


The organ of the Church of Nossa Senhora da Guia in Angra do Heroísmo (Terceira Island): some notes

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Summary

This text presents an overlook of the organ of the Church of Nossa Senhora da Guia, part of the former Franciscan convent of São Francisco in the town of Angra do Heroísmo in Terceira Island (Azores). This instrument recently restored is a good example of the best late-eighteenth-century Portuguese organ-building. It was build by António Xavier Machado e Cerveira in 1788.

The Azores has a dense concentration of around sixty organs distributed by eight of the nine islands of the archipelago. These instruments were built during several time periods ranging from the mid to late eighteenth century to the early twentieth century. However a fair amount of the surviving organs were commissioned for convents (both masculine and feminine institutions) as early as the last decades of the *Ancien Régime*. This is the case of the organ commissioned for the church of Nossa Senhora da Guia, part of the Convent of São Francisco in Angra (Terceira Island).

Franciscan friars arrived in the Azores islands almost at the same time settlers began to establishing in the archipelago throughout the fifteenth century. By mid-sixteenth century they were already well established in the islands when the Convent of São Francisco in Angra began to develop into the Order's most important house later becoming the seat of the new province of Saint John Evangelist, founded in 1642 (Costa, 2008, p. 138).

The Franciscan convent of Angra's foundational stone of the new church (the one we know nowadays) was placed on 6 March 1666, gathering the highest figures of the Province, as well as the other religious institutions of the town, notably, the Cathedral, the Jesuit College and the Augustinian convent (Monte Alverne, 1962, p. 28).

The Order's chronicler Fr. Agostinho de Monte Alverne referred that six years later the church was completed and on 1 October 1672 the Bishop of Angra D. Fr. Lourenço de Castro presided to the benediction of the new high altar in a highly pompous ceremony where all the town's hierarchies also participated.

For the new church many artworks were commissioned to embellish the several altars. Monte Alverne identifies what was left from the previous church and the relocation. These were mostly altarpieces, notably the main altar which was transferred to the Chapter, and another three altarpieces that were placed all over the building (Monte Alverne, 1962, p. 29). This implies that both the main altar and three other chapels of the new church received new altarpieces.

This might also have been the case of the church's organ, although there's not enough evidence to suggest the previous existence of such musical instrument in use. What we gather from Monte Alverne's statements is that this new church of the Franciscan convent involved a significant investment in artistic refurbishments by 1672 and, mostly certainly during the following years, since the celebration of mass in the main altar couldn't imply that the other lateral chapels would be already finished.

This assumption that the refurbishment continued throughout the eighteenth century seems to be confirmed by José Alves da Silva in a footnote to his annotated second edition of the former Franciscan friar Jerónimo Emiliano d'Andrade's 1843 *Topographia ou Descrição phisica, politica, civil, ecclesiastica, e historica da Ilha Terceira*, where he states on note h) that the church's benediction occurred in 1672 and the church was finished by the Bishop D. Fr. Lourenço de Castro (identified by the author as "Costa" which was certainly a *typo*), his body being translated to this church in the nineteenth century (Andrade, 1891, p. 120).



Image 1

Convent of São Francisco, Angra do Heroísmo (nowadays the Angra do Heroísmo Museum).

The convent's church, dedicated to Nossa Senhora da Guia, stands out as one of the most imposing buildings in the town of Angra, next to the Cathedral and the church of the Jesuit College (Andrade, 1891, p. 119). It was one of the town's larger construction projects of the seventeenth century. The temple is located in a high platform overlooking the town's centre which confers an imponent view to its facade. It is a three-nave church which is divided by high arches decorated with paintings.

After the extinction of the religious orders in 1834 the convent waited for about a decade to house new institutions. The first one to be installed in part of the convent building was the *Liceu* (a secondary education institution) by a decree of 20 September 1844 (Andrade, 1891, p. 120). The Franciscan library was made into a Public Library by the decree of 17 November 1836 and later 10 April 1860. Another section of the convent was prepared to install a diocesan seminar, which was officially open on 9 November 1862 (Andrade, 1891, p. 121). After 1834 the convent church was managed by two confraternities: the confraternity of Nossa Senhora da Guia, which dated from 1590, but was reformed in 1862, and the confraternity of Our Lady of Sorrows which dated from 1780 (Andrade, 1891, p. 122).



Image 2

The Church of Nossa Senhora da Guia, Convent of São Francisco, Angra do Heroísmo.

The organ that is now extant in the convent's church was built in 1788 by the Portuguese organ-builder António Xavier Machado e Cerveira having the number 22 of his workshop production. It is located in a tribune under one of the arches on the Gospel side of the church next to the high choir. It is the oldest organ built by Machado e Cerveira still in existence in the Azores islands and it is one of the rare cases of an instrument that still remains in the same place where it was installed for the first time (Cordeniz, 2010, p. 26). The organ case is decorated with marbled paintings in much the tones of the church walls. The facade pipes are also decorated with the usual wind figures blowing in the flue openings. The Franciscan seal is present at the top of the case and two gilded flower vases complete its triangular shape.

One interesting aspect regarding the organ case that was kept after the 2010 restoration was the numerous *graffiti* inscriptions made during the period the *Liceu* functioned in the convent (until the 1960s). Among these inscriptions we find three dates regarding the

tuning of the instrument by Thomaz do Canto in 1916, 1937 and 1956 respectively (Cordeniz, 2010, p. 27).



Image 3
The Machado e Cerveira organ of the Church of Nossa Senhora da Guia (Angra).

Regarding the instrument registration, there is a significant correspondence between stops on both hands based on flue stops. It is the only instrument in the Azores with this level of correspondence both on open and closed pipes, resulting in a sound balance between the two options (Cordeniz, 2010, p. 27). The keyboard has a range of two octaves and a second (from C-c'/c#'-d) being this the shortest version made by Machado e Cerveira.

LEFT HAND	RIGHT HAND
☛ Trompa	☛ Clarim [<i>em chamade</i>]
☛ Resimbala	☛ Corneta, 5 v.
☛ Símbala	☛ Resimbala
☛ Compostas de Vintedozena, 5 v.	☛ Símbala
☛ Compostas de 19. ^a , 3 v.	☛ Compostas de 19. ^a , 4 v.
☛ Dozena	☛ Voz Humana
☛ Quinzena	☛ Flauta em 12
☛ Flautado de 6 tapado	☛ Flautim
☛ Flautado de 6 aberto	☛ Oitava real e 12 ^a
☛ Flautado de 12 tapado	☛ Flautado de 12 tapado
☛ Flautado de 12 aberto	☛ Flautado de 12 aberto

Table 1
The organ register scheme (Machado and Doderer, 2012, p. 85).



An overview of the organ sound

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FYG8PDz4IJ8>

After standing inactive for several decades, this instrument was restored in 2011 by the Portuguese organbuilder Dinarte Machado, with a deep intervention in the air supply system. It was reduced from the three-bellow system installed in the tribune behind the instrument in the late nineteenth century to a two-bellow system which was transferred again to the case interior (Machado and Doderer, 2012, p. 85).



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