ministers [...].<sup>39</sup>

This type of primary source allows us to ascertain that, despite the absence of judicial processes, deputies and inquisitors could indeed be institutionally punished for their “faults” — at the very least, removed from their positions. This is attested by the correspondence of the Tribunal — although we cannot identify the identity of the punished ministers through it, this can be resolved by cross-referencing it with other primary sources. The letters indicate that, in addition to minor faults such as failure to comply with the established service hours, unauthorized absences, failure to observe procedural deadlines, and failure to fulfil the obligation to visit the inquisitorial prisons, among others, there were also more serious ones — never specified in the consulted sources, just as it happened regarding the identity of the offenders. However, it is certain that there are not a few cases of ministers being removed from their positions by the Tribunal, apparently ‘administratively’ — i.e., without recourse to judicial proceedings. Some officials did not escape punishment either:

In Coimbra, I dismissed one inquisitor for exceeding in some matters with indiscreet zeal, retired two deputies for being old and sick, ordered those eight deputies not be called to the Mesa, and deprived the prison warden and three other lower officials of their offices. In Évora, I dismissed an inquisitor

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<sup>38</sup> This is confirmed by the letter sent by the inquisitor general, Dom Francisco de Castro, to the Portuguese monarch: “on November 14, 1629, while in Castelo Branco, I received two letters from Your Majesty, dated August 21, in which Your Majesty ordered me, due to various complaints that the Hebrew nation had represented to Your Majesty against some ministers of the Holy Office, their styles and instructions, to personally inspect and visit all the inquisitions and, with particular care, inquire about the matters addressed in the said letters; and that, whatever resulted from the visits, I would report to Your Majesty, through the hands of the Count-Duke, what seemed appropriate based on them”. BAIÃO, António. *El-Rei D. João IV e a Inquisição (Separata)*. *Anais da Academia Portuguesa da História*. Ciclo da Restauração de Portugal, v. 6, 1942, Lisboa, p. 15.

<sup>39</sup> BAIÃO, António. *El-Rei D. João IV e a Inquisição*, p. 17, emphasis mine.

for being incapable of his office, although he was a man of virtue and example, but he was a canon and neglected his church duties, not being fit to serve in the Inquisition, and I ordered those six deputies not be called to it. Similarly, I ordered those eight deputies not be called to the Inquisition of Lisbon. In these cases, and others, I made this decision for just considerations of the service of God and Your Majesty, and there are enough without them for the service of God and Your Majesty and [...] of the Holy Office. And the prison warden and guards of the same Inquisition were punished as they deserved and deprived of their offices, for giving warnings outside and to the prisoners, greatly prejudicing the justice and the secrecy of the Holy Office<sup>40</sup>.

Through the letters, one can also perceive the inquisitor general's resistance to acknowledging the "faults" of deputies and inquisitors. On the other hand, once again, the humanity of the ministers is emphasized to justify them:

Regarding a minister who has passed away, some fault was found, which was not sufficiently proven. However, even if it had been proven, the fault of one individual cannot reflect on the entirety of the Tribunals, because only those composed of angels could be without fault in all their ministers<sup>41</sup>.

## VII. The monarch's correspondence

Rich in possibilities, another set of documents that is part of the 'map of corruption' is the correspondence sent to the Portuguese monarch — and I am not referring to that institutionally crafted by the Inquisition.

Perhaps the most important case of corruption in the Tribunal known to historiography relates to a memorial anonymously sent to the Portuguese monarch in 1623<sup>42</sup> — as pointed out by Ana Isabel López-Salazar Codes, the author of the allegations certainly was (or had been) a minister of the Tribunal, likely having the support of some of his peers in the preparation of the document.

The voluminous memorial — 15 pages, written in small and careful handwriting — listed serious accusations against ministers and officials of the three district tribunals of the Portuguese Holy Office. However, the main target of the document was none other than Dom Fernão Martins Mascarenhas, at the time the inquisitor general of the Tribunal. Ana Isabel López-Salazar Codes points out that, according to the memorial,

<sup>40</sup> BAIÃO, António. *El-Rei D. João IV e a Inquisição*, p. 17-18.

<sup>41</sup> BAIÃO, António. *El-Rei D. João IV e a Inquisição*, p. 18.

