

Segregation and Integration in Brazil's late 18th Century creole society: the case and context of artist Mestre Athaíde in Minas Gerais

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Abstract:

The gold rush of 1698 in Minas Gerais allows the Catholic Church to expand rapidly, building numerous churches, cloisters, and other temples with flamboyant baroque motifs. Such are coated with gilded woodcarving and glazed tiles, produced and painted in Portugal. In this context, Mestre (Master) Athaíde (Mariana, Minas Gerais, 1762-1830), a painter, gilder and carver, was the author of the Barroco de Minas (Minas Baroque) style, marked by artistic freedom and cultural diversity, distancing himself from the more classical Barroco Litoral (Littoral Baroque). He lived in a very diverse creole society, even if one marked by imperialistic ideals of a slave-based economy - a time when darker skin tones implied a submissive life condition in a rigid social hierarchy, ruled by the dichotomy oppressor/oppressed. Athaíde, of Portuguese origin, never backed down from slave owning, even though his life partner was "mestiça", a common term at the time for miscegenation between people of European and African descent. Yet, under pressure from the Catholicism, Athaíde never married his partner. He specialized in ceiling painting and had his family play a part on his work, for instances, having his partner served as model for his painting of the Virgin, as well as his children in role of the angels. A daring gesture but highly influential at the time. It would take close to his whole lifetime to be allowed to teach Drawing and Architecture (1818). He educated his own slaves to become painters and gave them "cartas de alforria" (documents which legally freed them from slavery) in his final will. In his final years, Athaíde still witnessed a significant cultural shift, with the independence of Brazil, with a constitutional monarchy lead by Pedro I (Pedro IV of Portugal). Yet, this slave-based economy remained the dominant ideological doctrine until 1888, long past Athaíde's passing.

1. Introduction

Mestre (Master) Athaíde was born in 1762, during a heightened period of economic flux, due to revenues from exploiting gold mines. The gold rush had begun in 1694. New Portuguese law

granted the right to property to whomever found gold. The new century indicated, early on, that a great deal was going to change in Brazil. Brewing since the Portuguese expansion settled in 1500, miscegenation became increasingly widespread, resulting in a social and cultural normative behaviour. Yet, in manorial families, marriages were still strict in having the same ethnic background (European) and light-skin tone as main factor of union. In general terms, it was also a time of increased fertility, with the number of children in a single household varying between 10 and 20 offspring as common numbers. Men from richer families were educated, from a noticeable young age, to engage with the *mulatos* (a very broad ethnic identity derived from lighter and darker skin tones) but also to normalize slavery.

The Holy Church, both in Brazil and in Portugal, disapproved of marriages between light skinned European's descendants and other ethnic backgrounds, deemed inferior and to be subdued. This did not prevent relationships and births outside this rule to happen. On the contrary, people found ways to overcome this, such as only living in de facto matrimony, leaving no choice but to be tolerated behaviour by higher hierarchies of Brazilian society. Thorough investigation on this subject has been done by John Frederick Schwaller, in his monumental work titled "The History of the Catholic Church in Latin America: From Conquest to Revolution and Beyond". Edward L. Cleary, on topic (Cleary 2012, p.165-167), gives credit to the author's religious sensibility on the matter, "unusual among Latin American historians trained to leave Church history to ecclesiastics". It is with similar goals we approach our theme, with a detached perspective, encompassing a non-European perspective on cultural identity and interpersonal relationships by the means of artistic expression and representation, in order to achieve further objectivity.

Yet, segregation permeated social mobility. People of darker skin tone were highly unlikely to be granted higher education, even by Jesuit terms, or ascend from hardworking poverty line, or, in an even more oppressive scenario, total submission through slavery. São Paulo, on one hand, only cultivated alliances between European elites and indigenous people. Between them, miscegenation was encouraged, for only a small portion of native folk was bound to be slaves (considered rebellious by indigenous standards). On the other hand, the same Jesuits who prevented African descendants to have formal education, were against the slavery of the *Índios* (native population) grouping them for further evangelization, guiding them towards a productive European lifestyle, and even allowing artistic creativity. This came with a cost: a forced acculturation and an inherent obligation to contribute wealth to the *Companhia de Jesus*.

As we begin to interpret the artistic aspects of *Mestre Atháide's* work in the churches of Minas Gerais, defining his role goes beyond the development of the Minas Baroque style and his

distancing from the Littoral Baroque. Delving into his singular work, comprised of paintings which aimed to imitate art tiles (*azulejos*) - a common mural decoration in churches and convents of the Brazilian coast, but rare as far as Minas Gerais went – we emerge with recurring themes of cultural identity owned by Brazil’s creole society. A poignant example of this, as we will see below, is the artist’s use of his wife and children as models to paint the Virgin Mary and surrounding angels (Oliveira 2011, p.99-100; Campos 2007, p.222-226). Even though this was a common practice among plastic artists, such a choice caught the attention of the public and higher hierarchies, for his family were ethnically mixed, making the model choice bold and daring towards the common modeled elites from Europe.

