



The Maestro and the Emperor: Patronage, Cultural Diplomacy and the Brazilian soundtrack at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition (1876)

*O Maestro e o Imperador:
Mecenato, Diplomacia Cultural e a
trilha sonora brasileira na Exposição
do Centenário da Filadélfia (1876)*

*El Maestro y el Emperador:
Mecenazgo, Diplomacia Cultural y la
banda sonora brasileña en la Exposición
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Abstract

This article⁴ examines the historical transition from the international diffusion of culture under the Ancien Régime, rooted in patronage,

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to modern forms of Cultural Diplomacy. Drawing on historical sociology and the interdisciplinary intersection of music and diplomacy, the study employs the extended case method through documentary research on the correspondence between Emperor Pedro II and maestro Carlos Gomes. It analyzes the role of music in shaping Brazil's international image at the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exposition. The relationship between the Emperor and the composer illustrates how artistic patronage was reconfigured into a diplomatic strategy aimed at presenting Brazil as a “civilized” and “modern” nation to the world.

Key-words: Music, Representation, History of Brazilian Foreign Policy, Patronage, Cultural Diplomacy.

Resumo

Este artigo analisa a transição histórica da difusão cultural internacional sob o Antigo Regime, ancorada no mecenato, para as formas modernas de Diplomacia Cultural. Fundamentando-se na sociologia histórica e nos estudos sobre música e diplomacia, adota-se a metodologia do estudo de caso ampliado a partir de uma pesquisa documental da correspondência entre o Imperador Dom Pedro II e o maestro Carlos Gomes. Investiga-se o papel da música na construção da imagem internacional do Brasil na Exposição do Centenário da Filadélfia (1876). A relação entre o monarca e o compositor ilustra como o mecenato artístico foi reconfigurado em estratégia diplomática para projetar o Brasil como uma nação “civilizada” e “moderna”, atenuando contradições internas como a persistência da escravidão.

Palavras-chave: Música, Representação, História da Política Externa Brasileira, Mecenato, Diplomacia Cultural.

Resumen

Este artículo analiza la transición histórica desde la difusión internacional de la cultura bajo el Antiguo Régimen, anclada en el sistema de mecenazgo, hacia las formas modernas de diplomacia cultural. Basándose en la sociología histórica y en los estudios sobre música y diplomacia, el trabajo emplea el método del caso ampliado mediante una investigación documental de la correspondencia entre Pedro II y Carlos Gomes. Se analiza el papel de la música en la construcción de la imagen internacional de Brasil en la Exposición Centenaria de Filadelfia de 1876. La relación entre el emperador Dom Pedro II y el compositor ilustra cómo el mecenazgo artístico fue reconfigurado como una estrategia diplomática orientada a presentar a Brasil como una nación “civilizada” y “moderna”.

Palabras clave: Música, Representación, Historia de la Política Exterior Brasileña, Mecenazgo, Diplomacia Cultural.





Introduction

The second international journey of Brazilian emperor *Dom* Pedro II included an extended stay in the United States of America and visits to France, Austria, Italy, Egypt, Palestine, Syria, among other countries. During this trip, the monarch was received as a guest of honor at the *Philadelphia Centennial Exposition* (1876). Modeled after similar events held by the great European powers, the Exposition aimed to showcase the material achievements of capitalist development in the U.S. while celebrating the anniversary of the country's independence. For the Empire of Brazil – and the emperor in particular – the event was not only an opportunity to promote Brazilian commodities, notably coffee and cotton, but also to present a positive image of the country to the “civilized world”⁵.

The concern with Brazil's international image was rooted in an evident contradiction: while Brazilian elites wished to showcase the country's proximity to European “civilization”, to European audiences the sole monarchy of the Americas was a “backward” country, considering the maintenance of an economic system sustained by slave labor well into the late nineteenth century. Therefore, events such as the great Universal Exhibitions of the time were seen as opportunities to mitigate these political and moral anachronisms, in a symbolic effort that became even more important following the destruction provoked during the Paraguayan War (1864-1870) (Skidmore 1992; Schwarcz and Starling 2018; Schwarcz 2018; 2024; Belém Lopes 2025).

After attending the opening ceremony of the *Centennial Exposition* in May 1876, Pedro II contacted the most prominent Brazilian composer of the time, *maestro* Carlos Gomes, demanding the composition of a hymn to be performed during the official celebration of the U.S. Independence in July. Hastily composed by Gomes in Italy, the hymn “*Greeting from Brazil*” was sent to the emperor in time to be performed during the commemoration. The correspondence between the maestro and the emperor – mediated by a Brazilian diplomat in Rome – reveals a clear intent to include music in the strategies implemented by the Brazilian imperial government to promote the country's image at the event. The

5 Drawing upon Ricupero (2004, XXV), we understand “civilization” as a key ideal of 19th-century Brazilian elites. For the imperial intelligentsia, becoming a “civilized nation” meant adapting European political and cultural traditions to Brazil, thereby reshaping its relationship with the capitalist core. We argue that the notions of the “civilized” and the “modern” were deeply informed by Social Darwinism, combining geographic determinism and racial theories that viewed miscegenation pessimistically, assuming that acquired characteristics could not be inherited (Schwarcz 1993, 46).





occasion also sparks interest because it allows us to reflect on the monarch's role in projecting the country's culture internationally, taking into account the transformations in the historical relationship between State authorities and artists.

