

# Iconografia musical por artistas viajantes no Brasil do século XIX

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## Resumo

Este artigo examina cenas musicais com cordofones (de cordas dedilhadas) nas obras dos dois maiores artistas viajantes no Brasil do século XIX, o francês Jean-Baptiste Debret, e o alemão Johan Moritz Rugendas. Diferentemente do esperado, tais ilustrações não registram cordofones no formato do numeral ‘oito’, como os tradicionais viola e do violão. Alternativamente, encontram-se instrumentos, desconhecidos, em formatos ‘ovais’ e ‘piriformes’. Porém, para além do interesse organológico-classificatório, esse artigo assinala a multidimensionalidade da mediação visual do fenômeno musical por tais artistas, indicando a necessidade de contextualização política, social e cultural das imagens como condição para seu melhor uso como registro musical do passado.

### Palavras-chave:

Iconografia musical no Brasil, viola e violão, Debret e Rugendas

# Musical iconography by travel artists in nineteenth century Brazil

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## Abstract

This article examines musical scenes with plucked chordophones in the works of the two most important travel artists in nineteenth century Brazil, the French painter Jean-Baptiste Debret, and the German artist Johann Moritz Rugendas. Differently from expected, their illustrations do not register any figure eight-shaped chordophone as the traditional *viola* and *violão*. Rather, one finds unknown, oval and piriform, instruments. However, beyond classificatory organology interests, this article points out the multidimensionality of the visual mediation of musical phenomena by such artists, indicating the need for cultural, political, and social contextualization, including the artistic conventions, as a condition for a better use of those images as musical evidence of the past.

### Keywords:

Musical iconography in Brazil,  
Debret and Rugendas,  
Brazilian chordophones

# Iconografía musical por parte de artistas viajeros en el Brasil del siglo XIX

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## Resumen

Este artículo examina escenas musicales con cordófonos (instrumentos de cuerdas pulsadas) en las obras de los dos mayores artistas viajeros en el Brasil del siglo XIX, el francés Jean-Baptiste Debret y el alemán Johan Moritz Rugendas. Al contrario de lo esperado, tales ilustraciones no registran cordófonos con forma de “ocho” como los tradicionales guitarras. Contrariamente, se encontraron instrumentos desconocidos, en formatos ‘ovales’ y ‘periformes’. Sin embargo, más allá del interés organológico-clasificadorio, este artículo se ocupa de la multidimensionalidad de la mediación visual del fenómeno musical en estos artistas, indicando la necesidad de contextualización política, social y cultural de las imágenes como condición para su correcto uso en cuanto registro musical del pasado.

### **Palabras clave:**

Iconografía musical en Brasil, viola y violão, Debret y Rugendas

Images show us a world but not the world itself. Images are not the things shown but are representations thereof: re-presentations. Indeed, what images present may otherwise not exist in “reality” and may instead be confined to the realm of imagination, wish, dream, or fantasy. And yet, of course, any image literally exists as an object within the world that it in one way or another engages.

Richard Leppert (1996, p.3)

## 1. Introduction

In this article I analyse how plucked chordophones were pictured in the works of two European travel artists, the French painter, Jean Baptist Debret and German painter, Johan Moritz Rugendas, who lived in Brazil in the first half of the nineteenth century. First, I discuss approaches to musical iconography and visual representations and then analyse and interpret their pictorial representations of musical scenes including plucked chordophones. I conclude the article by arguing that the inconsistency of the representations and the diversity of the chordophones that appear in the musical iconography relate to a period of intense flux of peoples, cultures and artefacts in nineteenth century Brazil.

By examining the images as the product of an era, influenced by the artists’ personal trajectories, interests and artistic conventions, and not as neutral, unbiased or unproblematic representations of the past, I argue that they show selective elements of Brazilian life that had the specific function of illustrating travel albums for a European public. I take into account, however, that onlookers are “active participants in determining meaning” in visual representations, (LEPPERT, 1996, p.6), and that pictures, as cultural artefacts, are susceptible to different

interpretations depending on the temporal, cultural, and geographical contexts in which they are experienced (SVASEK, 2007, 2012). Considering the limitations of verbal language for explaining visual representations, and the bias of the interpreter, I critically look at Debret's and Rugendas' iconographies and propose an approach that accounts for their complexities, encompassing the backgrounds of the artists, the technological constraints of the media employed, the organology of chordophones, and the relations of power in the creation of travel accounts. I argue that as much as providing privileged sources to glimpse the morphology of chordophones, these musical iconographies inform us of the ways the instrument was used to mediate relations of class, gender, and race in Brazil.

## 2. Musical iconography

Tilman Seebass (1992, 2001) has noted that musical iconography is located between musicology (including ethnomusicology) and art history. Bringing together expertise in both fields, it demands great attention to visual representations of music as historical documents. The very name of the field, musical iconography, is based on the method of interpretation developed by the art historian Erwin Panofsky (1939, 1974) in which the work of art could be fully understood in a three-stage analysis. In the first step, called pre-iconographical, the iconographer has to identify the basic elements of a scene, as objects and events familiar to the viewer. In the second, iconography, the elements are described and traced back to their historical contexts of conventional subject matter, such as symbols or icons of early texts or paintings. In the third step, iconology, the analyst can visualize the content, or intrinsic meaning of an art work at a deeper level of understanding. As Panofsky (1974, p.30) explains, the art work "is apprehended by ascertaining those underlying principles which reveal the basic attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious or philosophical persuasion - qualified by one's personality and condensed into one work". Panofsky's method has been criticized as reductionist for narrowing the possibilities of interpretation, and trying to find a particularistic meaning of the picture without considering meaning for whom or in which context (BURKE, 2001; SVASEK, 2007, 2012).