Since Minas Gerais was one of the key breaking points for the historical structures of the colonization of Brazil, a brief historical analysis of Brazil’s growth from Portuguese imperialist expansion is required. The works of Godinho, for the Portuguese side, and Caldeira, Bueno, Freyre, on the Brazilian side of the historical narrative are, therefore, meant to allow our thematic deepening. Furthermore, Brazil’s recent years were enriched by many small and local studies, meant to broaden our knowledge of the social and artistic structures of Minas Gerais and the immensely broad social and cultural palette of the *Mineiros* (the Minas Gerais locals).

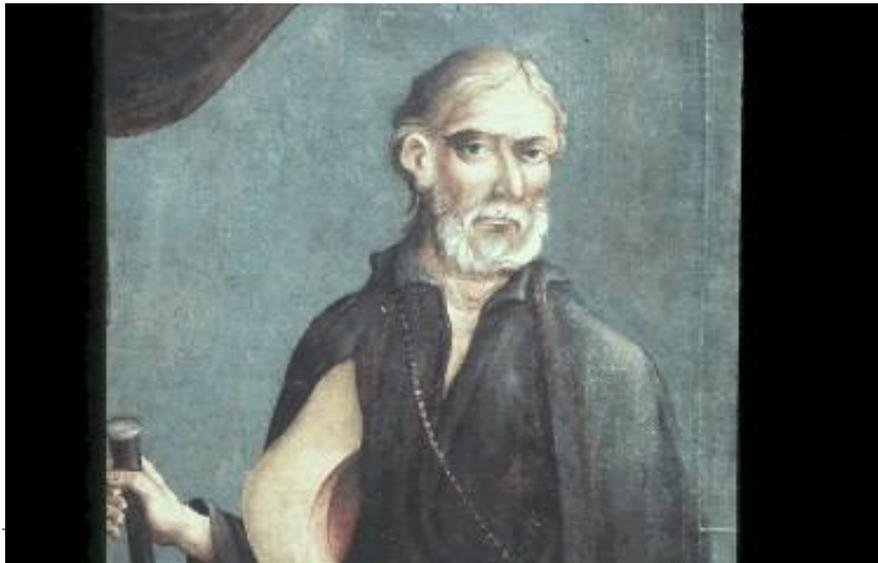


Figure 1: *Mestre Athaide*.

2. Born from the gold rush, developed in miscegenation

2.1. The creation of Minas Gerais through Historical perspective

Once control of the means of production through concessions from the Portuguese crown was gained, with slave labour force, the concentration of all power led to the lords of the sugar mills, who became the base of the monetized Brazilian economy. The only limitation to such power was the municipal council, but the ties of kinship and influence continued to allow oppressive hierarchies to dominate every source of social influence and, above all, guaranteed access and mobility through their ranks.

Jorge Caldeira (Caldeira 1999, p. 178) argues that the specificity of Brazil in the XVII century, compared to other colonies in America, was its larger scope of internal economic activity, which spanned all over the country. Cattle, food, wood, transportation based on indigenous slave labour are just a few examples. Although São Paulo and Brazil's interior region had sugar mills, they were in inferior number when compared to other dominant regions. In São Paulo, for instances, the power was held by highly influential families who dominated the indigenous population. They could mount reconnaissance expeditions to the interior of the country, explorers who would be named *Bandeirantes*. Besides extending the Portuguese domain to territories that were not assigned to Portugal by the treaty of Tordesillas, they also subdued natives into slavery. All these actions were severely criticized the Jesuits, who, for the most part, had a less violent integration in mind. When the *Bandeirantes* of São Paulo came to know of the existence of gold in Itacolomi, an immediate gold rush was unleashed.

Minas Gerais came to be from a geographical area pertaining to the *Capitania* of São Vicente, which included the coastal region of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. When people started migrating in from all over Brazil - and even from Portugal - the local authorities were taken by surprise. The first reaction was the prohibition of migratory paths into the region and the suspension of any construction of religious cloisters and other missionary activity. But all prohibitions were ignored, for there were no serious attempts to enforce and uphold the autocratic rule.

All the said families in São Paulo had discovered gold deposits but could not prevent other less influential explorers from discovering gold in nearby areas. Most of these men came from Bahia, the capital, or from Pernambuco, Rio de Janeiro. It was a matter of time before São Paulo's families felt they were losing influence on the Minas Gerais gold prospect frenzy. The cultural differences between the Europeans (and those of European descent) from the indigenous people were blatant.