This paper contributes to the field of International Relations, specially for Brazilian Foreign Policy History and Cultural International Relations agendas by highlighting a shift in the projection of Brazil's culture and image abroad during the Second Reign period (1840–1889). Based on Perry Anderson's (2013) comments on the transformations in diplomatic practice observed between Absolutist States and modern nation-states, our main argument is that there is a political distinction among the practices aimed at international cultural diffusion employed by these different State regimes. Under the Ancien Régime, the patronage system subjected artists to the political power of monarchs, and the international diffusion of culture by diplomats and State agents served primarily to exalt the image of the sovereign (Mayer 1987; Adorno 1989; Elias 1993; Burke 1994; Giovani 2014; Spohr 2014). The demise of the Absolutist State and subsequent emergence of the nation as the legitimizing paradigm for State sovereignty brought with Modernity provoked a transformation in these cultural relations: artists were no longer bound to serve the sovereign, and were gradually considered representatives of a national culture (Elias 1993; Burke 1994; Thiesse 1999; Hobsbawm 1983; 2012; Anderson 2013). The structuring of Cultural Diplomacy in the mid 19th century thus became a State practice that mobilized elements of national culture to construct an international image no longer centered on a prince (Mattos 2025).

Although Brazil did not experience the Ancien Régime, the Empire adopted certain transplanted practices, such as royal patronage to the arts and sciences (Schwarcz 1998). At the same time, State-funded artistic institutions were pivotal to a fundamentally modern project: the construction of a Brazilian "image of nationality" (Rouanet 1991, 241; Ricupero 2004; Mattos 2025, 82-83). In this sense, the relationship between Carlos Gomes and Pedro II is particularly interesting, considering the maestro greatly benefitted from a close relationship with the emperor, while simultaneously building a career as a freelance artist that embodied Brazilian national musical culture in the view of the country's elites (Góes 1996; Mattos 2025). From the analysis of the epistolary exchanges regarding the inclusion of Gomes's music among Brazil's contributions to the 1876 Philadelphia Exposition, we argue that modern forms of Cultural Diplomacy emerged within the framework of imperial patronage, foreshadowing later institutional developments. In this





context, the paper also traces an early example of a tradition in the Empire's diplomacy: the deliberate effort to present Brazil as a "civilized" and "modern" country⁶, aligned with the political and cultural interests of its ruling class, even as the country remained bound to slavery (Ricupero 2004).

We argue that the support given by the government, and by the emperor himself, to maestro Carlos Gomes represents a key milestone in understanding the political dynamics of Cultural Diplomacy practices undertaken by the Brazilian State. This is especially evident in the central role of classical music in shaping the country's international image, a focus that extended beyond the imperial period. According to Fléchet (2012), Brazilian diplomacy invested almost exclusively in promoting this genre abroad until the late 1950s. In this context, Gomes' music exemplifies how the Empire of Brazil inaugurated a tradition of using classical music to project the nation as "civilized" and aligned with European standards of material, social and cultural progress.

Methodologically, this article employs qualitative, historical-discursive research based on physical and digital archives. The analysis utilizes primary sources, such as official correspondence, diplomatic documents, and cultural records, and secondary literature to examine the communication between Emperor Pedro II and maestro Carlos Gomes, highlighting music's role in shaping the Empire of Brazil's international image in Philadelphia. To this end, it adopts the extended case methodology, understood through Lai and Roccu (2019, 3) as a flexible approach to theory building that privileges contextually rich and complex accounts of the social world, while attributing an emancipatory function to the production of knowledge. Drawing on cultural history and the historical sociology of International Relations (Elias 1993; Devin 2010), the study interprets the symbolic practices of the Empire's international projection and situates them within the broader framework of Brazilian Cultural Diplomacy.

The article is organized into three main sections. The first examines the political and cultural implications of the shift from an aristocratic patronage model to the modern practices of Cultural Diplomacy. The second develops a

6 This article problematizes the categories "civilized" and "modern" to show how language shapes perception and knowledge production. Rather than treating language as neutral, it highlights its epistemological and sociopolitical dimensions. While existing approaches emphasize positionality and situatedness, they often overlook researchers' own use of language. Building on Alejandro (2021, 3-5), the article reflects on analytical categories as a means of decentering naturalized assumptions and increasing awareness of who speaks and from where. As Alejandro (2021, 2) argues, problematizing categories can generate more rigorous empirical findings and nuanced analyses within qualitative research.





methodological approach centered on documentary research, underscoring its key contributions to the field of International Relations (IR), particularly within the historiography of Brazilian foreign policy, through an extended case study, *The Brazilian Experience in Philadelphia (1876)*. The final section analyzes efforts to shape the international image of the Empire of Brazil at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition (1876), highlighting how its aesthetic-political project reflected the emperor's intention to project a "civilized" and "modern" national identity – partly through the use of Gomes's music.

Culture and Diplomacy: from Absolutism to the modern nation-state

The employment of cultural products and expressions for diplomatic purposes is a long-standing practice in international relations. As Spohr (2014, 19) notes, under the Ancien Régime art could represent a prince's cultural capital, serving to demonstrate to foreign emissaries that he was "conversant with current cultural developments". Burke (1994, 162) similarly observes that, during Louis XIV's reign in France, ambassadors formed a substantial part of the audience for court festivals, plays, and operas, while French diplomats sponsored performances abroad in order to increase the king's reputation throughout Europe. Over time, however, transformations in the relationship between State and culture, as well as between authorities and artists, reshaped the diplomatic functions of cultural production.