However, beyond the iconographical methodologies proposed by Panofsky (1974) and Seebass (1992, 2001), there is no systematic formula aimed at musical picture analysis. Every

analysis requires a specific approach depending on the subject involved and the purposes of the research. Seebass (1988, 1992) has pointed out the importance of examining the medium employed, the intention of the artist, his background, and how the work has been evaluated by the artists' contemporaries. In addition, Thomas Heck (1999) has drawn attention to the constantly imitative character of works of art, and their many possibilities of interpretation. He asserts that in musical representation, a real instrument or an entire ensemble can be depicted in an imagined performance. Similarly, Febo Guizzi (1988) has highlighted the polyvalent potentialities of musical images that underpin a range of possible historical and contextual interpretation. In the same vein, but emphasizing the social, cultural, and political nature of visual representations of musical practice, Richard Leppert (2014) asserts that "To write about visual culture as a record of musical practice, one must know the specific histories that attach to the practice, one must understand, in other words, the various means—educational, technical, economic, aesthetic, etc.—by which it was made and its making was mediated." (LEPPERT, 2014, p.12).

### 3. Visuality and power

Concerns with ways of seeing and the multiple possibilities of meaning in the relationship between images, cultures and spectators, make it clear that images are not literal representations of reality. Rather, they point to the need for contextualized interpretation. In the case of the representations produced by European artists in nineteenth century Brazil for the travel literature market, the contexts reveal a power imbalance in the ways in which the artists approached their subject matter, what is epitomized by the very practice of classifying and representing the population. The Brazilian subjects were seen without wanting to be seen, were pictured without knowing who was picturing them. There was, moreover, a bias of sight, not sight as optical phenomenon, but sight in the sense of the capacity of the visualization of history: a term derived from Mirzoeff's (2013) critical visibility approach.

For Mirzoeff (2013), critical visibility deems sight to be embodied power and knowledge, and a means of authoritarian control. Mirzoeff (2013, p.XXXI) identifies three components that form what he calls a complex of visibility: classification, separation and aesthetics. Classification stems from natural history, and "operates by creating distinctions such as "free and

slave,” “colonizer and colonized;” which are based upon “practices enforced by law and custom.” The technique of separation ensures that classifications are executed by imposing a “physical segregation between those so classified.” Aesthetic techniques reinforce classification and separation by creating “not so much an aesthetics of beauty, as an aesthetics of respect for the status quo”. When these three components work together they reinforce one another creating a paradigm of visual domination that seems to be natural.

This process of classification, separation and aestheticization, is implicated in the transformation of individuals as subjects identified by Foucault (1991). According to him, the discipline exercised by political power, “organizes an analytical space in which each individual has its own place and each place its individuals” (FOUCAULT, 1991, p.143). From this perspective, to examine, analyse, and classify, creates knowledge that facilitates power over people. This visualization is epitomized in the project of the Panopticon. An architectural design model for a prison, the Panopticon was the project of a building in which the convicts could not see the prison guards, who would be situated in the centre of the construction, but the guards could always see the prisoners. As Foucault (1991) pointed out, this project, designed by the British philosopher Jeremy Bentham in 1791, aimed to “induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (FOUCAULT, 1991, p. 201).

#### **4. Debret and the *Picturesque and Historical Voyage to Brazil***

Jean-Baptist Debret (1768-1848) started his art studies by attending the *atelier* of his famous cousin, the great painter Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825). David was a French Revolutionary supporter and an ‘icon’ of Neoclassical painting. His political and aesthetic ideas influenced a whole generation of young artists in France and had a deep impact upon Debret’s work. Aged seventeen years old, Debret became a member of the French Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture. Whilst living in France, he was an active artist, taking part in exhibitions and winning prizes for his historical paintings during the Napoleonic Empire (1804-1814/15) (LIMA, 2007).

Leaving Europe for economic and political reasons, Debret went to Brazil with a group of French artists in 1816. Arriving in the country he was hired as an official painter and set

designer for the monarchy, starting his activities in Rio de Janeiro creating scenarios for the public ceremonies of the Portuguese royal family. He also worked actively for the creation of an academy of arts in Brazil and became a teacher of historical painting when the Brazilian Imperial Academy of Fine Arts was inaugurated in 1826 (SCHWARCZ, 2008). Alongside his regular duties, Debret painted and collected hundreds of aquarelles about the country; once back in Europe, he intended to produce a work about Brazilian civilization. Upon returning to France in 1831, Debret published his *Picturesque and Historical Voyage to Brazil*.

The book intended to show “the progressive march of civilization in Brazil” (Debret; 1980, p. 9), and documented aspects of nature, men and society in the nineteenth century. The work was issued between 1834 and 1839 in French and German and was composed of 153 plates and texts divided into three tomes. I will be working with two versions of the book, the first French edition *Voyage Pittoresque et Historique au Brésil* (1834) and a Brazilian edition, *Viagem Histórica e Pitoresca ao Brasil*, (1980). What seems to be just another travel book of the time, the *Picturesque and Historical Voyage to Brazil* has some unique features that deserve to be mentioned. The length of Debret’s stay in Brazil, where he lived for 16 years, was extensive compared to other travellers. This fact alone affords his descriptions considerable credibility as compared with other writers. Having more time he was able to witness various political and historical moments and become acquainted with the everyday life of the country. The fact that Debret called his book “picturesque and historical voyage” is significant. When he used the term “historical”, he clearly wanted his book to stand out from those of other travellers’ who showed only the picturesque: The term “historical” emphasizes the importance of the content adding credibility and prestige to his descriptions.