Still, those elites from São Paulo tried to integrate the natives, establishing the so-called general language, Tupi, as an effective way to communicate and thrive collectively. Tensions rose from such attempt at the cultural assimilation of the natives, by means of aiming for a complete absorption into European customs and morality. Such was the sentiment of oppression, that even armed clashes became persistent and lethal, such as the case of the War of Emboabas, from 1707 to 1709. This conflict resulted on a massacre of Paulistas, who ended up leaving the region to settle near other gold deposits, deeper inland: what is now Mato Grosso and Goiás.

The gold rush allowed other trading to firmly establish itself, sometimes with more lucrative deals than many of the gold miners. Among these, the easiest asset to sell as a commodity were slaves. Human trafficking increased significantly, and without a severe ethnic segregation, miscegenation between every ethnic representative in Brazil, ensued. Close to a general rule, even priests, who had vowed celibacy, engaged in lifelong partnerships with woman of visible distinct genetic backgrounds, much to opposition of the Church (Caldeira, 1999).

As a result of the whole economy becoming monetized, it was possible, to a certain extent, for the slaves who were successful in mining or other trades, to be granted freedom from the owners themselves, stimulating furthermore private activity in their respective economical endeavour. However, albeit with hesitation and flexibility, imperial authorities would manage to control this new reality of prosperity.

By 1711, it was estimated that 30,000 people had arrived in the region. In 1721, the Capitania of Minas Gerais was officialized. Quickly, imperial authorities began to try to regulate this sizzling demographical growth. Starting from a mere tax collection as tribute to the crown, commonly known as a “fifth” of gold (quinto dos infernos, as it was called), such a tax stimulus also meant Minas Gerais would see new activities being developed, according to needs of the population. Entire regions began to dedicate themselves to cattle and agriculture production, permeating improvements lead by what was innovation at the period: the breeding of horses and mules led a revolution in transportation and communication routes, civil construction developed towns and larger cities, armed troops strengthen themselves and nearby perimeters. Amid such social and cultural change, artistic sensibility (with religious purpose) began to be widely endorsed by the Catholic Church.

2.2. An artist between segregation and integration; between tradition and innovation

A prestigious artist in his time, with great contributions to the Brazilian decorative arts (to the

region of Minas Gerais), Manoel da Costa Athaíde, known as *Mestre Athaíde* or *Alferes Athaíde* (Second Lieutenant, due to his rank in the military institution of Ordenanças) was born in Mariana, 1762. His parents, Maria Barbosa de Abreu and Luís da Costa Athaíde, a Portuguese captain from Minho (northern Portugal) settled in said town of Minas Gerais, close to Ouro Preto, all regions where, in fact, most of the Portuguese migration settlements in Brazil took place. Even if little is known about Manoel da Costa Athaíde's personal life, due to scarce historical sources from the period and region, there are still valuable details from the concise documents which are available, offering us the opportunity to delve deep in critical analysis, under several prisms of knowledge.

The first references to his activities as a painter mention that, in 1781, at the age of 19, he received payment for painting skin tones on two images of Christ, and further payments for painting and gilding other pieces at the Sanctuary of Nosso Senhor Bom Jesus de Matosinhos, in Congonhas do Campo, relatively close to Mariana (Del Negro 1962, p. 78). Other similar works ensue in 1782, on the Church of Nossa Senhora do Carmo in Mariana, his hometown and main residence. We also know, from records of payments found in archives, that he worked throughout the 1790s in the Church of São Francisco de Assis, also in Mariana, extending his work throughout neighbouring villages as researched documents have proved.

With the artisan mindset of former times, being a painter meant a wide range of interpretation: from the less qualified skillsets to the most specialized and prosperous artist. The title *Mestre* (Master), though, inferred the use of slave labour and teamwork employment, ruled official by the Senate of the House. This also meant "training" new professionals (Campos, 2002, p. 251). Documents show us Athaíde's use of the title was granted to him from higher hierarchies, though none of the available attest the date of such commencement. Despite this, documents do show us that Athaíde received a certificate as professor of the "Arts of Architecture and Painting" from the Senate of the Mariana Municipality, a few years prior to his death in 1818.

2.3. Militias and Ordenanças

In the beginning of the 18th century, besides the War of the Emboabas (referred above), there were several other calls to arms. The military followed a tripartite organization, designed to assure power to the Governors, following close what was practiced in Portugal. There were troops of *Primeira Linha*: professional soldiers, a strict elite, most of which came from Portugal; *Milícias*, composed of young bachelors or married men with no issues with long distance relationships; lastly, the *Ordenanças*: considered paramilitary - or auxiliary troops, of little value in wars – who constituted a proto-military police force at the service of the Governors and Courts, commanded

by a Captain-Major in each town or city. They had no permanent activity but included a certain number of people who were compensated solely by the prestige of the title (Cotta 2000). Such example of embodiment this third line, is the case of *Mestre Athaíde*.