As Perry Anderson argues, the Absolutist State pioneered a series of institutional innovations that would later become central to modern nation-states, including professional armies and formal diplomacy (Anderson 2013, 29). Yet, despite these continuities, diplomatic practices under the Ancien Régime differed fundamentally from those of the modern international system. As Anderson (2013, 38–39) notes, the ultimate source of legitimacy in Absolutism was the dynasty rather than the nation; the ruling principles of the age were therefore grounded in dynastic continuity, not in nationalism or territorial sovereignty.

This distinction is also relevant to understand the diplomatic use of culture. Authors such as Elias (1993), Mayer (1987), and Adorno (1989) emphasize that musicians in aristocratic courts were embedded in systems of patronage and regarded as servants of the sovereign. Kings and princes commissioned musical





works, determined the circumstances of their performance, selected audiences, and frequently influenced their themes (Elias 1993, 29). In this context, music fulfilled what Elias (1993, 47) described as an utilitarian function, serving royal ceremonial, aristocratic sociability, and the symbolic projection of monarchical authority (Adorno 1989, 58; Giovani 2014; Spohr 2014). Studies of diplomatic musical practices illustrate this dynamic. Spohr (2014) shows how the performance of concealed music⁷ during the reception of French ambassadors by King Christian IV of Denmark in 1634 projected the monarch's political intentions and cultural refinement. Similarly, Giovani (2014) demonstrates that *serenatas*⁸ commissioned by ambassadors in eighteenth-century Venice frequently celebrated dynastic events, military victories, royal birthdays, and religious festivities, functioning as explicit tributes to rulers and ruling houses. The diplomatic circulation of music thus primarily contributed to the glorification of sovereigns rather than to the representation of broader political communities.

The nineteenth century witnessed important transformations in this configuration. The gradual rise of the bourgeoisie and the expansion of cultural markets created more favorable conditions for artistic autonomy and for the emergence of what Elias (1993, 28) termed the “freelance artist”. Musicians increasingly depended on public audiences, publishers, and commercial contracts rather than exclusively on aristocratic sponsorship (Elias 1993, 39–41; Parker 2002, 92). Music came to be valued as an artistic creation in its own right, while artists acquired a new social status as individual creators and cultural authorities (Elias 1993, 46–47; Hobsbawm 2012, 290). Although government support for cultural institutions may be interpreted as a persistence of the Ancien Régime (Mayer 1987), the broader transformations associated with Modernity gradually altered the official uses of culture.

Indeed, the rise of the nation constituted one of the defining political and cultural developments of the modern era (Anderson 2016; Hobsbawm 2012; Thiesse 1999). As dynastic and religious forms of legitimacy weakened, the nation emerged as a new basis for collective identification and political authority.

7 The term refers to a musical performance in which the musicians can be heard but not seen by the audience. This effect was achieved by constructing chambers and rooms connected by pipes that allowed sound to travel from one space to another (Spohr 2014).

8 The eighteenth-century serenata is a dramatic form of accompanied vocal music, usually performed publicly, after sunset, in the open air or in the courtyard of the palace. (...) Serenatas took on a representative function derived from their ability to display greatness while fulfilling the need for entertainment and the obligation to celebrate a particular event” (Giovani 2014, 45).





Citizens increasingly came to be imagined as members of a shared community characterized by common cultural elements such as language, literature, and folklore (Anderson 2016, 128; Hobsbawm 2012, 13–14; Thiesse 1999, 14). Even surviving monarchies adapted to this transformation by progressively nationalizing their symbols and political narratives (Anderson 2016, 130–131; Thiesse 1999, 15). As Burke (1994, 201) summarizes, “Louis represented God, but later rulers represented the nation.”

Consequently, the political meaning of cultural representation also changed. If, under Absolutism, music was employed to exalt the sovereign and display his refinement, in the modern nation-state it increasingly came to be understood as an expression of national culture. The diplomatic use of music therefore shifted from the glorification of rulers toward the projection of collective national identities. Studies on modern European cultural initiatives illustrate this transformation. Gienow-Hecht (2009) demonstrates how German diplomats capitalized on the prestige of German classical music and composers such as Beethoven in order to strengthen the international image of the German Empire. Similarly, Campo-Bowen (2016) shows how Smetana’s opera *The Bartered Bride* was mobilized by Czechoslovak diplomacy as a symbol of national culture and state legitimacy. In both cases, musical traditions already established abroad were appropriated by state authorities as instruments of national representation.

These developments help illuminate the emergence of what scholars define as Cultural Diplomacy. According to Crespo (2012), Dumont and Fléchet (2014), Frank (2003a, 2003b), Lessa (2002), and Suppo and Lessa (2007), Cultural Diplomacy refers to the international dissemination of selected cultural products and expressions in support of state objectives. Such initiatives may seek to improve a country’s image, facilitate political and commercial relations, expand audiences for national cultural industries, or strengthen symbolic influence abroad (Crespo 2012, 112; Lessa 2002; Suppo and Lessa 2007, 244–245). As Frank (2003b, 326) notes, Cultural Diplomacy promotes a nation’s “cultural presence abroad,” while Suppo and Lessa (2007, 245) describe it as a form of “national propaganda.”