However, 180 years after the first edition of the *Picturesque and Historical Voyage to Brazil*, there has been much discussion regarding Debret’s publication. His work has been scrutinized by scholars of various academic fields inspiring many publications in Brazil and France that have generated controversies. Though Debret could argue that he lived in Rio de Janeiro for many years and as a historical painter was a good observer, he could not avoid the difficulty of picturing landscapes, customs, objects, and peoples he had never seen before. Moreover, he could not escape the European interest



in the exotic, the influence and competition from other travellers and the commercial interests in that type of literature (LIMA, 2007).

The first critique of his work came from the Brazilian Institute of History and Geography (IHGB) in 1841. Bento da Silva Lisboa and J. D. de Attaide Moncorvo, who signed an article of 31 October 1840, praised the first tome concerning the origins of the country. The second tome, however, concerning life and customs in the country– was poorly rated. The reviewers criticized inaccuracies regarding dates of historical events, but the centre of their critique focused on a claimed rapid shift in the customs of Brazilians regarding the treatment of Africans slaves. They wrote: “It is a judgment that this second volume has little importance to Brazil: since it started in 1816 and finished in 1831 when the author went back to France, it could not cope with the changes that have happened in Brazil in customs, arts and sciences...” (IHGB, 1841, p.99).

The IHGB reviewers objected to Debret’s representation of the slaves, asserting that the scenes exaggerated the violence with which the slaves were treated. According to Julio Bandeira (2006), when Debret exposed the situation of the slaves, showing “the violence and the craziness of the reality” (BANDEIRA, 2006, p.12), the Brazilian elites (including land owners, merchants and political authorities) were affected by his representations. Although the Brazilian institute had disapproved part of the publication, the equivalent institution in France, the Institut de France, had endorsed it in 1839. The conflicting views of the institutions were not due to a bias stemming from the nationality or social class of the analysts, as their concerns were shared among scholars in Brazil.

Thekla Hartmann (1975) criticizes Debret’s pictures of the natives, arguing that the artist did not have much contact with Indians, reproducing images from other artist’s books. She argues that “the Indians heads are always on European bodies” and that other misrepresentations contribute to distorted ideas about Indians at this time (HARTMANN, 1975, p.70). Analysing his work aesthetically, Rodrigo Naves (1996) argues that “Jean Baptiste Debret was not a good artist, not here [Brazil], nor in France.” Nevertheless, Naves asserts that “[t]he search for a form that incorporated something of the sociability of Rio de Janeiro marks [Debret’s] Brazilian trajectory. One should not deny the documentary worth that goes beyond a simple fidelity to the objects and the peoples represented” (NAVES, 1996, p.46).

Criticizing Naves' perspective, Alfredo Grieco (2000) contends that the revelation of the "real" Debret and the meaning of his work can only emerge once one stops contemplating only the pictorial qualities of the images and starts seeing the artist as more than just a painter (GRIECO, 2000, p.77). In the same vein, Valéria Lima (2007) tries to reposition Debret and his work arguing that the artist was a national thinker and his *Picturesque and Historical Voyage to Brazil* was more than a typical travel account, it was a pictorial, historical and philosophical interpretation of the country.

Much criticism directed towards Debret could be seen as a general evaluation regarding travel artists in the nineteenth century. Criticisms include imprecision in descriptions, the invention of scenes, copying from other travel artists, lack of technical skills, lack of knowledge, difficulties in adapting to new scenarios and subjects, exploitation of the exotic for commercial reasons, conflicts between written and pictorial descriptions and so forth. As I will show in more detail below, all these issues can contribute to a relativization of the images, but they do not invalidate them as historical documents. Debret probably composed scenes of life in Brazil that he did not actually witness. If the 'content' in some cases can be questionable, his descriptions are in accordance with many other travellers seeking the picturesque. The use of the images as historical reference, though, depends on the mode and framework of interpretation as with any historical document.

## 5. Rugendas and the *Picturesque Voyage to Brazil*

The German painter, Johann Moritz Rugendas (1802 - 1858), belonged to the seventh generation of a family of painters, most of who were war painters, but he broke with the family tradition, choosing a different way of employing his skills. At the age of nineteen, after graduating from the Munich school of arts as a drawer, Rugendas had the opportunity to take part in the comprehensive scientific expedition of Baron Georg Heinrich von Langsdorff (1774-1852) to Brazil. The expedition, sponsored by the Russian Empire, aimed to acquire knowledge about Brazilians and the natural world by classifying and exploring new territories. From 1822 to 1824 Rugendas worked for Langsdorff as an artist in the service of science, recording images to be published in botanical, zoological, geographical and ethnological books. Though he stayed with the group for

three years he left the expedition in November of 1824 returning to Europe in May 1825. Once back in Europe, Rugendas published his *Picturesque Voyage to Brazil* in installments by Engelmann & Co editors, from 1827 to 1835.

The book was composed of one hundred black and white lithographs and texts that show a rich picture of the country encompassing its history, geography, culture and society. The publication is impressive for the range of subjects displayed in a substantial number of images and texts. However, the texts were not written by Rugendas himself, in fact, the French edition explains that the text was written by his friend Victor Aimé Huber, based on the notes Rugendas took in the field. One could believe, though, that the images found in the book were made by the artist. A comparison between the original drawings made in the field and the final lithographies edited in France, however, show that there are considerable discrepancies separating those two representations. Thus, it is necessary to ask to what extent the book can be used as historical evidence, or attributed to Rugendas.