Of the documents with information about Athaíde, the ones concerning his military activities in the *Ordenanças* compose a significant portion of the records available. First, we find him as a Corporal of Squadron, without a specified date of enrolment. Then, in April 1797, he ascends into the Sergeant role, and, in March 1799, he becomes Lieutenant, a position granted by the Governor of the *Capitania* of Minas Gerais. The ruler, though, made sure to include the following note: "he shall not earn any wages, but shall enjoy all the honours, graces and privileges that belong to him" (Porto de Menezes 1965, pp. 56-58).

2.4. Third Orders and Brotherhoods

There are, of course, other institutions which are equally important for a more direct approach to Athaíde's artistic and bureaucratic footprint. In a broader sense, the Catholic Church, for instances, excels, in this period, at shaping the social fabric of Brazil. Not expressively present in the beginning of the Minas Gerais narrative. Often composed by missionaries (mainly Jesuits), conflicts often sprung between them and the settlers. This led to a prohibition, by the Government, of the establishment of religious Orders in Minas (Oliveira, 2011). This revealed to be temporary, as laymen Brotherhoods and Third Orders were then installed. The Brotherhoods were dedicated to the devotion of religious entities like Jesus, Maria, Saints or even Souls in purgatory. They were also responsible for social actions in order to help impoverished members of their community. This, inevitably, led to the construction of churches or smaller sized chapels. There were even cases in which sole pivotal parts, like altars, were sufficient for preaching. These dynamics helped maintain the work market and subsequent demand for an artistic-cultural employment, incising in religious architecture, painting, handicrafts and sculptures. Even though there are no documents to confirm this, one can only believe this historical context served its purpose on Athaíde's formative years as an active partaker of this cultural turn, as his first paid jobs of artistic nature do suggest.

Furthermore, proof of his active involvement with Christian movements is implied by his will, where one can confirm Athaíde's filiation as a member of ten of these referred brotherhoods: Ordem Terceira de São Francisco de Assis; Senhora das Mercês dos Perdões; Nossa Senhora da Boa Morte (Parish of Antônio o Dias); Ordem Terceira da Nossa Senhora do Carmo; Senhor dos Passos (Parish of Pilar), all of which situated in Vila Rica (Ouro Preto); Senhor Bom Jesus de Matosinhos de Congonhas; Senhora Mãe dos Homens do Caraça; Senhora da Lapa de Antônio Pereira; Terra Santa de Jerusalém and Ordem Terceira de São Francisco da Penitência, in Mariana, the location in which he was buried in 1830 (Porto de Menezes 1965, 134-135).

2.5. O Santo Ofício (The Holy Office of the Inquisition): beyond religious belief persecution

In the last few decades, studies continue to be published in which the way the Portuguese *Santo Ofício* developed and maintained its regional action is scrutinized. Minas Gerais is no exception. The practice of "visits", in which high clergy from Portugal, towards the end of the 17th century, gave first-hand guidelines with aims to develop a vast network of local agents, called "Commissioners", mainly concerned with recruiting, "enabling" informers whom they called "relatives" of the *Santo Ofício*. The following statistic (Rodrigues 2009, p. 21) shows us how the number of Commissioners matches the "Gold Cycle", as referred in Brazilian and Portuguese historiography. As we will see, it grew as far as it could before closing in on the dissolution of the institution, in 1821:

Date gaps	Number of Commissioners
1621-1670	297
1671-1720	637
1721-1770	1011
1771-1820	484

Commissioners were in continuous contact with the Holy Inquisition of Lisbon, still an imperial epicentre for many institutions, albeit constant turmoil, back and forth between Portuguese and Brazilian elites. They received all the communications about those accused of transgressions, or of those persecuted and the already condemned. Information relative to these people were transmitted to local authorities and then forwarded to these Commissioners any denunciations of moral deviations by local transgressors. One of the many informants of such condemned behaviours was none other than Luís da Costa Athaíde, father of our historical subject: "When people, for various reasons, felt the need of making denunciations to the Court of the Holy Office, they turned to the Commissioners. This was the path most used by those who went to the Inquisition with the purpose of denouncing. Luis da Costa Athaíde (...) for example, proceeded this way when, in 1770, he denounced Ana Jorge for disrespectful acts with Catholic images to the Commissioner of Mariana, J.R. Cordeiro" (Rodrigues 2009, p.13).

2.6. Miscegenation and Segregation

Miscegenation was one of the pillars of construction of Brazil. In respect to the indigenous people, ethnic mixing led the settlers in the interior, in order to be able to assure the proper delimitation of Brazil, and, within the large scope of the vast territory, develop economical means of production,

evolving from the sugar monoculture conducted in prior times with African slaves around coast towns. In the case of miscegenation with African people, such was deemed of undervalue, due to their persevering slave stigma, bound to domination through forced labour. This vision was even shared within Christian rulers.