The emphasis on the national dimension is particularly significant. Unlike the forms of cultural projection typical of the Ancien Régime, Cultural Diplomacy presupposes a political context in which the nation-state constitutes the primary actor of international relations. In this sense, Cultural Diplomacy should be understood as the diplomacy of national culture. While it shares continuities with earlier forms of international cultural circulation, it differs both in its





institutionalization within state structures and in its focus on representing the nation rather than the sovereign. The international prestige of cultural figures, often initially generated through private initiatives, becomes a resource that can later be mobilized by the State in support of broader diplomatic objectives (Dumont and Fléchet 2014; Fléchet 2012; Frank 2003b).

Although the examples discussed above derive primarily from European experiences, this historical understanding of Cultural Diplomacy can also illuminate developments in other regions of the world. The nation-state became a global model of political organization during the nineteenth century, and ideas associated with Romanticism, nationalism, and national culture circulated far beyond Europe (Anderson 2016; Ricupero 2004). The notion that cultural production could represent the nation both domestically and internationally became increasingly influential across diverse historical contexts.

Brazil offers a particularly relevant example. Following independence, the Empire of Brazil emerged as the only monarchy in the Americas while remaining a slaveholding society, a combination that profoundly shaped its processes of state-building and nation formation (Ricupero 2004; Rouanet 1991; Schwarcz 1998). For imperial elites, the construction of the Brazilian nation involved not only the adoption of European political forms but also the promotion of cultural markers associated with civilization and national identity (Mattos 2025; Ricupero 2004). Institutions such as the Brazilian Historical and Geographical Institute (IHGB), the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts, and the Imperial Music Conservatory played important roles in this process by fostering historical narratives, artistic production, and national symbols compatible with the political project of the Empire (Mattos 2025; Rouanet 1991; Schwarcz and Starling 2018).

The Empire of Brazil thus constituted a context in which monarchical traditions coexisted with a modern nation-building project actively supported by Pedro II (Schwarcz 1998). This combination makes nineteenth-century Brazil a particularly useful case for examining how practices associated with patronage and monarchical representation intersected with emerging forms of Cultural Diplomacy. Building on this discussion, the following section examines how these dynamics became visible in the Brazilian participation at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition of 1876, particularly through Pedro II's support for Carlos Gomes and the international projection of Brazilian cultural production.





Documentary Research and the Extended Case Method: The Brazilian Experience in Philadelphia (1876)

In April 1876, Dom Pedro II arrived in the United States of America to participate in the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition (Schwarcz 1998, 552–553). Although attending the event as a private individual, the Brazilian monarch joined the efforts of numerous Brazilian authorities involved in organizing the Empire's exhibits. Beyond showcasing agricultural products, machinery, photographs, paintings, and indigenous artifacts, Brazil sought to project an image of itself as a “modern” and “civilized” nation (Skidmore 1992; Uslenghi 2016; Mattos 2025). This effort, however, coexisted with deep domestic contradictions, particularly the persistence of slavery and the aftermath of the Paraguayan War (Schwarcz 1998; Skidmore 1992).

The communication established between the emperor, Carlos Gomes, and the Baron of Javary is preserved in the form of letters and telegrams, which constitute essential sources for this study. Documentary research is a methodology routinely employed in History and Sociology; however, its role is interdisciplinary, influencing the field of International Relations, especially in the study of Foreign Policy History and Cultural Diplomacy. We understand documentary research as a systematic procedure aimed at reviewing or evaluating documents, both printed and electronic, recognizing them as rich sources of data while also acknowledging that they are not necessarily precise or complete records of past events (Prior 2003; Bowen 2009; Yanow 2007).

Based on De Certeau (1992), Yanow (2007), and Morgan (2002), documents are understood as intentional testimonies shaped by political and cultural relations. Through processes of creation, preservation, and interpretation, documentary research highlights how historical narratives are constructed, negotiated, and institutionalized. In this sense, documents do not merely describe reality but also prescribe meanings, actors, and agendas. This approach allows us to explore the traces and evidence that compose the historiographical narrative of Brazilian International Relations.

In this paper, documentary research focused on the archives of the National Historical Museum (*Museu Histórico Nacional* – MHN) and the Imperial Museum (*Museu Imperial* – MI), which hold part of the collection “Antonio Carlos Gomes: composer of two worlds,” registered in UNESCO's Memory of the World Program since 2017. The primary selection criterion was temporal, focusing on documents





produced in 1876. Access to the MHN collection required an in-person visit in March 2024, complemented by digital materials later provided by the institution. The Imperial Museum's collection was accessed through its online repository. In addition to archival materials, the research also considered other sets of documents relevant for reconstructing the broader context in which Pedro II and Carlos Gomes were embedded. These include records from American newspapers such as *The New York Herald* and *New-York Tribune*, as well as official documents produced by the Brazilian commission responsible for the country's participation in the Exposition (*Comissão Representante do Império do Brasil 1875; 1876; Coutinho 1878*).

To analytically ground this empirical reconstruction, the study draws on the sociological approach developed by Norbert Elias⁹, whose historical sociology is guided by the reflection on the individual and society as fundamental and inseparable dimensions. Based on the concept of configuration, Elias emphasizes two distinct yet interdependent levels of observation: individuals (or “players”) and the networks of interdependence in which they are embedded (the “game”) (Devin, 2010, 80–81). This approach, according to Guillaume Devin (2010, 64–65), enables the individual to be situated within their historical and social context. From this perspective, reflecting on the exposition and, subsequently, on the interactions between Emperor Pedro II and the musician Carlos Gomes reinforces the idea that an individual outside any social configuration is inconceivable. This becomes clearer when considered alongside processes of state formation, particularly as individuals are seen as inseparable from their increasingly dense insertion into national dynamics and broader networks of interdependence among states. In the Brazilian case, this dynamic is expressed in the production and projection of a particular national identity, especially in the transition from patronage to more institutionalized forms of cultural diplomacy.