In this regard, one of Rugendas' main expert, Pablo Diener (1997), argues that only some images which had not been 'manipulated' afterwards, that were made 'objectively', under the supervision of naturalists should be deemed historical documents, such as "the illustrations of plants, animals, as well as the series of portraits of the diversity of the black slaves and indigenous people." Whilst the everyday life representations were considerably modified "...to follow the trends of the time". (DIENER, 1997, p.79,81). In other words, Diener denounced the emphasis given to the picturesque and the exotic in some representations regarding them as imaginative creations rather than as accurate replications of what had been seen by the artist. In the same vein, but focusing on Indian iconographical representations, Thekla Hartmann (1975) contended that, while in the field, Rugendas represented correctly the diversity of the natives and their specific ethnic groups. However, she condemned the arrangements made by the author afterwards.

## 6. The new medium of lithography

Moving to technical issues related to the production of the book, a comparison between many lithographs within Rugendas' *Picturesque Voyage to Brazil* and the first drawings shows that the process of editing significantly interfered with the

final version. This is not surprising, as the new lithographic technology required collective participation in the production that was shared amongst various professionals including: “the drawer, the stamper, the colorist, the editor and the printing house” (ZENHA, 2002, p.135). For the editing process of the *Voyage Picturesque to Brazil* Rugendas had the help of 21 lithographers, as Celeste Zenha (2002) notes:

Adam, specializing in figures, took part in the elaboration of 31 of the 100 plates; Deroi, of 18; Villeneuve, of 11; Maurin, of 9; Sabatier, of 8; Bichebois, of 6; Joly e Wathier, of 5; Jules David, of 4; Rugendas, Vigneron e Zwinger, of 4; the famous Bonnington, Lecamus e Viard, of 3; Monthelier, Tirpene, Arnoul, Bayo e Jacottet, of 2; Dupressoir and Leborne of only one image. (ZENHA, 2002, p. 138)

Each one of those artists, including Rugendas himself, added, edited, changed or suppressed to some degree the details of the original drawings provided for the facsimiles. That is one of the reasons the editor demanded Rugendas’s collaboration in every aspect of the plates’ production. Although Rugendas had agreed to supervise the production process; he managed to oversee just twelve plates. Before the end of the publication he had returned to the Americas for the second time. As Zenha (2002) points out, if eventually the travellers were considered to be the authors of those types of publication, it was less as a result of their participation in the making of the final product, than because the readers believed that the artists actually witnessed the scenes.

However, the images could sometimes be taken on a different path in the process of editing. After publication, editors could sell them for other purposes. The images could be copied, adapted and reutilized for other publications. In each case, authorship was rarely accredited to the travel artist. The re-appropriation of images appeared in different visual media: periodicals, wall papers (panoramas), albums of pictures and souvenirs. In 1833 in France, for instance, the Swiss lithographer Johann Jacob Steinmann selected thirteen views of Rio de Janeiro to issue a book called *Souvenir de Rio de Janeiro*. In this book he decorated each image with illustrated frames based on the pictures made by Debret and Rugendas in their respective voyages. This type of illustrated album was frequently sold in Brazil as well. They helped to create an image of the country and the city that served not just to

satisfy the curiosity of European public, but slowly influenced a national imagery that Brazilians came to accept as normal. The lithographic technique, along with an increasing rate of communication associated with commercial interests, generated an unprecedented circulation of images and ideas that influenced the imaginary of Europeans and Brazilians alike.

## 7. Interpreting images with chordophones

The isolation and classification of elements found in nature and society distort our understanding of the reality that is actually movement and interrelation. That understanding is recovered when one juxtaposes the images giving movement to elements and inert characters. To some extent it is the intention when one collects images of music and dance [...].

Janice Theodoro (1996, p.83)

### 7.1 Guaiacuru Chief



Figure 1

Jean Baptiste Debret (1835)  
lithography, Guaiacuru  
Chief- Tome I, plate 16

From 153 plates in his *Historical and Picturesque Voyage to Brazil*, Debret painted 11 plates showing musical instruments. From these 11, only 3 showed plucked chordophones (Plate 16, Tome I; Plate 8, Tome II; and Plate 29, Tome III). In the first tome, despite being accused of not having had much contact with the natives, Debret depicted the life of various tribes, including the *Couaycoursous* (*Guaiacurus*) in Plates 16, 17 and 18. Plate 16, *ChefeGuaiacuru* (Portuguese edition) or Guaiacuru Chief.

The plate shows two Indian males before going to do business with Europeans, and a female Guaiacuru sitting on a bench doing some manual work. Though they are placed outdoors, the house is surrounded by a fence that separates them from the wilderness. The man in the foreground is the leader and the owner of the house. He is observing his wife who looks back to him passively– with a suggestion of submissiveness. The other man is not facing the viewer, he is touching the horse with one hand and holding a lance with other, his main function in the scene is to show that the Guaiacuru group is hierarchized and he is a soldier. It is important to note that in the middle of the picture there are two steps that reinforce the different social level between the characters, but, more than that, they keep apart two opposing elements that Debret wanted to emphasize. On the left hand side, the natural world is represented by a horse, a tree, and an Indian, all three placed on a lower level, whilst on the right hand side there is a couple and two musical instruments placed under the roof representing civilization.

Another important aspect of the scene is the way Debret dressed his characters. The Indians were painted wearing similar clothes to the characters that Debret's tutor Jacques-Louis David painted in his famous picture "The Oath of the Horatti" in 1784. The reference to the renowned Neoclassical painting was a deliberate choice made by Debret, to dignify the indigenous subjects through clothing. The musical instruments hanging on the wall, a plucked chordophone (three-course double strings with a round sound box) and a bowed chordophone were not used to play indigenous music, rather as European-like instruments they were important elements in the scene to reinforce the idea of cultural assimilation by the natives.

