

## THE ORGAN VERSES OF FREI JERÓNIMO DA MADRE DE DEUS: PORTUGUESE ORGAN MUSIC IN THE TIME OF D. JOÃO V<sup>1</sup>

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The process of the «Italianization» of sacred music – which affected Europe as a whole throughout the eighteenth century – had a peculiar development in Portugal, since it was not only a mere consequence of the interchange of ideas or a gradual change in musical taste but also the result of a clear political intention.<sup>2</sup> Although contact with Italian music existed already in the seventeenth century, as can be inferred for example from the presence of works by Bernardo Pasquini and other Italian composers in manuscript P-BRp MM 964 (an important compilation of keyboard music collected by the late 1600s in the North of Portugal), the enthronement of King João V in 1707 marked the beginning of a new musical era in Portugal, particularly in the field of sacred music. His ideal of connection between political and religious powers and his apparent desire to emulate the splendor of the Papal Court in Rome led to a series of decisions that would drastically change the Portuguese conception of religious music, especially in the Lisbon area, for years to come.

One of the first steps to achieve that purpose was the importation of Italian musicians for the Royal Chapel, the most significant example of which being the widely known engagement of Domenico Scarlatti in 1719. By the early 1730s the vast majority of musicians in the Royal Chapel were Italians. Another concern was the training of young Portuguese musicians. A specialized institution – the *Seminário Patriarcal* – was created for this purpose in 1713. The training, obviously of Italian orientation, was extremely efficient and the *Seminário* remained the leading Portuguese music school until 1835, when it was replaced by the Lisbon Conservatory. D. João V also sent some of the most gifted

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*Música Instrumental no Final do Antigo Regime – Contextos, Circulação e Repertórios*, Lisboa, Edições Colibri, 2013, pp. 219-230.

students to Italy for a more intense training. But, apart from this pedagogical effort, other important measures were taken, resulting in the acceleration of the «Italianization» process: the *vilancico* – the most significant of all music traditions inherited from the seventeenth century – was gradually banned from religious services as the Roman ceremonial was adopted, eventually disappearing by 1723.

In contrast with the rather important legacy of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Portuguese organ masters, post-1700 organ music in Portugal has often been considered almost inexistent (apart from the widely known example of Carlos Seixas's four organ sonatas). Whether due to the destruction caused by the great earthquake of Lisbon in 1755 or to other causes, the absence of sources is surprising, considering the reports of musical activity during that period and the enormous legacy of vocal music with organ continuo. In this context, the collection of twenty verses for organ by Frei Jerónimo da Madre de Deus, by far the largest solo organ work from that period known to this day, assumes great importance.<sup>3</sup>

The only extant biographical reference to Jerónimo da Madre de Deus appears in the *Catalogo dos compozitores na Sciencia da Muzica, / e dos instrumentos de Orgão e Cravo da Ordem de S. / Paulo pr.<sup>o</sup> eremita da Congregação da Serra d'Ossa / nestes Reinos de Portugal e Algarves, de q̃ ao prezen- / te se conserva memoria*, compiled in 1737.<sup>4</sup>

Fr. Hyeronimo da Madre de Deos he natural desta cidade de Lisboa Occid.<sup>al</sup>, e não so bom compozitor, mas insigne organista. Compôs huma missa de muita fabrica, a qual tem merecido lugar entre as estimaveis q̃ se cantão nas maiores festas desta corte: tão bem compôs alguns responsorios do officio do nosso P.<sup>te</sup> S. Paulo, q̃ se conservão neste conv.<sup>to</sup> de Lisboa, e se tem cantado com particular louvor do seu autor, q̃ por ser ainda corista, dá grandes esperanças de maiores progressos, pela continua applicação q̃ tem aos estudos da composição; vive neste d.<sup>o</sup> conv.<sup>to</sup>, contando ao presente 22 annos de idade, e sinco p.<sup>a</sup> seis de profeço.<sup>5</sup>

It can be inferred from the information contained in this document that Frei Jerónimo da Madre de Deus was born between 1714 and 1715, having joined the religious order of Saint Paul around the age of seventeen. He also signed the book of admissions of the Irmandade de Santa Cecília (a guild which all professional musicians were obliged to join) on September 9, 1766.