The indigenous society easily handed power and shared local knowledge, allowing the outside settler to thrive. A difference was established, between the good and "meek" *Índios*, with whom the Portuguese married and allied, and the bad or "brave" ones, with whom war was waged. These were enslaved and, as far as possible, exterminated.

For instances, the fact that the "meek" Tupiniquins had a matrilineal social organization, integrating their women's husbands into their society, as well as considering them their allies, facilitated settlement relations. This was not possible with other indigenous peoples who did not have the same social and cultural practices. On the other hand, the Catholics had the intention to catechize the Indians and prevent their enslavement. The only instance miscegenation with the indigenous population went through opposition from colonial rule, applied to the polygamous norm, practiced within tribal context.

Having the same attitude towards the enslavement of relocated Africans, though, was unrealistic within said societies needs and goals, therefore of lesser moral concern. Yet, even if colonial rule condoned settlers who married or lived with African slaves, or ex-slaves, or even with *mulatos*, in practice reality proved to be quite different as integration and diverse interpersonal relationships were hard to smooth out. Culturally, outside nobility's hierarchy, whether it was the elites from Portugal or the so-called "land nobles" ascending from Brazil's territorial expansion (those who managed to acquire favoured positions or rights over land), the remaining social tissue, a vast majority, found ways to dignify miscegenation and integrate partners and respective offspring. One thing, though, was guaranteed for all social mobility of this Era: miscegenation as a hereditary factor, was a handicap. Even in the religious brotherhoods, non-European descent was unwelcome, forcing these outcasts to create their own brotherhoods and segregated social circles, to provide shelter for their impoverished needs and spiritual devotions.

Considering *Mestre* Athaíde had "always lived as a bachelor. Item I declare that due to human frailty I have four natural children [names] and I name them as my lawful and true heirs and executors", according to his will, 4 years before his death, 1826 (Porto de Menezes 1965, p. 133), we must conclude in favour of the existence of ingrained social prejudice towards the public display of ethnically mixed relationships and family ties. He further declares his birth in the city of Mariana, as the "legitimate son of" of a Portuguese father and mother, implying his European descent, expressively referred throughout the document. In the rest of the will, he mentions the

brotherhoods he partook in, referring to the fact he is always an "unworthy Third Brother of...". His biographers consider it as an acknowledgment, or a self-denunciation (to the taste of the Holy Office). Such confession (a "mea culpa, mea maxima culpa") of his life's sin of concubinage with a *mulato* woman, mother of his children, was a recognition of a sinful life that could have led to his expulsion from the Third Order of São Francisco. Despite this, only to confirm the suspicion of his biographers, his will includes a remnant to his de facto wife, even naming her: Maria do Carmo Raimunda da Silva. Assuming the impossibility of hiding a lifetime, shows to what extent such relationships were tolerated, although preaching and rules were always against it. Thus, remaining unmarried, meant the Brothers could have "dealings" with women of any condition, if they did not incur in "scandalous" nature (Sousa 2015, p. 177). Therefore, the "provisions" of the statute could be relaxed, depending on the influence and prestige of the man in question.

3. The art of *Mestre Athaíde*

3.1. Baroque and Rococo

The Baroque period, considered by many scholars as the end of the Renaissance, paved its way in Europe towards the end of the 16th century and the mid-18th century. It broadened an aesthetic choice where the geometric unity and balance of Renaissance art was replaced by symmetrical compositions, dominated by an intensified and realist way to present the figures on paintings. Marked by a dynamic sense of theatricality within tense drama, as well as a contrast between brightness and darkness, such exuberance and exaggeration reached every corner of the arts, whether it was in decoration, architecture, painting, sculpture or music.

Cardona mentions the following (Cardona, 2017, p. 131): "The doctrinal reform that was imposed from the Council of Trent (1545 -1563), transversely encompassing clergy and devotees. Popular devotion and feelings of piety increased around previously established themes: the life of Christ and of Our Lady - Christological and Marian themes and the salvation of souls". The diocesan synods would conciliate such encouragements and stimuli towards "the cult of "Our Lord, or Our Lady", and of the mysteries; as well as the cult of angels, saints, canonized or beatified saints and interdicting the representation of unknown saints".

Although the Baroque developed first in Italy, later spreading to the rest of Europe, it was in Spain and Portugal, main bastions of the Counter-Reform (for both were political and colonizing powers), that it expanded the most, both in the metropolises and in the New World. Spanish America

obtained gold, silver and other resources much earlier than their Portuguese counterparts in Brazil, only fully developing in the 18th century, as we have discussed above.