The idea behind the painting, though, was to show how the native population was evolving in the country and how Brazilian civilization was being imagined. The Guaiacurus are not shown as the stereotype of the 'primitive,' as peoples living in the woods, hunting, or participating in rituals; rather, they are displayed as having incorporated civilized manners. As mentioned above, Debret did not have much contact with Indians, himself. Instead, he based most of his descriptions of this theme on other travellers' books and through the research he did in the Imperial Museum of Natural History in Rio de Janeiro. Debret was correct in referring to the Guaiacurus as people from the provinces of Goiás and Mato Grosso. Analysing Debret's original aquarelle, however, Hartmann (1975) found that the Guaiacurus

were painted on a landscape in Rio de Janeiro, implying that this was the place where Debret actually painted the picture.

Taking a close look at the plucked chordophone hanging on the wall of the Guaiacurus' house, one sees an instrument with six single strings, identifiable by the tuning peg with six holes and the six single strings over the soundboard. The fretboard contains twelve frets and the round soundboard looks like the half of a gourd, in spite of the back of it being invisible in the picture. Apart from its presence amongst the Indians, every aspect of this instrument is intriguing: the shape, the number of strings and the size, for there is no parallel to it in Brazilian organology of chordophones and it is impossible to make a direct association with any other instrument in Brazil nowadays or in the past. Nonetheless, similar chordophones will be pictured by Debret and Rugendas in Brazil.

## 7.2 The siesta

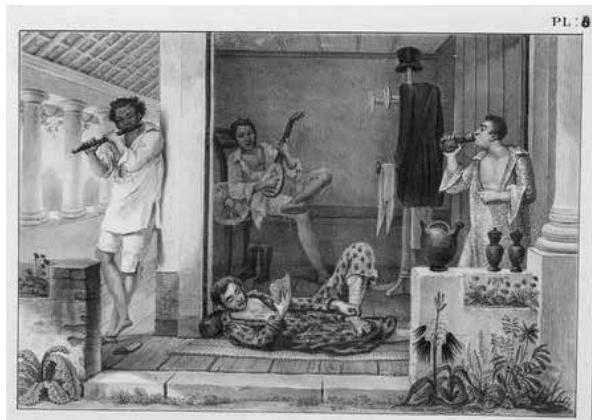


Figure 2  
Jean Baptiste Debret (1835)  
lithography,  
*The Siesta* - Tome II, plate 8

In this plate one finds an after-dinner or siesta scene. This scene is unique in Debret's lithographic work for the way he depicted wealthy light-skinned men in their private life. That is, the men are neither formally dressed nor working. Women, children and slaves are not included in the scene for their presence would require different manners from the men. The men are in their period of relaxation in which Debret intentionally showed the effects of the tropical weather on their behavior. The heat makes the men take off their shoes and open their shirts to relieve the heat. Their body posture is slothful. One man drinks water from the pots, while another lies on the floor reading a book and two more play their instru-



ments in a relaxed way. Overall, this picture creates a stereotype of the 'idle Brazilian' who, affected by the overwhelming heat, could not help themselves and only surrender their civilized composure. The two musicians fill the scene with sound, but not in a vigorous or animated way, rather they are in fact blowing and plucking their flute and chordophone in the same mood in which the other two individuals are resting. Not unintentionally, the main character of the picture is the chordophone player who is placed in the centre of the scene for a reason. In the context created by Debret, the chordophone performer gives the harmonic basis to support the melody played by the flautist, and in a metaphorical way he reinforces the harmony or cohesion of the whole picture. The central position of the chordophone player and his positioning in a kind of open dress room, gives him acoustic advantage in order to increase the resonance of the instrument, ultimately setting the 'spirit' of the scene.

However, there is no typification for this chordophone in Brazilian organology. Looking more closely at the instrument one can grasp six holes in the tuning peg which indicates a six-string chordophone, but it is not clear if it is a three-course double string or a six-course single string instrument. The fingerboard shows approximately seventeen frets. The shape is not round as in the Guaiacurus' instrument painted by Debret (fig.1), rather, it is clearly a pear-shaped and rounded back chordophone. In the text following the picture, Debret named the instrument *guitarre* and all Brazilian translations of the French edition I have accessed call it, erroneously, *vio-lão*. However the chordophone shown by Debret resembles a small lute or a mandolin.

### 7.3 The feast of the Holy Ghost

The first picture in the plate is a depiction of the *folias*, who paraded throughout the city of Rio de Janeiro, performing and carrying a banner with the image of a small white dove (symbol of the Holy Ghost), collecting donations for the Feast of the Holy Ghost that happened every year in the main plaza of the city, the Campo de Santana. The scene shows two chordophones played in a musical group: these included a triangle, a tambourine and a drum, as they provide singing accompaniment for the *folias*. Despite some possible controversy, when analysing a close up of the musicians in the scene, I contend that Debret pictured, once more, a pear-shaped (mandolin-like) plucked chordophone.



Figure 3  
Jean Baptiste Debret (1835)  
lithography, *The Feast of the  
Holy Ghost* - Tome III, plate 29



In this sample, though, (as distinct from the chordophone in fig.2), it becomes clear that they are four-course double string instruments. Debret does not name them, but based on his other two pictures of chordophones shown above, it seems likely that, for him, this type of chordophone was classified as *guitarre*, or *guitarra* (in Portuguese), regardless of its resemblance to the mandolin. There is no record of them being used by the *folias* for the Feast of the Holy Ghost. In those celebrations, the main instrument has been the traditional figure-eight shaped *viola*, as one can see in the two paintings of the time. One, painted in Rio de Janeiro by an officer of the British Royal Artillery who lived in the city from 1819 to 1820, Henry Chamberlain (1796-1844). And the other picture is a Holy Ghost *folia*, in Diamantina, painted by the French artist Hercule Romuald Florence (1804 - 1844), who was hired for the same Langsdorff expedition that Rugendas took part in Brazil.

