

The organ of the parish Church of Nossa Senhora da Conceição, Angra do Heroísmo, Terceira Island (Azores): some notes

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Summary

This text presents an overview of the organ now in the parish Church of Nossa Senhora da Conceição in the town of Angra do Heroísmo in Terceira Island (Azores). This instrument, built by Portuguese organbuilder António Xavier Machado e Cerveira in 1815, originally belonged to the Convent of Luz in Praia da Vitória being purchased for the Collegiate of Conceição soon after the extinction of the religious orders in Portugal in 1834.

The town of Angra, seat of the respective Diocese that comprises the nine islands of the Azorean archipelago was a significant religious centre from the sixteenth to the early nineteenth century. Besides the Cathedral, the town still has four more parishes – São Pedro, Santa Luzia, São Bento, and Nossa Senhora da Conceição – which make the town's secular religious division. The parish of Conceição has been considered by historians throughout the centuries as the second most important following the Cathedral.

Gaspar Frutuoso, writing at the end of the sixteenth century, described Nossa Senhora da Conceição as “a beautiful and gracious three-nave church”, mentioning that it was the second largest parish of the town of Angra with 900 inhabitants (Frutuoso, 1998, Liv. VI, p. 13). He also mentioned that the church's collegiate had a vicar, a *cura*, and seven beneficiaries but didn't identified any organist.

Already in the nineteenth century, the former Franciscan friar (a secular clergyman afterwards) and local historian Jerónimo Emiliano d'Andrade published a topographic *opusculum* on Terceira Island in 1843, soon after the extinction of the religious orders (which happened in the Azores archipelago in 1832). In his book Andrade characterised Conceição as “excellent”, a three-nave church with several chapels and altars which kept its majestic character despite the damage caused by time. He added that the church also had a high choir and a *coreto* for the music with one of the best organs of the island. Andrade further adds that, after the ecclesiastical reform of 1832, the collegiate was reduced to a vicar, two *curas*, and a treasurer, the ten beneficiaries and the organist post being suppressed (Andrade, 1843, p. 109). This *coreto* was also noticed by Félix José da Costa in 1867 (Costa, 1867, p. 106).

The *coretos* (a music balcony) became a usual architecture feature of the Azorean churches later in the eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth century. These were usually located on the Epistle side of the central nave next to the transept. In some cases, i.e. Angra Cathedral, there were two balconies on both sides of the nave facing each other (in the case of this temple) with an organ on each balcony. The music chapel would gather on these balconies to perform music during the ceremonies with the performers usually placed in front and around the organ that was the centre piece. The description provided by Andrade strongly suggests that the organ now at Conceição was first located

in a balcony, probably somewhere in the central nave before being moved to the high choir at the back of the church.



Image 1
The parish Church of Conceição (front façade).

In the second edition of Andrade's *Topographia*, annotated by the priest José Alves da Silva (that had been vicar at Conceição), some historical information about the collegiate during the nineteenth century was added. Most notably were the interventions of the confraternities and their improvements in the church's architecture. The works were done in 1882 and 1883, during the period of Francisco Rogério da Costa as the church's vicar, and the cost was around 400.000 réis. A significant intervention was done in the altar of the main chapel, the Blessed Sacrament chapel, and the baptistery, but the most interesting part to our study was the work done in the high choir. There, a new wood balustrade was installed as well as a new wood floor (Andrade, 1891, p. 136).

In his notes, Silva clarifies that it was during this time that the organ was moved to the high choir, from the balcony located in the Epistle side of the main nave. He further added that this balcony was facing the pulpit and that a new pulpit was built in its place symmetrical to the one on the Gospel side. This pulpit has now been removed, but the description provided by Silva provides us the first location of the organ in the church's nave (Image 2). During the transfer process from the balcony, a halo ornament (probably depicting the coat of arms of the religious house of the instrument's origin) was removed for the organ to fit in the height of the high choir (Henriques, 2019, p. 281).

A later description of the church appeared in the local historian Alfredo Sampaio's book (Sampaio, 1904) about Terceira Island, published in the first decade of the twentieth century. Throughout the chapter regarding the churches of Angra, Sampaio criticised the

architecture and art of the temples. He gave the highest praise to the Cathedral, the church of the former Jesuit College, the Misericórdia Church, and the church of the town's former Franciscan convent. Regarding Nossa Senhora da Conceição, the author compared the interior of this temple to the Cathedral's, because of the three-nave configuration (Sampaio, 1904, p. 233). When referring to the high choir, the author characterised the organ found there as a small instrument.



Image 2
The parish Church of Conceição (interior).

Although no references to any organ practice or organ post at the Church of Conceição before the nineteenth century were provided by the historians listed above, a document from the Order of Christ chancery provide us proof that there was an organist (*tangedor dos orgãos*) in the church since at least the first half of the seventeenth century. This means that some kind of instrument (probably a positive one) existed in the church since that time. This is further confirmed by the presence of the post of organist within the collegiate staff which, as was mentioned above, was only formally suppressed by the Liberal decree of 1832. The document confirmed the salary of the organist of Conceição in 1680 of the 3.333 reis and the two *moios* of weath that had been stipulated in a decree dated 1607 (Sousa Viterbo, 1910, p. 281). This means that since at least 1607 until 1832 there was a paid organist at the collegiate of Nossa Senhora da Conceição which implied the presence of an organ at this church since at least 1607.