AOS 9 dias do mez de *Setembro* do anno de 1766 entrou por Irmaõ da nossa veneravel Irmandade da Gloriosa Virgem Martyr Santa Cecilia o R.<sup>do</sup> P.<sup>e</sup> M.<sup>e</sup> F.<sup>r</sup> Jeronimo da Madre de Deos morador no Convento de S. Paulo o qual prometteo guardar, e comprir as leys, e obrigaçoens

do nosso Compromisso as quaes lhe foraõ lidas, e elle muito bem entendeo, e em fé do sobredito assinou juntamente comigo secretario, e deo de sua entrada 2400 que ficou carregada no livro de receita ao nosso Irmaõ Thesoureiro.<sup>6</sup>

Since membership was mandatory for professional musicians, this was certainly a second admission, taking place after the re-organization of the Irmandade in 1765 following the destruction of its archives during the earthquake of 1755. It nevertheless proves that the composer was still active by that date.

None of the works mentioned in the above *Catalogo* has survived. The legacy of Frei Jerónimo da Madre de Deus, as known to the present day, consists of three vocal works with organ continuo and a collection of short organ verses. Only one of these works – the *Antyphona a 4*<sup>7</sup> for SATB choir and organ (bc) – has survived in the form of an autograph, bearing the date of 1768.

Title	Source	Date	Observations
<i>Antyphona a 4</i> [Veni Sancte Spiritus]	P-Ln MM 140//3	1768	Autograph
<i>Sabbato Sancto ad Matutinum Lectio</i>	P-Ln MM 140//2	–	Copy
<i>Octava</i>	P-Ln MM 471	–	Copy
<i>Lamentação 3.<sup>a</sup></i>	P-Ln MM 1433	–	Copy (doubtful)
<i>Versos [...] 5.<sup>o</sup> tom</i>	P-EVp CLI/1-4 n.º 7	–	Copy

Manuscript CLI/1-4 nr. 7 from the Public Library and District Archive of Évora (P-EVm CLI/1-4 7) consists of one single quire of four bifolia in oblong format. The front page bears the title «Versos / Sobre o Canto Chão / Para Orgão / de Fr. Jeronimo da M.<sup>dre</sup> de Ds.». On the following pages the inscriptions «São Feitos todos / Por 5.<sup>o</sup> tom» and «Allegros todos» can be found.

The general appearance of the manuscript – and this might be one of the main reasons for the lack of attention these pieces have been subject to thus far – is somewhat unprofessional. Although there are no misplaced harmonies and very few wrong notes, the fragility of the calligraphy, the «holes» in the counterpoint and some sudden changes in the texture suggest a certain lack of skill. Considering the solid craftsmanship displayed in P-Ln MM 140//3 (the autograph of *Veni Sancte Spiritus*), it seems strange that such an accomplished musician as Jerónimo da Madre de Deus – regarded as «não so bom compozitor, mas insigne organista» (not only a good composer, but an outstanding organist) – would commit such obvious mistakes. It thus seems obvious that the inferior writing of P-EVp CLI/1-4 n.º 7 is due to the copyist or to the transmission process. This amateurish appearance is a constant in

Portuguese eighteenth-century solo keyboard music copies and contrasts vividly with the high quality work of professional copyists found in most vocal music of the same period. João Pedro d'Alvarenga and I have already pointed out this fact while addressing the subject of Carlos Seixas's keyboard sonatas. In fact, while comparing several sources of the same work by this composer, the same passage could be found written in different ways depending on the source. This is the case, for example, of bars 19 to 21 in his *Sonata in g minor* (Ex. 1 and 2).



