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The Organ of Santa Catarina's Church, Calheta, S. Jorge Island – Azores

Luis Henriques

The Church Matriz of Santa Catarina (St Catherine) is the principal church of the *vila* of Calheta, on the island of São Jorge, archipelago of the Azores. This church houses one of António Xavier Machado e Cerveira's organs (n.º 29), one of the finest Portuguese organ-builders of the last decades of the eighteenth century. His workshop was credited to have built more than a hundred instruments of which around sixty have survived to this day. Of these, fourteen were commissioned for the Azores which makes him, together with Joaquim António Peres Fontanes, the most represented organ-builder of the 55 instruments extant in this Portuguese archipelago.

The construction of the church Matriz of Santa Catarina began on January 8 1639, after the sixteenth-century building was destroyed by fire.¹ The church was built on the site of a small chapel dedicated to St Catherine, which had been destroyed following a volcanic eruption. The construction lasted for a considerable period and was only completed around 1763 due to the earthquake that hit the island

on July 9, 1757, delaying much of the work. The baptismal font was provided by the priest António Pires de Serpa, who visited the church in 1664. Due to its proximity to the sea, the church was damaged by an ocean swell on October 4, 1945, and again on January 1, 1980, by the strong earthquake that affected most of the islands that make the Central Group of the Azores.

The organ-builder António Xavier

Machado e Cerveira was born on September 1, 1756, son of Manuel Machado Teixeira. He took the name "Cerveira" from his mother, Josefa Luísa Cerveira, third wife of Manuel Machado Teixeira. He was born on September 1, 1756, and around 1766 began to work with his father repairing and tuning organs and, afterwards, as a builder. He was a resident of the parish of Mártires in Lisbon around 1784, building an organ for this church which was being reconstructed after the 1755 earthquake. After his father's death in 1787, he returns to Lisbon in the following year after spending some time in Coimbra, establishing his workshop in the street of Tesouro Velho. In 1791 he presents himself to parish of Mártires as a resident in the street of Tesouro Velho. It was probably during this period of

“One of the finest Portuguese organ-builders of the last decades of the eighteenth century



establishment that he built the organ that was sold to the church of Santa Catarina. He died in September 1828.²

The organ of Santa Catarina's church was the 29th instrument built by Machado e Cerveira dating from 1790³ and was recently restored in 1991 by master organ-builder Dinarte Machado. It is the oldest cabinet-shape instrument in the Azores archipelago. During this year Machado e Cerveira built another two organs: one for the church of São Vicente (n.º 25), in Abrantes, and the other for the church of the Dukes of Palmela (n.º 27), in Lisbon.⁴ No references were found regarding the existence of an organ in the church of Santa Catarina prior to the purchase of Machado e Cerveira's instrument. This may be related to the church's various repairs which might not have been very convenient to allow an early instalment of an organ.

The instrument was purchased for the church of Santa Catarina in 1827, with a cost of 300\$000 reis, after it had been rejected by a convent of nuns from Ponta Delgada (São Miguel Island), claiming that the *cheios* were too loud.⁵

Although the name of the convent is not known, of the various feminine convents established in the city around that time, the instrument might have been rejected by the convent of Santo André, a Clarisse house in the centre of Ponta Delgada. This assumption is based on the fact that almost all of instruments made by Machado e Cerveira for the Azores were commissioned by Franciscan convents.⁶ However, this convent later purchased much louder 12-stop organ, which was built by the same organ-builder and delivered after his death in 1828 (n.º 104).⁷

Measurements of the organ are 1.172cm high, 309cm wide, and 85cm deep, and it is now located in the high choir of the church. After its arrival in 1828 the instrument was installed in the main chapel of the church. In 1857 it was moved to an elevated gallery, built by woodcarver João Francisco da Silva and painted by José Machado da Cunha.⁸ It is not known when it was installed in the high choir but it is possible that the transfer occurred in the last decade of the nineteenth century when several repairs were

made by organ builder Manuel de Serpa da Silva.⁹

Machado e Cerveira's organ cases, especially the cabinet ones, are similar in shape, having as criteria of conception for the case the number of registers that would be included. Generally instruments up to twelve stops are enclosed in cabinet-shape cases. For instruments with more than twelve stops he used larger open cases, variable in shape, with reed pipes *en chamade*.¹⁰ These are very sober cases with almost no decoration besides small sculptural motives, such as the instrument in the church of Santa Catarina. When open, the case does not display façade pipes being the interior pipes exposed with no ornamental display. The instrument has a cuneiform bellow (130 x66.5cm), with an electric ventilator added during the 1991 restoration, but keeping the manual air supply system. This is probably the bellow installed by Manuel de Serpa da Silva sometime during the 1890s, in order to maintain a constant and more effective air pressure to the instrument. One other





The Church Matriz of Santa Catarina (St Catherine)

feature is the presence of two metal pedals to cancel the *cheios*, a very effective device that allows the organist some freedom of movement. The presence of this kind of device in Portuguese organs is common in large instruments with its use for the registers *en chamade* and Machado e Cerveira took it further using it in cabinet instruments.¹¹

The 10-stop organ has one manual with a split keyboard compass from C-c1/c#1-d3 which allows two different registrations for the left and right hands.

Registration

Left Hand	Right Hand
Fagote	Oboé
Clarão, 5 f.	Compostas de 22.º, 4 f.
Quinzena	Corneta, 3 f.
Flautado de 6 tap[ado]	Flauta em 12
Flautado de 12 tap[ado]	Flauta em 6

The instrument registration is unbalanced between the stops operated by both hands. There is no flue register for the right hand and the two *flautados* of the left hand are capped. In this way the relation between the left hand *flautados* of 6 and 12 *palmos* with the right hand is made through two conic flutes of 6 and 12 *palmos* respectively. This is not abnormal if it is intended a unification

of the instrument sonority for both hands, for both flutes share a common round sonority with the capped flutes. The unbalanced tonal plan will be one of Machado e Cerveira's main features, especially in smaller instruments, obtaining a dynamic sonority from a strong contrast between the left and right hands.