The organ that is now extant at the Parish Church of Nossa Senhora da Conceição in Angra do Heroísmo was built by the Portuguese organbuilder António Xavier Machado e Cerveira (1756-1828) in 1815 with the opus number 81. This instrument was originally commissioned for the Convent of Nossa Senhora da Luz, a Clare nuns institution in the *vila* of Praia, also in Terceira Island. After the extinction of the religious orders in the Azorean archipelago in 1832, the organ of the Convent of Luz was granted to the Church

of Conceição, as noted by Andrade (1843, p. 109). This statement was repeated by local historian Félix José da Costa in 1867, adding that, besides the provenance institution, the instrument was granted to the Church of Conceição by an order (*portaria*) from the Portuguese Ministry of the Kingdom (*Ministério do Reino*) dating 20 December 1832 (Costa, 1867, p. 109). Costa added that the instrument was delivered in 1836. However, I wasn't able to locate the *portaria* mentioned by the author in the nineteenth-century collections of Portuguese legislation. The transfer of the instrument happened during the period when Francisco José Evangelho was the church's vicar. Several written indications were found inside the organ's box for its reassembling (Machado & Doderer, 2012, p. 81). These writings probably date from the transferring of the instrument from the balcony in the central nave to the high choir in the 1880s

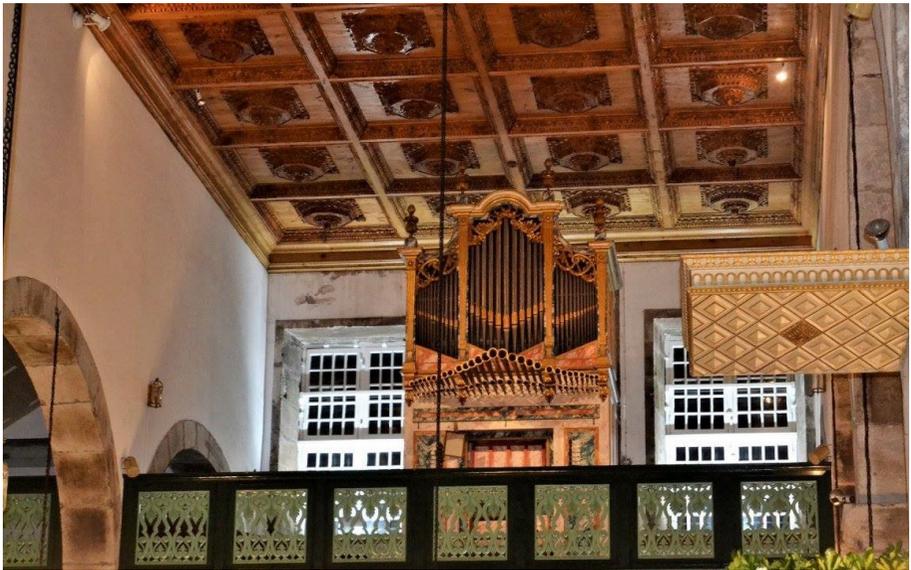


Image 3

The Machado e Cerveira organ of the Church of Nossa Senhora da Conceição, Angra do Heroísmo.

The Conceição instrument (Op. 81) is part of the last batches sent to the Azores islands from the Machado e Cerveira workshop. In the previous year another instrument (Op. 78) had been sent to Faial Island, which is now in the Parish Church of São Salvador in the town of Horta. These two instruments appear chronologically isolated from a previous batch of two instruments sent between in the years 1798 and 1804 respectively and a large batch of six instruments sent between 1821 and 1831.

The instrument has a divided keyboard, an integrated bellow and two trammers to cut the full registers and the reeds. Its construction process is very close to the above-mentioned Op. 78 (built a year before) with the difference of one of the left hand's registers, and very different from the next *opus* (82), although the box style is very close as is the registers configuration, despite having one less register on each side (Cordeniz, 2010, p. 44). Cordeniz also identified two other organs (the following opp. 79 and 80) in the Portuguese continent that are similar to the two Azorean instruments (opp. 78 and 81). This meant that, at least during an advanced phase of the workshop, Machado e Cerveira based his work on collective systems that would facilitate a production profit.

LEFT HAND	RIGHT HAND
☛ Trompa de batalha [en chamade]	☛ Clarim [en chamade]
☛ Clarão, 5v.	☛ Corneta, 4v.
☛ Composta de 22ª, 3 v.	☛ Vintedozena, 4v.
☛ Dezanovena, 2v.	☛ Dozena e 19ª, 4v.
☛ Dozena	☛ Quinzena, 2v.
☛ Quinzena	☛ Oitava real
☛ Flautado de 6 tapado	☛ Voz humana
☛ Flautado de 6 aberto	☛ Flauta travessa
☛ Flautado de 12 tapado	☛ Flautado de 12 aberto

Table 1

The organ register scheme (Machado and Doderer, 2012, p. 81).

🎧 An overview of the Organ of the Church of Conceição, Angra do Heroísmo.

The organ of the Church of Conceição was restored in 1996 by the Portuguese organbuilder Dinarte Machado with the addition of new features such as a new electrical-generated system of air parallel to the original bellow-feeding system.



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