This processual and relational perspective reinforces the article's engagement with the extended case method (Lai and Roccu 2019), which enables the articulation of micro-level empirical evidence with broader theoretical debates. In doing so,

9 Norbert Elias's processual sociology provides common ground between “domestic analysts” and “internationalists.” Rather than examining interactions between predefined spheres, it conceives social phenomena as embedded in changing networks of interdependence. The key question is therefore empirical: identifying the boundaries of these interdependence chains without imposing a priori analytical divisions. This approach rejects linear and teleological models of social change, emphasizing contingent and non-predetermined configurations. At the same time, Elias retained an evolutionary understanding of international relations through his notion of the civilizing process (Devin 2010, 71–73).





it departs from traditional methodological discussions on case study research in International Relations (IR) and Political Science (PS) (Yin 2009; Gerring 2013), whose trajectories have largely been shaped by positivist and neopositivist approaches. Within these paradigms, two dominant tendencies prevail, each reflecting different understandings of causality and logics of inference, yet both sharing ontological commitments to a mind-world separation to which critical, “reflexivist” IR does not subscribe (Lai and Roccu 2019, 4). Instead, this article adopts a critical and reflexivist perspective in which the case is understood as constructed through a dynamic interaction with theory. Rather than being merely selected, the case is interpreted as historically situated knowledge, produced through processes of extension rather than generalization.

In reflecting on the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition (1876), this article approaches the event as part of a complex representational sphere, that is, a space in which nations constructed and projected images of themselves (Hall; Nixon and Evans 2024), understood in non-linear terms. Rather than suggesting a simple transplantation of ideals, it emphasizes the nuanced processes of their circulation and adaptation, particularly in the interplay between patronage and emerging forms of modern cultural diplomacy. This perspective requires careful engagement with context and positionality, as well as the production of explicitly political knowledge with, above all, emancipatory potential. For this reason, the extended case method aligns with the ontological and epistemological commitments of various critical approaches in IR, as well as with studies on the history of foreign policy that employ genealogies, ethnographies, documentary research, and related methodologies. In reflecting on the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition, this article advances the extended case method as a process of knowledge production grounded in a single case, with the aim of contributing to ongoing debates on the development of a critical reflexivist approach to case study research.

It engages with scholarly debates through non-causal and non-positivist perspectives, recognizing that knowledge production is not neutral but inherently political and potentially emancipatory (Lai and Roccu 2019, 5–6). Accordingly, the study draws on methodological strategies that are relational, dialogical, and participatory. Such a critical approach rejects the separation between the object of study and the researcher, instead situating the latter’s political role within the social relations that surround the object of inquiry, rather than assuming the distance and detachment typically associated with positivist scholarship. Finally,





we emphasize that the extended case methodology should be understood as a self-reflexive approach grounded in situated knowledge. The critical methodological proposal we advance for case studies attends to the evolving nature of power relations and social forces, as well as to how these shape societies while, at the same time, being constituted by them (Lai and Roccu 2019, 6).

In analytical terms, rather than treating the 1876 Philadelphia Exposition as an isolated historical episode, this case is mobilized to refine debates on Cultural Diplomacy, patronage, and the transition from the Ancien Régime to modern state practices. The empirical material thus plays a constitutive role in the development of the article's theoretical argument. Building on this framework, the following section reconstructs the interactions between Pedro II, Carlos Gomes, and the Brazilian diplomatic apparatus, examining how documentary evidence reveals the emergence of cultural diplomacy practices in the Brazilian Empire.

Carlos Gomes, Pedro II, and the Image of the Empire of Brazil

After attending the opening ceremony of the Centennial Exposition, Pedro II sent a telegram to a Brazilian diplomat in Rome, the Baron of Javary, requesting that he contact the main Brazilian composer of the time, Carlos Gomes (Javary 1876a, 1). The monarch demanded the composition of a hymn in honor of the centennial of the host country, to be performed during the official celebrations on July 4th, and did not accept excuses (Javary 1876a, 1; Virmond and Nogueira 2014).

On May 11, 1876, shortly after receiving the emperor's message, the Baron of Javary wrote a letter to Carlos Gomes. In the letter, kept in the archive of the MHN, the diplomat conveys the monarch's orders and urges the composer to act quickly, considering that the hymn should be sent to the U.S. in time to be rehearsed before its official performance (Javary 1876a, 2). The Baron concludes his letter by stating:

Our August Sovereign is giving you a new proof of distinction, to which I'm sure my dear Maestro will respond with solicitude. So let's get to work. *The dedication we all pay to our Benevolent Monarch will inspire my dear Maestro to write a precious hymn that will satisfy the Emperor*





and bring glory to the author and to the Brazilian name. (Javary 1876a, 2 our translation).¹⁰

According to Virmond and Nogueira (2014, 2), the Brazilian consul in New York had already contacted Carlos Gomes requesting a piece to be composed specifically for the Philadelphia Exposition, but received a negative response from the composer as early as April 1876. The Brazilian maestro, however, relented in face of the emperor's more direct and assertive stance, stating in his reply to the Baron of Javary that he would abandon "all commitments in Italy to fulfill the Emperor's order" (Gomes 1876a, our translation), while also requesting further details so he could begin working on the hymn. In a second, undated telegram to the Baron, Gomes once again declared that he was waiting for more information regarding the "artistic elements that would be available" (Gomes 1876b, our translation) for the performance of the hymn in Philadelphia. The response to the composer's inquiries came directly from the emperor, who, in a telegram dated May 19, 1876, stated that the hymn should be composed for orchestra only (thus, without a choir) and indicated the date by which the score should be in the hands of the Brazilian diplomatic corps (Pedro II 1876).