Ex. 1 – Carlos Seixas, *Sonata in g minor*, bb. 20-21 (P-Ln MM 338)



Ex. 2 – Carlos Seixas, *Sonata in g minor*, bb. 20-21 (P-Ln MM 1015)

The use of different notations to obtain the same (or, at least, a similar) musical effect suggests that some of these manuscripts were to a certain extent not copied from other manuscripts (autographs or not) but written down from memory at a certain stage of a process of performance-based transmission. One example in the works of Frei Jerónimo da Madre de Deus, is the «unfinished» appearance of bars 5 to 8 of Verse III (Ex. 3a), which suggests that some notes are missing in the Alto part (Ex. 3b).



Ex. 3a, Frei Jerónimo da Madre de Deus, *Versos de 5.º tom*, Verse III, bb. 5-9 (manuscript)



Ex. 3b, *Idem* (proposed correction)

For a better understanding of the transformations in Portuguese organ music during the eighteenth century – which is to say, during the period of greater absorption of Italian influences – it is interesting to compare these pieces with others of earlier composition. In this respect, the importance of the *Versos* by Frei Jerónimo da Madre de Deus lies also in the fact that they testify to a continuing practice of alternating organ music during the singing of the *Magnificat* or the *Benedictus* in spite of the profound changes in the musical structure of liturgical ceremonies. It is therefore possible to compare these pieces with the twelve *Versos de 8.º tom* by Frei Diogo da Conceição (probably written during the last decades of the seventeenth century) of which a copy is preserved in manuscript 43 of Oporto Municipal Library – the *Livro de obras de Orgão juntas pela curiosidade do P. P. Fr Roque da Conceição*, one of the most important collections of Portuguese keyboard music, bearing the date of 1695.<sup>8</sup>

The first striking difference between these two works is the layout of the music. The verses by Frei Diogo da Conceição are written in open score format – four independent parts displayed in four staves with four different clefs – which was still the usual way to notate keyboard music in Portugal by the late 1600s.<sup>9</sup> This kind of writing is used along the whole *Livro de Orgão de Fr Roque da Conceição*, as well as in all known Portuguese manuscripts from the same period. On the contrary, the works of Frei Jerónimo da Madre de Deus are presented in two staves, independently from the number of parts displayed.

Obviously, these differences in layout are the result of differences in the music itself. The works of Frei Diogo da Conceição reflect the pre-1700 Portuguese organ tradition in the line of António Carreira and Manuel Rodrigues Coelho with eventual influences of Italian masters (Kastner 1979, pp. 117-128).<sup>10</sup> Four-part writing is used throughout, even when the music is clearly homophonic (this is even more obvious in the case of his *Batalha do 5.º tom*<sup>11</sup> where repeated chords are displayed in that way), and the harmony, while being clearly tonal, often appears to be the result of a polyphonic texture with extended use of imitation (Ex. 4 and 5).

Ex. 4 – Frei Diogo da Conceição, *Versos de 8.º tom*, Verse I, bb. 1-3

Ex. 5 – Frei Diogo da Conceição, *Versos de 8.º tom*, Verse II, bb. 1-3

The music of Frei Jerónimo da Madre de Deus seems clearly Italianate and distant from the Portuguese keyboard tradition of the previous century. The use of thirds, octaves in the left hand, Alberti basses and other features of Italian harpsichord technique dominates the writing. Counterpoint, while present, is often submitted to a structure polarized between melody and bass, especially in the case of inner parts. The texture varies from verse to verse and even within the same verse. In Verse V the number of parts varies from two to four and the last bars include chords with no less than nine notes (Ex. 6).

Ex. 6 – Frei Jerónimo da Madre de Deus, *Versos de 5.º tom*, Verse V

Although both works are intended for the keyboard, in the latter the writing appears to derive from the keyboard itself instead of being a mere consequence of the keyboard performance of a more abstract polyphonic conception.

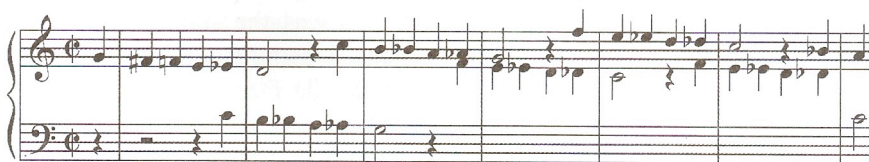
The twenty verses display a variety of compositional techniques such as imitative counterpoint (Ex. 7), accompanied melody (Ex. 8), chromaticism (Ex. 9) or even the use of a *cantus firmus* with the fifth psalm tone (Ex. 10).