Regarding the instruments painted by Debret, the lack of national museums of musical instruments in Brazil led me to investigate the history of Luso-Brazilian chordophones through the remnants of instruments in European museums, but the results were disappointing. In a visit to the Museu da Música (Music Museum) in Lisbon in 2012, during which I was able to examine the whole collection, encompassing those instruments not on display to the public, I did not find any instrument that matched the ones pictured by Debret in the three lithographies analyzed above. The only similar sample found, was the *bandolim*, that is the Portuguese and Brazilian Portuguese name for the instrument named in English as mandolin. However the *bandolins* in the Luso-Brazilian context can be si-

milar either to the traditional Italian (lute-shaped) mandolins, with a pear-shaped body and short neck, or with a round sound board with a flat back which are more popular in Brazil. Yet the *bandolins* or *mandolins* have considerably smaller dimensions than the instruments depicted by Debret.

However research on the 'Musical Instruments Museum Online' (MIMO) on the entry for *guitarre* (as mentioned by Debret), retrieved three chordophones called *guitarre* with the closest shapes, dimensions, and number of strings to the ones pictured by Debret in the second lithography examined (fig.2). The entry for mandolin on the same website retrieved many samples of the same kinds of *mandolins* found in the museum of music in Portugal. Despite the resemblance, I did not find any chordophones in the museums that can be clearly identified as the ones pictured by Debret in Brazil.

## 7.4 Customs of Rio de Janeiro



Figure 4

Johan Moritz Rugendas (1835)  
lithography, *Customs of Rio do  
Janeiro.- Part II, Plate 16*

Tropical vegetation is always present in Rugendas' lithographs, including this scene in which the author pictured the customs of Rio de Janeiro. The mountains, the rich and dense vegetation in which the house is placed, form an authentic landscape in Rio. However, it becomes clear that Rugendas did not want to show the social reality of the great majority of the population, rather, the Rio de Janeiro he depicted was the one pertaining to the well-to-do of the city. The outfits of the young couple, their confident posture and even the sunlight on their faces and bodies emphasize their social class and position of racial privilege in society. Another notable element is the chordophone leaning on a cushion on the right hand side at the bottom. Since Rugendas wanted to show modernized, civilized, and Europeanized Cariocas, he painted a luxury chordophone. The craftsmanship of the instrument and the musical scores underneath it highlight that the couple belongs to a well-educated and wealthy minority within Brazilian society. The chordophone is a convenient component for the scene for it encapsulates the message intended by the artist to represent youth, romance, elegance, and sensuality. However, it is not clear what chordophone is represented.

Along with the *guitarres* or *gitarres* pictured by Debret in the examples above, this chordophone is not a figure-eight-shaped *viola* or *violão* as one might expect to find in Brazil at that time. Yet, neither does it reflect Debret's *guitarres*, being very well built and considerably longer. Nevertheless, in the written part of his German edition (1835, part III, pp.34,38; part IV, p.26), Rugendas writes in three different passages that Brazilians mostly played the *mandolino*. He explains that the *mandolino* was played to accompany songs in Rio de Janeiro, in rural areas of the country, and for *lundu* dances. The French edition of the book (1853, pp.26, 31, 36) includes the term *mandoline* (mandolin in French or in German) to refer to the instrument. The Brazilian publications of the book failed to translate the term *mandolino* properly instead it was erroneously rendered as *violão*, a different category of chordophone.

Once more it is difficult for the iconographer to be certain about the instrument, for the chordophone he pictured looks like a mandolin, at least its soundboard has some similarity to that instrument. However this chordophone and the others pictured by Rugendas (shown below) have a much larger soundboard and a significantly longer neck. The illustrated instrument seems to be of a medium-bass tonal range, whilst

the mandolin is a treble chordophone. In the plate 'Customs of São Paulo' (fig.5) there is another chordophone that resembles the one in Customs of Rio de Janeiro but appears to be a product of inferior craftsmanship.