Due to the country's intense economic activity, combined with the spontaneous creation of artistic communities, the arts were no more composed solely of Portuguese, trained in their art in mainland Europe. Now, artists born and trained in Brazil, with their own artistic and cultural identity, slowly brewed all the way through the early 19th century, by then fully flourished into and from what could be called a "miscegenation" of the otherwise already singular Rococo style. Similarly, *Mestre* Athaide will interpret this in a unique way, granting him an historical role as the lead figure of painting in the Minas Gerais Baroque/Rococo style. One can quickly exemplify the importance of his work by his imprint on the Church of São Francisco de Assis in Ouro Preto. Both the ceiling of the nave, or the imitation of art tiles, painted inside the chapel, showcase his originality – a consequence of adapting to a very particular social phenomenon, as discussed in previous chapters.

The mentioned above church was built by the Third Order of São Francisco de Assis. The project began in 1765. Author Aleijadinho (a diminutive to imply tenderness or/and sorrow for the word crippled), whose birth name António Francisco Lisboa, born in 1738, was the son of Manuel Francisco Lisboa, a respected Portuguese architect, and Isabel, his slave woman of African descent. As ruled, the son of a slave was born a slave. Despite being an illegitimate son, his father recognized him as of his own, thus his freedom was granted at birth. António Francisco was brought up with his three half-brothers. When his father died, only the legitimate children shared his inheritance. Nonetheless, Aleijadinho became highly regarded as an artist in Minas Gerais, more so in his town of Ouro Preto. In the facade of the Church of São Francisco de Assis, we can observe António Francisco's distinctive Rococo style. In the beginning of *Mestre* Athaide's career, he painted some sculptures authored by Aleijadinho, but in the mentioned church, *Mestre* Athaide only collaborated with paintings on the final phase. Encompassing a time frame which spans from 1801 to 1812, it is also marks the decline of Aleijadinho's career, as he is forced to close his workshop due to the progression of his illness.



Figure 2. Church of São Francisco de Assis. Facade authored by Aleijadinho.

3.2. Church of São Francisco de Assis, Ouro Preto

Part of UNESCO's World Heritage, the Church of São Francisco de Assis houses celebrated works of Aleijadinho and the most renowned paintings from *Mestre* Athaíde, namely the ceiling and the wall panels of the sanctuary. As Del Negro states (Del Negro, 1969, p. 81): "The model of paintings on church ceilings, taught or brought over by Portuguese artists, simulated, by continuing over the walls of the nave or sanctuary, an architectural support to erect a ceiling, where a richly framed picture was fitted. Unlike other European models in which, through an atrium or hollowed out ceiling, a vision of celestial depth was unveiled, this painting set into the imaginary ceiling was only an ornament. Its layout, being independent, was not subject to the vanishing points of the architectural structure".

Athaíde's model was based on the ceiling paintings of Italian artist Andrea Pozzo (namely "Treatise on Perspective" from 1693). There is a possibility that Athaíde could have read the Pozzo's Treatise, but many other Minas Gerais artists used the same model in stricter Baroque manner, as seen below:



Figure 3. Andrea Pozzo (circa 1685), Church of Sant' Ignazio di Loyola, Rome.



Figure 4. Mestre Athaíde, Church of São Francisco de Assis, Ouro Preto.



Figure 5. José Soares de Araújo (1766), Church of Our Lady of Carmo, Diamantina, Minas.

According to Monteiro (Monteiro, 2019, p. 54): "The painting of the ceiling of the nave of São Francisco presents technical elements of the Baroque. With the use of false architecture, the painting provides a false impression of continuity of real architectural elements, to impress the observer, such as those taught by Andrea Pozzo in his treatise. In addition to elements of the Rococo such as the colourful and translucent palette, which translates beauty, lightness, softness, and joy, one therefore has elements of both styles: of the Baroque - the false architectural plot increasing the height of the Church, leading to heaven, to the vision of paradise. Of the Rococo - the clear colours: blues, pale yellow and the well-dosed red, the pretended architectural plot is reduced and simple, presenting lightness, as the architectural elements are hollowed out, consist of balconies and arches, giving the impression of spaces with luminosity." Therefore, this painting was created at a time when, in Europe, the Baroque was already giving way to the Rococo. Through intercontinental cultural exchange, stimulated by colonialism, such works were known in Brazil during Aleijadinho's and Athaide's lifetime.

The painting on the ceiling of Church of São Francisco de Assis is Athaide's magnum opus. It took twelve years to complete (from 1801 to 1812), displaying great mastery. Painted in bright colours, in a luminous and translucent way, it expresses the driving force of the Minas Baroque and Rococo. In order to complete such work, the artist used the trompe-l'oeil painting technique, thus implying more spatiality while amplifying the temple - a trick of perspective which creates an optical illusion.