Ex. 7 – Frei Jerónimo da Madre de Deus, *Versos de 5.º tom*, Verse XI, bb. 1-6



Ex. 8 – Frei Jerónimo da Madre de Deus, *Versos de 5.º tom*,  
Verse III, bb. 1-4



Ex. 9 – Frei Jerónimo da Madre de Deus, *Versos de 5.º tom*,  
Verse XV, bb. 1-6

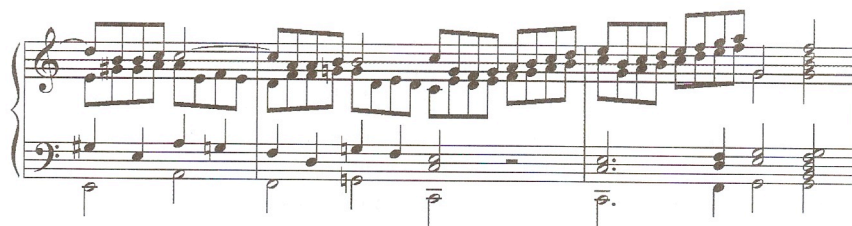
Ex. 10 – Frei Jerónimo da Madre de Deus, *Versos de 5.º tom*,  
Verse I, bb. 1-8

Despite their short length (varying from nine to thirty-four bars), these pieces reveal a certain tonal agility while sticking to the original key of C major. One interesting exception is Verse XX, which begins in C minor (Ex. 11)

Ex. 11 – Frei Jerónimo da Madre de Deus, *Versos de 5.º tom*,  
Verse XX, bb. 1-5

Another question that may arise from the study of these works is the kind of instrument on which they were meant to be played. In the case of seventeenth-century music, the *Livro de Orgão de Frei Roque da Conceição* provides a diagram showing a keyboard with the compass of C to a'' with a short lower octave,<sup>12</sup> which accommodates the majority of the pieces contained in the manuscript. Although there are no surviving Portuguese instruments from this time, this was the standard keyboard range in seventeenth-century Iberian organs.<sup>13</sup>

The *Versos* by Frei Jerónimo da Madre de Deus often demand the top C (c'''), thus requiring a four-octave keyboard (C – c'''). The low F sharp appears twice (in verses II and VII), both times in the context of octaves for the left hand, suggesting a complete octave in the bass. While it is impossible to ascertain whether these octaves were originally intended by the composer or added later, the writing of bars 13 to 15 in Verse II (Ex. 12) clearly indicates the use of a short octave keyboard.



Ex. 12 – Frei Jerónimo da Madre de Deus, *Versos de 5.º tom*,  
Verse II, bb. 13-15

The manuscript of the *Versos* bears no registration marks (which is also the case in all the sources of the organ sonatas by Carlos Seixas) and it doesn't seem to suggest the use of divided stops (the inner parts frequently move across the  $c-c\#$ ' borderline and the top voice often reaches the middle  $c$ ). Nor does it contain idiomatic writing for *en chamade* reeds (or even for a *Corneta*). Therefore it doesn't seem that the instrument in mind would be a large organ with a typical Iberian sound palette – such as the two organs of the Cathedral of Braga, built in 1737 by the Galician monk Simón Fontanes – but a smaller-scaled instrument with complete stops, more in the style of some Italian instruments of the time.

