

The Ponte do Silvestre (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil): A junction of technology, iconography and heritage

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Abstract

The Railway development in the nineteenth century seems paradigmatic of internationalization processes that contributed to establish the contemporary society. The construction of railways in different parts of the world allowed cultural contacts, knowledge exchange, migration, equipment and economic circulation. Through the analysis of Ponte do Silvestre's image (Estrada de Ferro do Corcovado, Rio de Janeiro - Brazil) we would like to highlight three connections. First, we consider the transfer of knowledge between Europe and South America. The Brazilian engineer Pereira Passos, graduated in France, designed the bridge for the first Brazilian touristic railway (1885). Passos used the Riggi system invented for use on the mountain Riggi touristic railway (1871). Discussions on this technological option was the focus of English and Brazilians engineers. This railway became also the first to be electrified in Brazil, under the control of a French-Canadian group. Second, consider the production and dissemination of Marc Ferrez's photographic views (1884), who first recorded the construction of the railway. Produced as a technical record of the building, was used for local touristic disclosure. This image, reproduced in lithograph, was released in the Brazilian catalogue for the International Exhibition of Paris (1889) Later was reproduced in postcard, with wide national and international circulation. Third, from the heritage point of view, the Ponte do Silvestre is part of the production of a Rio de Janeiro's memory, both from the technological and material point of view, as documental and visual. It is associated with many historical and natural elements protected at the national level (Corcovado train station, Corcovado hill, Cristo Redentor, Parque Nacional da Tijuca) and also international (cultural landscape of Rio de Janeiro world heritage, 2012). Inclusive because actually the railway to Corcovado is one of the most know and visited touristic attractions in Brazil.