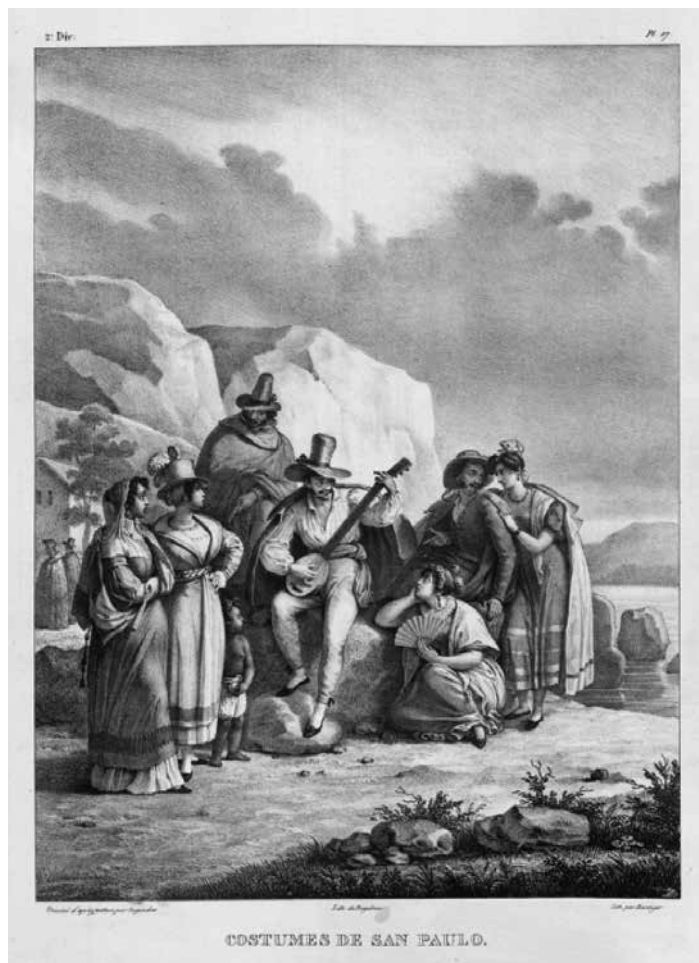


Figure 5

Johan Moritz Rugendas (1835)  
lithography, Customs of São  
Paulo.- Part II, Plate 17

In the *Museu da Música* (Music Museum) in Lisbon, I found a *cítara* (cittern) that has a similar pear-round-shape, and it contrasts with Rugendas chordophones in that the body has a flat back. Yet, the MIMO website's entry *mandolino* (the name of the most popular chordophone in Brazil, according to Rugendas), depicts a "mandolin-banjo" displaying the same general features as the one pictured by Rugendas. The entry *cittern* on the same website retrieves many similarly shaped



Figure 6

Spix (1823-1831, p.34) Lithography, *Feast of the African Queen*

chordophones, but all with a flat back soundboard. The only exception found was a chordophone called *Lutgitar* (lute-guitar) in the Musik & Teatermuseum in Stockholm that has a convex soundboard but a considerably shorter neck.

Despite the fact that Rugendas regarded the *mandolino* as the most played chordophone in Brazil and recorded instruments that were not easily recognizable, another contradictory account of music and chordophones in Brazil was provided by other two German explorers, Spix and Martius (1824), who travelled across the country from 1817 to 1820. As they had musical knowledge, and have even registered a *lundu* in musical scores in the country, their accounts are believed to be closer to the reality than most travellers' reports in this regard. They affirm:

Music...is cultivated with more partiality by the Brazilians, and particularly in Rio de Janeiro; and in this art they may perhaps the soonest attain a certain degree of perfection. The Brazilian, like the Portuguese, has a refined ear for agreeable modulation and regular melody, and is confirmed in it by the simple accompaniment of the voice with the guitar. The guitar (viola), here, as in the south of Europe, is the favourite instrument... The national songs, which are sung with the accompaniment of the guitar, are partly of Portuguese origin, and partly written in the country. By singing, and the sound of the instrument, the Brazilian is easily excited to dancing, and expresses his cheerfulness in polished society...(SPIX and MARTIUS, 1824, p.156).



Spix and Martius (1824) were very specific in emphasizing that the *viola* was the instrument Brazilians liked most. So much so, that in all editions of their work either in German (1831), English, or Portuguese (1981), the instrument is called *viola*. Even though the term *viola* could designate a myriad of chordophones, doubts about what kind of *viola* it was could only be solved by visual representations of a particular chordophone they had witnessed during their travels in the country. They recorded the instrument in a 'Feast of the African Queen', during their stay in the province of Minas Gerais (fig.6). That instrument has the advantage of being very well delineated and it is clearly an eight-shaped, six-course, single strings guitar, called *violão*, or French *viola* (*viola francesa*), as it was commonly known in Brazil at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Their picture can be considered the oldest visual representation of the *violão* found in the country.

## 7.5 Chordophones in rural areas

Returning to Rugendas' representations of chordophones in Brazil, in four other plates the artist showed a sequence of scenes with chordophones being played in rural settings by light-skinned men. The chordophones ('*mandolinos*' according to the artist) are all similar but not quite identical. There is a slightly rounder soundboard or a longer neck in one or other image depending on the lithography chosen and according to the interpretation of the viewer. He also depicts the mobility of the instrument. In the plate 'Family of Planters' (fig.7), a man performs while walking, animating the trip, and this is the only image of a chordophone in all his Brazilian lithographs in which the gourd-like rounded back of the instrument is clearly shown by the artist.

Figure 7

Johan Moritz Rugendas (1835)  
lithography, *Family of Planters*. -  
Part III, Plate 17

Figure 8

Johan Moritz Rugendas (1835)  
lithography, *The resting of a  
Caravan*. - Part III, Plate 19



On the plate 'The Resting of a Caravan' (fig.8) the instrument entertains the resting troops. The almost complete absence of slaves, blacks, or women playing the 'mandolino' is noticeable: even when the artist paints the *lundu* as he did in the plate 'Lundu Dance' (fig.9), the predominantly Afro-Brazilian tradi-



Figure 9

Johan Moritz Rugendas (1835)  
lithography, *Lundu Dance*.- Part  
III, Plate 18. This is the only  
composition made by Rugendas  
in which the chordophone is used  
for dancing accompaniment. It  
is played by a white man without  
percussion to mark the rhythm

Figure 10

Johan Moritz Rugendas (1835)  
lithography, *Family of Farmers*.-  
Part III, Plate 16



tion is performed by white characters; the musician and the couple who dance. Of the twenty-two people in the scene, only four are of African appearance. On the lithograph 'Family of Farmers' (fig.10) the chordophone is played by the owner of the house, the chief of a Catholic family. He entertains himself and others by playing music when a slave announces the arrival of a visitor. The whole scene shows the structure of a typical rural family in which the hierarchies based on gender, race, and social status are secured with children and slaves sitting on the floor. The man decides when the instrument should sound and when it should not. Although his chordophone has the typical gourd-like soundboard as in other Rugendas pictures, it has a considerably shorter neck in relation to the other chordophones represented.