Italian influence in Portuguese religious music affected not only compositional activity but also an interest in Italian organ building. One example is the purchase of three portative organs from Rome for a major event such as the consecration of the Mafra Basilica in 1730 (Doderer, 2002, p. 92). Throughout the eighteenth century the acquisition of Italian organs and the absorption of Italian organ building features by Portuguese makers were common. The aforementioned portative organs did not survive to the present day but other similar instruments can still be found. Such is the case of the organ in the Church of the Misericórdia in Tomar, built by Tommaso de Martino in 1761, or the organ in the Chapel of Nossa Senhora da Saúde in Lisbon, built by Carlo Mancini in 1787, both of which possess complete stops and a four-octave keyboard with lower short octave. Some Portuguese builders produced organs that seem to absorb patterns of those small Neapolitan instruments. Examples of this are the organ built by Bento Fontanes in 1773 for the Church of the Misericórdia in Torres Vedras, and the cabinet organ built by Leandro José da Cunha in 1785 for the Church of the Misericórdia in Tavira. These instruments also have complete stops (apart from the *Corneta* and the *Voz humana*, which are treble stops) and a short octave keyboard (in the latter case reaching  $d''$ ).

By the late 1700s, Portuguese organ building (especially in the area of Lisbon, through the activity of makers such as António Xavier

Machado e Cerveira and Joaquim António Peres Fontanes) was undergoing a transformation that would lead to the creation of a particular type of instrument, also with noticeable Italian influence but retaining strong Iberian features as well and introducing innovative technical and timbric solutions. The Portuguese organ acquired a wider range of possibilities and became much more orchestral in character in order to suit a music that was itself becoming much more operatic (Vaz 2013, pp. 169-172). However, smaller instruments, such as the ones described above, continued to be produced throughout the eighteenth century and remain, along with the music of Frei Jerónimo da Madre de Deus, as a sign of a period in Portuguese history when organ music – as well as organ building – was directly influenced by Italian models.

### Notas

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<sup>1</sup> A preliminary version of this text was presented at the 14th Biennial International Conference on Baroque Music (held in Belfast in July 2010), under the title «New Insights into Early Eighteenth Century Portuguese Organ Music: The Works of Frei Jerónimo da Madre de Deus».

<sup>2</sup> About the Italianization of sacred music in Portugal during the reign of king D. João V, see Rui Vieira Nery in Nery and Castro, 1991, pp. 84-90 and Alvarenga, 2008, pp. 17-68. See also Alvarenga, 2011, pp. 179-214. Further research has been made by Cristina Fernandes and Rui Cabral Lopes.

<sup>3</sup> I wish to thank my friend and colleague Rui Vieira Nery, who draw my attention to these works and whose research first brought to light biographical information on this composer.

<sup>4</sup> «Catalogue of the composers in the science of music, organ and harpsichord from the Order of Saint Paul the First Hermit, Congregation of Serra d'Ossa in these kingdoms of Portugal and Algarve». This document is part of manuscript P-Ln RES. 8942 (ff. 199-203v).

<sup>5</sup> P-Ln RES. 8942, f. 203 (quoted in Nery 1980, pp. 49-50).

<sup>6</sup> Lisboa, Igreja dos Mártires, Irmandade de Santa Cecília, *1º Livro de admissões* (italics corresponding to the manuscript insertions in the printed form; underlined as in the original).

<sup>7</sup> *Veni Sancte Spiritus*.

<sup>8</sup> P-Pm MM 43, ff. 113v-115r: «8º Tom Verssos por g; sol, re ut. De Fr. Diogo da Conceção».

<sup>9</sup> Unlike other works in manuscript P-Pm MM 43, all these verses are notated in Treble, Alto, Tenor and Bass clefs.

<sup>10</sup> Kastner, while referring to Pedro de Araújo (of which several works can be found in P-Pm MM 43), underlines the fact that the so called «Braga manuscript» (P--BRp 964) contains, besides those works, pieces by Manuel Rodrigues Coelho and late-seventeenth century Italian composers, such as Bernardo Pasquini.

- <sup>11</sup> P-Pm MM 43, ff. 101r-104v.
- <sup>12</sup> P-Pm MM 43, ff. [I]v e [II]r.
- <sup>13</sup> A selection of works from the *Livro de Orgão de Fr. Roque da Conceição* was recently recorded by the author at the historic organ Joseph Mañeru (1699) in the church of Nuestra Señora de la Asunción in Longares, Spain: *El organista 'portoges': Livro de Órgão de Frei Roque da Conceição*, João Vaz (organ), Institución Fernando el Católico – Órganos históricos en Aragón (cd), 2011.

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