The scenario is composed of King David and the Doctors of the Church, each represented on the four corners: St. Jerome, St. Augustine, St. Gregory and St. Ambrose. Athaide's work, Francisco Bastos describes it as such (Bastos, 2006, p. 76): "beautiful painting on the ceiling shows Our Lady of the Porciúncula ascending to heaven, accompanied by a flock of angels of various ages - children, young people and adults. The composition fills the ceiling of the nave from wall-to-wall. In it, the painter seems to have used people of his acquaintance as models, for the musician angels are mulattoes and quite human-looking, including the Madonna, whose inspiration seemsto have been a brunette with wide hips and thick legs, a contemporary of the painter."

The artist did, indeed, leave behind the strict Portuguese Baroque in favour of giving the figures a touch of joy, more ethnically inclusive while leaving the sacred message intact. He often common traits from his daily life surroundings for his characters, therefore a broader palette of skin tones went beyond the usual European style symbolism, traditionally used in sacred motifs. With unique theatricality, it is safe to say he captured a more truthful essence of a diversified Mineira society.

Nevertheless, Athaide, through his sacred works, never backed down from a catechetical message with his works, aiming to attract more people to practice the Catholic faith. This, although, distinguished itself by its ethnic universal appeal (Argan 2004, p.83). It was a first step towards the African (and people of African descent) community's representation. This brought them closer to the Holy Scriptures, for many of them kept their religious faith linked to Africa's plural, yet very characteristic, worship customs and rituals.



Figure 6. Center of the ceiling's painting



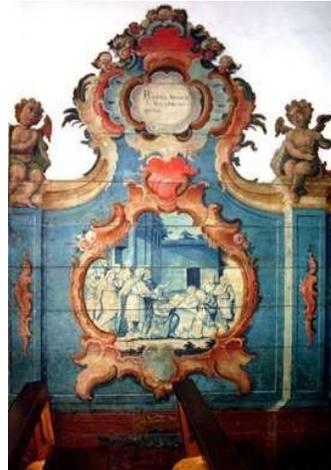
Figure 7. Our Lady of Porcinula

With Athaide's wife and children as models. Athaide's wife and children as models. Athaide painted the Virgin close to the figure of his partner Maria do Carmo and the surrounding angels were based on their four children. Without controversy surrounding such works, other artists from Minas Gerais painted sacred compositions where darker skinned saints were depicted, for they, in fact, were present in the historical canon of Catholicism. Athaide dared even further, painting another Madonna nearby, in Ouro Branco. Time would grant these his future legacy. Centuries apart, they now can be reinterpreted as bridge into our modern social dynamics.

3.3. Art tiles and false tiles

There are no records that shows us whether *Mestre* Athaíde travelled through the Brazilian coast (for example, Bahia or Rio de Janeiro), where large nuclei of tile panels in religious buildings were located. One can only speculate about his formative years and foreign influences, considering the possibility of Athaíde meeting other artists passing through Minas Gerais, for History has always led us to an intense artistic life in the territory. Still, there is no way of knowing accurately how and which knowledge made its way to celebrated artists such as *Mestre* Athaíde.

As far as colonial perspective leads us, in Portugal, the wide use of art tiles in church decoration, as well as in monasteries and palaces, was only made possible due to the transaction flux of gold from Brazil, notably in the XVIII century. The hard conditions of transportation of brittle material like ceramic tiles, made it very difficult to have Portuguese styled art tiles in the mountains of Minas Gerais. Yet, as we will compare below in figures 8 and 9, two unique ways were practiced in Minas: firstly, with the sole case of Chapel of Nossa Senhora do Carmo, located in the Parish of Antonio Dias, in Ouro Preto, manages to display Portuguese art tiles in its decoration, dated from 1784; secondly, the sanctuary of the Church of São Francisco de Assis features a substitute, emulating the art tile look, where Athaíde made a set of paintings imitating cut out panels of ceramic inspiration:



**Figure 8 (left). Panel of art tiles in Chapel of N. Sª do Carmo, Ouro Preto.
Figure 9 (right). Wood painting imitating tile panels. Mestre Athaíde, S. Francisco church.**