The archives of the MI contain a score of the hymn dated May 22, 1876, which was likely the date the work was completed. The following correspondence on the subject located by our research, this time from the MHN, is a letter authored by the Baron of Javary dated June 4, 1876, in which he states:

Our Legation in Paris informed me in an official dispatch on the 1st of this month that it had received nine strapped rolls from Milan, plus a bundle destined for His Majesty, and that it had immediately sent everything to Washington. The composition arrived in Paris just in time to be sent by the steamer that left Le Havre yesterday and will arrive in New York on the 12th or 13th of this month. *The orders of our Benevolent Monarch have therefore been carried out; the hymn is on its way, and by now the Emperor should have received the telegram I sent him yesterday, notifying him of everything* (Javary 1876b, 1-2 our translation).¹¹

10 "O nosso Augusto Soberano dá-lhe uma nova prova de distinção, à qual estou certo que o meu caro Maestro responderá com solicitude. Assim pois, mãos à obra. A dedicação que todos tributamos ao nosso Benemerito Monarca hade inspirar ao meu caro Maestro um precioso hymno que satisfaça ao Imperador e redunde em glória para o autor e para o nome brasileiro."

11 "A nossa Legação em Paris participou-me em officio do 1º do corrente que tinha recebido de Milão nove rolos cintados, e mais um maço destinado a Sua Magestade, e que logo expedira tudo para Washington. A composição chegou a Paris muito a tempo de ser remetida pelo Vapor que hontem partiu do Havre, e que chegará a New York a 12 ou 13 do corrente. *Achão-se pois cumpridas as ordens do nosso Benemerito Monarca; o hymno vai em viagem, e a esta hora já o Imperador terá recebido o telegramma que hontem lhe dirigi, dando-lhe de tudo aviso.*"





The Baron of Javary also added a number of comments on the musical aspects of the piece and advised the Brazilian composer to consult the emperor before selling the copyright of the composition (Javary 1876b). We estimate that the hymn reached the emperor on the date predicted by the Brazilian diplomat in his final letter: in his personal diary, Pedro II mentions that he gifted a copy of Gomes's score to a relative of the director of the Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia on June 22 (Bediaga 1999, 60). Just three days later, the American newspaper *The New York Herald* published an article on the "Brazilian tribute" to the United States of America, including a review of the piano, orchestra, and military band scores (A Brazilian [...] 1876). Considering that the scores were sent to the emperor via diplomatic mail, it can be assumed that one of the Brazilian diplomats in the U.S. – or even Pedro II himself – forwarded these materials to the press. Gomes's hymn, announced in the official program of the July 4, 1876 celebrations as "*Greeting from Brazil*", was performed immediately after the reading of the original Declaration of Independence of the United States (Virmond and Nogueira 2014).

According to the *New-York Tribune*, the announcement of the Brazilian piece was followed by loud applause from the audience, which seemed to please the emperor, who "was evidently very much interested in the success of the hymn" (Dawn [...] 1876, 1). Similarly, *The New York Herald* reported that Gomes's composition was "well received by the multitude, and was frequently interrupted with applause" (Evarts 1876, 3). The positive reception by the public may be attributed to the favorable impression the emperor had cultivated during his months-long stay in the U.S., a fact widely reported in the press (Dawn [...] 1876, 1; Schwarcz 1998, 553; Uslenghi 2016, 31). In his personal diary, however, Pedro II lamented that, from the tribune where he was standing, "Carlos Gomes's hymn was barely audible due to the distance and the noise of the crowd" (Bediaga 1999, 64).

Reports of the public appraisal in Philadelphia contrast with the negative reception by the press. According to Virmond and Nogueira (2014, 7, our translation), "there is an unmistakable intention to relegate Gomes to a secondary role" on the part of the American press, which compared the Brazilian's composition to another work commissioned for the *Centennial Exposition*: a hymn by German composer Richard Wagner, performed at the opening ceremony in May 1876.

The correspondence exchanged between the emperor, the Baron of Javary, and Carlos Gomes indicates that it was Pedro II himself that promoted this musical





initiative. Although Virmond and Nogueira (2014) report that the Brazilian consul in New York had requested a composition from Gomes, the authors also suggest that “in truth, it was the Emperor who asked the consul to propose the work to Gomes” (Virmond and Nogueira 2014, 2, our translation). It is also important to note the absence of any mention of Gomes’s hymn in the official documents produced by Brazilian authorities responsible for organizing the country’s pavilions (Comissão Representante do Imperio do Brazil 1875, 1876; Coutinho 1878).

In a certain sense, the emperor’s request for a hymn evokes the patronage system, in which music served an “utilitarian” function in the festivities and ceremonies of aristocracy, and musicians were expected to provide a “service” to sovereigns through their compositions (Adorno 1989, 58; Elias 1993, 46). It seems evident that the emperor’s image would benefit from the performance of a piece publicly announced as the result of his request (*A Brazilian [...] 1876; Dawn [...] 1876; Evarts 1876*), contributing to his popularity as a cultured monarch and a lover and promoter of the arts (Schwarcz 1998) – a quality highly valued among sovereigns of the Ancien Régime (Elias 1993, 47; Giovani 2014; Spohr 2014, 19). Simultaneously, the presentation of a musical piece distanced Pedro II from the image of a “war tyrant” (Schwarcz 1998, 516) imprinted on him internationally following the Paraguayan War.