The registers are placed from the highest to the lowest, from the façade to the back of the instrument. Exception is made to the 12 *palmos* flute that is placed before the 6 *palmos* flute, which suggests the intention of a predominance of higher sounds over lower ones. This is further suggested by the internal organisation of the *cheios* registers, with the higher placed in front of the lower ones. Reeds have a strong personalised contour, with special focus on cabinet organs, with Fagote and Clarim registers very close to the other registers or a Fagote and Oboé registers (as in the present case) more present but, at the same time, also very expressive. For the *cheios* the Clarão register is made of five ranks of pipes having, in turn, its counterpart the *Corneta* has only three ranks, an inferior number for the usual characteristics of this register, although

both are not used simultaneously. However, it is suggested the possibility of the *Corneta* as a complement added to the *Compostas de 22.º*. This register is made of four ranks.¹²

This organ is a rare example of reed stops placed in a positive instrument made of ten half-registers. The use of *Fagote* and *Oboé* registers is also noteworthy, being a defining element in the instrument's features, both having the nasal sonority of the instruments they imitate. Their placement in the front of the case is another feature of this instrument, being suggested that the builder placed them as soloists.¹³ Although their prominent position they maintain a relatively balanced sonority in the general sonic configuration of the instrument. This balance is also achieved through semi-capped resonators. The *Fagote* register is paired with the capped *flautados* and the *Oboé* with the flutes. These registers were subject to a particular temperament transforming them important individual components in the timbre characteristics of this instrument.

Not much is known of the organists who worked in the church and, consequently, played this instrument. The most widely referred by the end of the nineteenth century is Jácome de Sousa Ribeiro. Born in Angra do Heroísmo, he was stationed in Calheta during the 1890s as a *amanuense* of the *Câmara Municipal* (a sort of public writer and keeper of accounting books), and was engaged in the island's musical scene playing piano and violin in the *soirées* and organ in several churches, one of the church of Santa Catarina.¹⁴ It was during this period that a new air supply system was introduced to the instrument, as mentioned before. It is thought that the composer and maestro Francisco de Lacerda also played the instrument sometime before moving to Angra do Heroísmo (1880s perhaps) and during his holidays in the island. It is known that he was quite a *virtuoso* organist. His uncle, Tomé Gregório de Lacerda was an organ-builder, author of at least four instruments and making repairs in several others.¹⁵



The organ of the church of Santa Catarina was recorded in the 1990s for a 3-CD set entitled *Os mais belos órgãos de Portugal – Açores* (The most beautiful organs of Portugal – Azores).¹⁶ The

instrument is featured in CD 2, with organist António Duarte performing five works by Spanish and English composers.¹⁷ This was the only known recording of this instrument, which is a

clear display of its beautiful sonority and a fine product of the late-eighteenth-century Portuguese organ-building art. ■

- 1 Manuel A. da Cunha, *Notas Históricas: Offerecidas á Mocidade Estudiosa Calhetense*, vol. I (Calheta: Typographia de «O Dever», 1924), 191.
- 2 Ana Tudela, “Genealogia socioprofissional de uma família de escultores e organeiros dos sécs. XVIII e XIX: Os Machados – Contributo para o estudo das Artes e Ofícios em Portugal.” 29-33. Accessed February 27, 2017. https://www.academia.edu/9555140/Genealogia_socioprofissional_de_uma_fam%C3%ADlia_de_escultores_e_organeiros_dos_s%C3%A9cs.-XVIII-e-XIX-Os_Machados
- 3 The organ bears the following inscription: “Feito em 1790. Acabado em dezembro do dito âno” (Made in 1790. Finished on December of the same year).

- 4 José N. Cordeniz, “Os órgãos de tubos de António Xavier Machado e Cerveira nos Açores” (MA diss, FCSH-Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 2010): 77.
- 5 Cunha, *Notas Históricas...*, 461.
- 6 Dinarte Machado and Gerhard Doderer, *Inventário dos Órgãos dos Açores* (Angra do Heroísmo: Direcção Regional da Cultura, 2012),
- 7 José N. Cordeniz, “Os órgãos de tubos de António Xavier Machado e Cerveira nos Açores” (MA diss, FCSH-Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 2010): 53.
- 8 Cunha, *Notas Históricas...*, 461.
- 9 Machado and Doderer, *Inventário...*, 105.
- 10 Cordeniz, *Os órgãos...*, 21.
- 11 Cordeniz, *Os órgãos...*, 20.

- 12 Cordeniz, *Os órgãos...*, 29.
- 13 Cordeniz, *Os órgãos...*, 30.
- 14 Cunha, *Notas Históricas...*, 387.
- 15 Cunha, *Notas Históricas...*, 409.
- 16 Various composers, *Os mais belos órgãos de Portugal – Açores*, Rui Paiva, António Duarte, João Vaz, Movieplay Classics MOV-3-11045, 1996, 3 CD.
- 17 The works recorded were Félix Máximo Lopez: *Verso de 2.º Tom* (track 8), *Verso de 5.º Tom* (track 9); Joan Cabanilles: *Toccata II de má esquerda* (track 10); John Travers: *Cornet voluntary in C major* (track 11), and John Stanley: *Voluntary Op. 6 n.º 9 in E minor* (track 12).