Thus, Athaíde's work features rocaille frames in shades of salmon, while the composition, in the upper area of the panels, is surrounded by two angels in typical Rococo fashion. Inside these frames we then find, in normative blue and white colours, tile emulation of episodes from the "Life of Abraham". Santos Simões points us towards (Santos Simões, 1965, p. 199) "The effect achieved, although it does not give the illusion of tile, as in the case of Carmo in Recife [Pernambuco], is, however, interesting for the fact that it shows that the tile was still the traditional process of decoration and, in its absence, attempts were made to replace it by painting on wood". The same scholar also considered the following (Santos 2009, p. 80): "We are lucky to possess a tile set which, besides being in a great state of conservation, is of a historicized character, and is located within one of the most important orders of Ouro Preto. In the late 18th century, it was, in a way, inspiring Athaíde's later work for the Third Order of São Francisco." José Meco agrees and comments (Meco, 1993, p. 26): "More curious is the imitation of storytelling panels painted directly on walls, ...[with] the appearance of top-cut wooden panels, imitating rococo tile compositions, such as those in the sanctuary of the Church of São Francisco de Assis, in Ouro Preto, and that of the sanctuary of the Mother Church of Santo Antônio, in Santa Bárbara, with the center painted in blue, while the frames, especially dense in the church of Ouro Preto, present polychrome ornaments of rococo style, which persisted during the first third of the nineteenth century..." Furthermore, Beiter states (Beiter, 2008, p. 99) that "The paintings are separated by columns and by angels, which are common to the Rococo style, at the top of their capitals. These angels carry symbols of the Saint Francisco Order related to self-flagellation, thus associating the figure of Abraham with the Franciscan precepts."

In general, the scenes chosen to be represented were copied from engravings, old books, missals or Bibles that circulated in the region through merchants who brought novelties. Author Hannah Levy mentions which images are most likely the sources from Europe that inspired Athaíde's chapel wood cut-outs: Demarne's Bible. This collection of prints of religious iconography was originally called *Histoire sacrée de la providence et de la conduite de Dieu sur les hommes*, published by the architect and engraver Michael Demarne between 1728-1730. The prints which were most likely used by Athaíde are numbered 36, 39, 40, 44, 46 and 50 (Levy, 1944, p. 8).



Figure 10 and 11. *Mestre* Athaíde, paintings in wooden panels imitating panels of art tiles. Sanctuary of the Church of São Francisco de Assis, Ouro Preto.

4. Conclusion

After the Church of São Francisco in Ouro Preto was concluded, *Mestre* Athaíde continued his works in different towns, nearby Mariana. It is documented he taught privately in the “Arts of Architecture and Painting”. In 1818, the Senate of Mariana was solicited to attest his role as Teacher, “able in these arts and competent in explaining and instructing those who want to learn”.

This was accompanied by a request of *Mestre* Athaíde, sent to the King of Portugal, who at the time resided in Rio de Janeiro, for a Drawing and Architecture lecture in Mariana, following the terminology of the noble bureaucrats, the creation of a “branch of instruction of Art of Drawing, Architecture and Painting, civil and military”. Thus, a chair of Professor paid by the Crown, since Marquis de Pombal had taken away schools and universities from Catholic Church dominance, privileging secular schools and universities.

The first Royal School of Sciences, Arts and Crafts had been recently created in Rio de Janeiro, in 1816, backed by enlightened French artists, all under the King’s blessing. Brazil would eventually free itself from colonial rule, in 1822, still in *Mestre* Athaíde’s lifetime, so times were implying greater social change was in way. His school project, though, never came to be, although, in 1824, when Brazil was already shaped as an independent State, Athaíde received a payment from the Senate of Mariana, for a painting of His Imperial Majesty Pedro I. It would be his only known

non-religious work.

In conclusion, the fusion and articulation of social structures of different origins, different systems of miscegenation made Brazil an artistic late bloomer, only to rapidly ascend into a striving force of diverse creativity. All the above in the context of oppressive slavery and rigid hierarchy ruling. In Minas Gerais case, the rush for gold mining, would have repercussions in all the social fabric, from which the arts thrived from. Between the assimilation of the Portuguese arts and the artistic creations of a new cultural identity, in the political field, Brazil would emancipate itself from colonialism, still in *Mestre* Athaíde's lifetime. And yet, he did not live long enough to witness the abolition of slavery in 1888.

There are key figures yet to be explored by our studies' lens, namely Bernardo Pires, João Nepomuceno Correa e Castro, Antonio Martins da Silveira or João Batista de Figueiredo, in order to complete a more comprehensive network between Athaíde's outer and inner circles. Even the artist himself is still prone to be studied under new perspectives, for there is still much to unfold about the *Mestre*. Only a few years have gone by, since newfound evidence points towards the existence of his paintings, hidden beneath posterior adds and cover ups.

It is safe to conclude, *Mestre* Athaíde still has more to reveal, as the broadening of his legacy widens. Yet, the most regarded studies, by Rodrigo Mello Franco de Andrade, Luís Jardim, Salomão de Vasconcellos, Hannah Levy, Carlos Del Negro, Raimundo Trindade, Ivo Porto de Menezes, Adalgisa Arantes Campos, Marly Spitali de Mendonça or Lélia Coelho Frota, remain essential for future investigations on *Mestre* Athaíde.

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