However, it is important to recognize that the primary objective of Brazil’s participation in the event was not to glorify the figure of Pedro II in particular but rather to promote the image of the Empire of Brazil more broadly. While the monarchy was undoubtedly part of that image, even official documents produced by Brazilian authorities do not excessively praise the sovereign. Instead, they describe his constitutional roles and his support for the arts and sciences as elements of Brazilian reality (Comissão Representante do Império do Brazil 1875). The other artistic exhibitions organized by the Brazilian Commission are also particularly revealing: the selected paintings emphasized historical themes, such as the Paraguayan War (1865–1870); the photographs – chosen by the emperor himself – depicted natural landscapes from northeastern Brazil, coral specimens, and views of cities like Recife and Rio de Janeiro (Comissão Representante do Império do Brazil 1876, 50–51; Uslenghi 2016, 73–75).

The relationship between Carlos Gomes and Pedro II must also be taken into account. On the one hand, Gomes was never formally subject to the patronage system; after all, he was not among the musicians directly employed by the Brazilian imperial court (Góes 1996; Mattos 2025, 125). The composer was





financed by the Brazilian State during two periods of his career (1863–1868 and 1873–1878) through stipends granted by the Imperial Music Conservatory of Rio de Janeiro and the Brazilian Parliament, respectively – unlike other contemporary composers who were directly sponsored by the emperor (Góes 1996, 35-37; Mattos 2025, 86). At the same time, the Brazilian maestro built his career as a freelance artist in Italy, supporting himself through contracts with music publishers for the printing and distribution of his compositions (Góes 1996; Mattos 2025, 125).

On the other hand, one cannot overlook the relevance of a “heritage” of the patronage system in the relationship between the maestro and the emperor: Carlos Gomes received financial support from the Brazilian monarch on numerous occasions throughout his career and benefitted from his closeness to the imperial elites (Góes 1996). Possibly as a result, their correspondence reveals a deeply deferential tone by the composer, who repeatedly expressed his desire to remain under the monarch’s protection and dedicated several works to the Brazilian imperial family (Mattos 2025, 127). Thus, Carlos Gomes would not have refused a direct commission from Pedro II for an event such as the *Centennial Exposition* – and the emperor was sure of it.

It is within this complex context that Pedro II’s decision to commission the hymn “*Greeting from Brazil*” from Carlos Gomes should be understood. Even though the inclusion of Gomes’s hymn in the official program stemmed from the personal initiative of the monarch, this composition can be placed within a broader framework – that is, within the strategies employed by both Pedro II and the imperial government to promote a positive image of the Empire of Brazil at the *Centennial Exposition* (Skidmore 1992; Schwarcz 1998; Uslenghi 2016). It is interesting to note that the Brazilian emperor employed the tradition of monarchical superiority over an artist, inherited from the Ancien Régime, in an attempt to better present the Empire of Brazil in a deeply symbolic event of the bourgeoisie’s conquered political and economic hegemony in the late nineteenth century (Hobsbawm 1996, 41). Thus, we observe that the performance of the hymn at the *Centennial Exposition* was an experience marked by the coexistence of characteristics from both models of international cultural diffusion, in a reflection of the contradictions that ruled over the Empire of Brazil, a country where “(...) the principle of popular sovereignty lived with the divine sanction (...)” (Schwarcz 1998, 493, our translation). This scenario is synthesized by Javary’s words, when he states that the hymn should simultaneously “satisfy the Emperor” and “bring glory (...) to the Brazilian name” (Javary 1876a).





Ultimately, the national content of said initiative leads us to consider it as an early example of Brazilian Cultural Diplomacy.

In this sense, Pedro II's choice of Carlos Gomes is particularly significant. At the time, the composer was the leading figure in the Brazilian musical scene – and one of the foremost names in the country's broader cultural scenario. This recognition stemmed mainly from an unprecedented achievement for a Brazilian artist of that period: in 1870, his opera *Il Guarany* premiered at Milan's *Teatro alla Scala* – one of the world's most prestigious opera houses – where it achieved great success with the Italian public (Góes 1996; Mattos 2025). The work became one of the most popular titles in the Italian operatic repertoire during the 1870s and had considerable international impact, with premieres in England, Chile, Argentina, Spain, Uruguay, the Russian Empire, Portugal, France, and Cuba until 1880 (Góes 1996, 249; Mattos 2025, 109–110). Although *Il Guarany* would only debut in the United States in 1884, popular excerpts from this opera – as well as from *Salvator Rosa* (1874), another of Gomes's works – had already been featured in concerts by musical touring companies in the country since late 1875 (Mattos 2025, 128–129). This demonstrates that the Brazilian composer enjoyed a level of international prominence that enabled the Brazilian State to instrumentalize his music in support of its diplomatic initiatives.