<sup>42</sup> For a detailed analysis of the case, refer to RÊGO, João Manuel Vaz Monteiro de Figueirôa. "A honra alheia por um fio". *Os estatutos de limpeza de sangue no espaço de expressão Ibérica (sécs. XVI- XVIII)*. Tese de doutorado em História. Universidade do Minho, 2009, p. 372-395; e LÓPEZ-SALAZAR CODES, Ana Isabel. *Inquisición y política. El gobierno del Santo Oficio en el Portugal de los Austrias (1578-1653)*. Lisboa: Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Centro de Estudos de História Religiosa, 2011, p. 61-73.

the person who truly governed the Holy Office was Belchior Veloso, a servant of the inquisitor general. Apparently, Mascarenhas would have created numerous supernumerary positions and appointed individuals who did not meet the necessary requirements to fill them, such as minors, those without academic degrees, public sinners, or, above all, New Christians. These individuals would have purchased the position from Belchior Veloso. Additionally, according to the informant, Mascarenhas would waive all penalties and penances imposed by the inquisitors in exchange for money given to Veloso. The document accused the inquisitor general of being a friend of the converts and even hinted that he maintained a certain emotional relationship with his servant<sup>43</sup>.

Surprising, the document pointed out corruption not only of “some individuals” — to use the expression of Dom Francisco de Castro — but indeed it struck the institution as a whole. I would draw your attention to one point. At least in one of the accusations, the informant seems to have been accurate: during the time of Dom Fernão Martins Mascarenhas, the Tribunal had created supernumerary deputy positions in a much larger number than necessary — as confirmed by the letter sent to the monarch in 1632 by the then inquisitor general, Dom Francisco de Castro, five years after the presentation of the infamous memorial. Indeed, supposing that these deputies had offered some amount to the institution in exchange for their appointments in the Holy Office — as denounced by the informant — could the historian take the practice as evidence of corruption in the Tribunal? In my view, it is precisely the opposite.

A hypothesis to consider suggests that, far from being considered as corrupt, such a practice was institutionally understood as virtuous. That’s what can be inferred from a set of letters sent by the Monarchy to the Tribunal in the early 17th century. From the letters, it is evident that the Holy Office was repeatedly urged to contribute with the money from the coffers controlled by the institution in the Monarchy’s efforts to deal with the “relief of India” (*socorro da Índia*) — there are several letters to this effect. I cite an example:

Reverend Bishop Inquisitor-General, my friend. I, the King, greet you warmly. I received your letter dated the 18th of last month in which you informed me of how you had delivered *eighty thousand cruzados from the revenue for the relief of India to the order of the governors, seeking part of it as a loan on your word*, and the rest you had caused to be given for other occasions of the service of the King my lord and father, whom God has. Because I find myself well served by you in this matter, as I hope I will be in everything that passes through your hands, I thought it fitting to tell you so, and you can be certain

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<sup>43</sup> LÓPEZ-SALAZAR CODES, Ana Isabel, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

that I will always have the due remembrance of your person and merits. Written in Aranjuez on the 25th of April, [1]622.<sup>44</sup>

According to his own statements, D. Fernão Martins Mascarenhas would have provided the Crown with around 400,000 cruzados during the time he held the position of inquisitor general of the Portuguese Holy Office, which demonstrates that he was an important political ally of the monarch for much of that period.

### VIII. The prosecutor's notebooks

The prosecutor's notebooks are the final coordinate of the 'map of corruption' in the Holy Office to which I will refer in this text — however, there are still others to explore, such as the lists of *autos-da-fé*. A very extensive set of documents, it requires patient reading work — sometimes quite difficult, due to the different handwriting styles recorded in this type of source — so that, not without some luck, we can find one or another accusation against inquisitorial agents.

As I pointed out elsewhere<sup>45</sup>, some of the accusations present in this set of documents suggest that the Portuguese Holy Office had other ways of punishing its transgressive ministers and officials, not only through judicial processes.

### Final considerations

The various sets of documents analysed here record different behaviours of ministers and officials of the Portuguese Holy Office that, in theory or in practice, could be institutionally classified as corrupt or as deviations from moral order. However, such classification depended on several elements, not only on framing the behaviours in inquisitorial legislation — which is not surprising, because even today laws do not apply mathematically. In isolation, not even the veracity of the allegations

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<sup>44</sup> PEREIRA, Isaiás da Rosa. *A Inquisição em Portugal: séculos XVI-XVII*. Coleção: Documenta Historica. Lisboa: Vega, 1993, p. 124 (documento 137), emphasis mine. . In the original, it was registered as: “Reverendo Bispo Inquisidor-Geral, amigo. Eu El Rei vos envio muito saudar. Vi a vossa carta de 18 do mês passado em que me destes conta de como fizéreis entregar à ordem dos governadores oitenta mil cruzados do dinheiro procedido do fisco para o socorro da Índia, buscando parte emprestado sobre vossa palavra, e o mais que depois que servis o cargo de Inquisidor-Geral desses Reinos fizestes dar para outras ocasiões do serviço del Rei meu senhor e pai, que Deus tem, e porque nesta matéria me acho bem servido de vós, como espero que o serei em tudo que corre por vossas mãos, me pareceu dizer-vo-lo [sic] assim e que podeis estar certo de que terei sempre de vossa pessoa e merecimentos a devida lembrança. Escrita em Aranjuez a 25 de Abril de [1]622”.