In the lithography 'Transporting a convoy of negroes' (fig.11), even though the image is about the tragedy of the slavery system, in this scene, Rugendas shows a different perspective. Instead of picturing the suffering of the black population, as he does in other lithographs, he decided to show a harmonious environment between whites and blacks. There is no chain attached to the slaves, or any kind of coercion visible by the whites. On the left hand side a slave rides on the back of a horse behind a white man. On the right hand side a black woman is loosely laid on a cloth. In the background one can glimpse slaves clapping hands and perhaps singing.

The chordophone is secondary in this lithograph. The man who holds it is not producing sound; he is resting his right arm on the body of the instrument while the left hand is only grabbing the neck. Actually the player seems to be bored,



Figure 11

Johan Moritz Rugendas (1835)  
lithography, *Transporting a con-  
voy of negroes.* - Part IV, Plate 4





Figure 12

Mandola. Repository: Museu Nacional de Etnologia (Portugal)

awaiting orders from his superiors. The player engages in no action, his silence adding to the meaning Rugendas aims to convey in the plate. Comparing the instrument with the others pictured by Rugendas in Brazil this one has the same kind of gourd-like sound box, but differently from the others it can be fairly identified as a *mandola*, as one can find in the National Museum of Ethnology in Portugal (fig.12).

## 8. Conclusion

This article has shown that the images produced by the two most important travel artists in Brazil do not reveal the most popular figure-eight shaped chordophones in the country: the *violas* and the *violões*. Moreover, neither artist mentions the words *viola* and *violão*, or even *guitarra* or *viola francesa*, in their texts. I suggest that there are at least three possible understandings for this absence; one is that Debret and Rugendas did not picture chordophones based on musical performances they had actually witnessed, or, if they did attend musical sessions, they gave little importance to the terminology and morphology of instruments. This is possible, as I have shown, for both artists have been accused of being imprecise in some of their representations in matters of peoples and customs. Thus, following this logic one can conclude that they also could have failed in their musical images since they did not show very recognizable instruments, with the exception of Rugendas' *mandola* (fig.12).

A second reason for not finding the chordophones depicted in Brazil or in European museums, could be that the instruments represented only existed in Brazil, either being 'transformed,' or simply vanishing over time. Moreover, as artisanal instruments, they did not follow certain specifications and for that reason they were pictured in considerably different ways from one another. A third possible conclusion that does not exclude the ones just mentioned, is that the imprecision or even the invention of the images is related to the lithography technology used to make their travel books. As I have shown, the lithographic process demanded the involvement of other artists and technicians who could, in some phases of the edition, alter aspects of the images.

Regardless of being real, invented, or partially created chordophones, Rugendas' '*mandolino*' and Debret's '*guitarre*' were used to create their interpretation of Brazilian society. Their representations indicated that plucked chordophones

were common artefacts and they used them to compose their representations of the inhabitants and their everyday life. The instruments were played only by white male characters, reinforcing their interpretations of the social hierarchy associated with race and gender at the time. The chordophones appeared in rural and urban environments, private meetings and public celebrations, and were used for dance accompaniment, for romance, while resting and during a walk. Whilst Debret and Rugendas did not depict chordophones being played by the black and female population, a chordophone is shown placed on the wall of the Guaiacuru chief house as one of the symbols of the civilizing process in Brazil.

What becomes clear in a broader consideration of the images in this study is that the chordophones depicted have multiple morphologies and vague terminology, and it is exactly what one finds when trying to juxtapose them with the chordophones in the MIMO database. The very presence of these artists in Brazil, after centuries of isolation, is an example of the openness of the country to visitors from other nations as part of the civilizing process that started in 1808 with the transfer of the entire Portuguese court to Rio de Janeiro. The variety of chordophones painted by these artists reflects their role as European travel artists – picturing the unknown for the European public. That leads to the conclusion that the inconsistency of visual representations of music made by travel artists in Brazil should be analyzed carefully before any generalizations are made about the musical past.

#### NOTES

1. Organologists have dedicated considerable time to the development of instrument classification systems. The most wide-ranging was that proposed by Hornbostel and Sachs (1914). Their system identifies physical characteristics in the production of sound as the basic principle of classification, dividing all musical instruments into four main categories: idiophones, membranophones, chordophones and aerophones. The chordophone category relates to any musical instrument that produces sound through one or more tensed and vibrating strings between two fixed points.

2. Also discussed by Grieco (2000).

3. The 2014 Oxford English Dictionary (OED) entry for “picturesque” defines it as: “Having the elements or qualities of a picture; suitable for a picture; *specifically* (of a view, landscape, etc.) pleasing or striking in appearance; scenic. Now frequently in weakened sense (sometimes *depreciative* or *ironic*): pretty in an undeveloped or old-fashioned way; charming, quaint, unspoilt, visually attractive, especially in a quaint or charming way.”

4. All Portuguese quotes have been translated into English by the author.

5. Some elements described in the scene were also analyzed by Lima (2007).

6. Despite Rugendas was a German describing instruments in Brazil he used

the Italian name of the chordophone *mandolino*, instead of the German term *mandoline* or the Portuguese name *bandolim*.

7. All Brazilian editions of Rugendas and Debret's books have the same translator, Sérgio Millet.

8. An unusual feature of this instrument is some extra frets on the low strings instead of on the higher ones.

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Received on 11 December 2014

Accepted on 3 March 2015

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