Beyond that, one must also consider the relevance of Gomes and his work within the broader scenario of Brazilian national culture. *Il Guarany* was based on the foremost Brazilian historical novel of the mid-nineteenth century – “*O Guarani*” (1857), by José de Alencar –, establishing itself as part of a broader trend of cultural productions increasingly concerned with the country's “image of nationality” (Rouanet 1991, 241). The construction of this image involved depictions of nature and the promotion of certain characters from the “national history” in literature, poetry, visual arts, and music – a formula largely adapted from European Romanticism (Rouanet 1991; Schwarcz 1998; Mattos 2025). While Indigenous peoples were often represented as “national heroes” in fantasized historical novels such as Alencar's “*O Guarani*”, the country's black population was deliberately excluded from this national imaginary (Mattos 2025; Ricupero 2004; Santos 2007; Skidmore 1992). This movement received official support especially during Pedro II's reign, when the Empire began promoting this new “national culture” through State-funded institutions such as the Brazilian Historical and Geographical Institute, the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts, and the Imperial Conservatory of Rio de Janeiro (Rouanet 1991; Schwarcz 1998).





Carlos Gomes thus represented the success of a cultural project aimed at constructing a Brazilian national identity under the auspices of the imperial elites – yet another reason why he and his music could be selected for this musical initiative. After all, the “score of identity” (Fléchet 2012) chosen by the emperor of Brazil to represent the country abroad could not contradict the political-identitarian project promoted domestically. As Mattos (2025, 103, our translation) puts it, Gomes “[demonstrated] the ability of a citizen of the ‘tropics’ to masterfully uphold the European artistic models”. Although it is possible to observe a relationship that mirrors the dynamics of the patronage system, Gomes was not seen as a mere “servant” employed to glorify the monarch abroad; instead, the composer was considered the main representative of Brazilian national music. His international success proved that the Empire of Brazil was able to participate in the cultural environment of the “civilized nations”, something the country aimed to prove in its attendance to the Centennial Exposition.

The outcomes of the initiative promoted by Pedro II, however, are difficult to measure. As mentioned earlier, Gomes’s music pleased the audience present at the ceremony in Philadelphia but was met with indifference by the press. In a letter to a friend dated August 1876, Gomes celebrated the successful performance of his hymn in Philadelphia, noting that the emperor himself had sent him a letter expressing his satisfaction (Gomes, 1876c). As for the hymn “*Greeting from Brazil*”, Virmond and Nogueira (2014, 9) point out that the piece fell into obscurity after a few additional performances during Pedro II’s stay in the United States. As Lessa (2002, 17–18) points out, Cultural Diplomacy requires investment without guaranteeing immediate returns, and often lacks clearly defined objectives. In this specific case, Gomes’ hymn complemented broader efforts by the imperial government to present a civilized and modern image of the Empire of Brazil to the event’s public – even if such an initiative was not part of the Brazilian authorities’ original plans. Regarding this objective, the outcome was ultimately viewed as disappointing: according to a report prepared by the Secretary of the Brazilian Commission, “(...) what received praise at the Exhibition was almost entirely the work of nature; the work of man played only a minor part (...)” (Coutinho 1878, 25, our translation)¹². In other words, the Empire of Brazil continued to attract foreign attention due to its agricultural potential and natural “exuberance” rather than for any demonstration of civilizational or technological advancement.

12 “(...) o que mereceu aplausos na Exposição foi quase tudo obra da natureza; o trabalho do homem entrou aí com pequena parcela (...)”





From a broader historical perspective, the instrumentalization of Carlos Gomes's music in Philadelphia, initiated by Emperor Pedro II, is an early example of a longstanding tradition of promoting Brazilian classical music as part of the country's Cultural Diplomacy. According to Fléchet (2012), this musical genre remained at the center of Brazil's musical initiatives abroad until the late 1950s. We thus observe the inauguration of a specific form of international production and engagement in which classical music functioned as a sign of civility, modernity, and of belonging to the concert of nations (Dumont and Fléchet 2014; Fléchet 2012; Mattos 2025).

Concluding Remarks

Based on a historical and sociological discussion, this article has examined how, under the Ancien Régime, artistic production was closely tied to monarchical authority, whereas in Modernity the consolidation of the nation-state progressively reconfigured this relationship by mobilizing culture as an instrument of diplomatic projection oriented toward the nation rather than the sovereign. The Brazilian episode discussed in this article illustrates how this broader transformation can be observed, albeit in a context marked by tensions and historical discontinuities, in a non-European setting.

The extended case analyzed suggests a set of political and cultural dynamics in which Dom Pedro II's patronage of music intersected with emerging forms of national representation. In the context of the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition of 1876, cultural production, particularly the music of Carlos Gomes, was mobilized as part of an effort to project an image of Brazil as "civilized" and "modern." Rather than functioning as a fully consolidated diplomatic practice, this episode can be understood as an exploratory configuration in which aesthetic and political objectives overlapped.

Within this framework, Cultural Diplomacy is approached here not as a fully stabilized institutional practice, but as an analytical lens to interpret the use of cultural production in international projection strategies. While elements of earlier representational logics remain present, the case indicates a gradual shift in emphasis toward the projection of national identity, even if still mediated by monarchical structures and symbolic hierarchies.





From a historical sociology perspective, the analysis suggests that such configurations may be read as part of longer processes through which cultural forms became increasingly embedded in practices of international representation. However, rather than claiming direct continuity with twentieth-century models of Cultural Diplomacy, the article emphasizes the heuristic value of the case in illuminating early articulations between music, state representation, and international visibility.

Ultimately, the documentary material analyzed here contributes to an understanding of how cultural practices participated in the symbolic construction of Brazil's international image in the late nineteenth century, showing how music operated simultaneously as an artistic expression and as a medium through which political meanings were negotiated.

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