<sup>45</sup> FERNANDES, Alécio Nunes. A corrupção dos juizes: análise de algumas denúncias contra visitadores do Santo Ofício ao Brasil. In: COELHO, Maria Filomena; RUST, Leandro (orgs.). *I Encontro De Corruptione: atas*. Brasília: Universidade de Brasília, 2022, p. 94-104. Available at: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-Vh2r1U8VIEI4I6VSQogeRKBmgSxqmXK/view?usp=sharing>. Accessed: June 20, 2024.

would be sufficient for a particular inquisitorial agent to be institutionally recognized and punished as “corrupt”.

Separately, two of these sets — the regulations and the books of “way of proceeding in the Holy Office” — suggest a procedural rigor that, in practice, was not always observed, especially if the alleged faults were attributed to ministers of the Tribunal — according to the sources, notaries, deputies, inquisitors, and deputies of the General Council fell into this group. The higher one climbed in the hierarchy of the Tribunal, the greater the chance that the institution itself would be tarnished in its image, either by punishing or not punishing ministers and officials, in cases where there were sufficient elements to condemn them more severely, which was also calibrated by public rumour — a concern materialized in the judicial processes of the Holy Office in not a few “*foram vistos*”, documents in which each of the votes of the inquisitorial judges in defining the sentences was meticulously noted.

In addition to those more properly legal, not always evident, political issues also had a determining weight in the difficult task of establishing, in practice, how corrupt or morally condemnable certain behaviours could be. There were also two very close factors that were not easily controllable by political actors with decision-making power — whether they were from the Tribunal, the Church, or the Monarchy. True or not, depending on the extent to which allegations of corruption or moral deviations gained prominence when they became known, scandal and “public reputation” (*fama pública*) could force institutions to take actions that, in normal situations, would typically be avoided.

On the other hand, depending on the political compositions, which were not always stable or enduring, certain practices that in theory were considered transgressive could be silenced, relegated to oblivion, or even interpreted in the opposite sense: corruption and virtue were politically shaped concepts — which by no means implies that judicial processes were a farce, much less for the institution itself; nor does it mean denying the fact that a good part of the inquisitorial agents considered guilty received, not infrequently, harsh punishments for their behaviours.

There is no doubt that institutionally the Holy Office was concerned (a lot!) with corruption and the moral deviations of its agents: this is confirmed by the various proceedings brought especially against guards, jailers, commissioners, familiars, and notaries. On the other hand, particularly considering the inspection visit books and

the Tribunal's correspondence, it seems clear that, as a rule, the institution almost always sought to prevent the faults of its most important ministers from being made public. However, this does not mean that, in cases considered serious, the Tribunal judges were exempt from punishment, although apparently none of them were judicially prosecuted, either for corrupt practices or moral deviations — one hypothesis that remains to be proven is that removal from office, whether temporary or permanent, was the most common imposed penalty on offending judges.

On their own, allegations of corruption, moral deviations, or even of being of New Christian ascent were not sufficient to prevent the professional advancement of Tribunal ministers. Like “purity of blood”, corruption attributed to agents, especially deputies and inquisitors, was socially constructed, dependent on political conjunctures and social networks to which the historical actors belonged — illustrative cases being those of João Delgado Figueira, Luís Álvares da Rocha, and Alexandre da Silva, who despite the accusations they faced, had successful careers in the Tribunal (and even beyond).

It is important to note that none of the groups that made up the hierarchy of the Tribunal were free from accusations, of greater or lesser seriousness, whether they were related to corrupt practices, moral deviations, or “Jewish” ancestry — some were also accused of having “friendship” with New Christians. Guards, wardens, familiars, commissioners, notaries, deputies, inquisitors, and even inquisitors-general: in all these groups, it is possible to find accusations against more than one individual. However, the historian needs to be careful not to blindly rely on them, seeing corruption where perhaps it did not exist. After all, true or not, accusations of corruption — in a broad sense — were (or could be) instrumentalized in various ways by historical actors, for example, in the form of personal vendettas and power struggles. Moreover, the fact that an accusation was serious did not have (never had and still does not have) a direct relationship with its possible truthfulness.

We began and end with the question that gives the title to this paper. Corruption, for whom? For the historical actors? For the Tribunal? For historians? The answer to such questions is far from easily formulated. However, at times, it speaks more about the historian's present than about the past of the institutions.



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