

# Musical Lives of the Ocisumba: Study and Rescue of an Angolan Chordophone

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The *ocisumba* (also *ocihumba* or *nsambi*) is a pluriarch-type chordophone of African origin, documented for over five centuries in the former Kingdom of Kongo and still known today in Angola. In that country, however, it is near extinction. To date, only one living master has been identified: Paulino Katimba, 82, residing in Caimbambo, Benguela Province, despite extensive efforts to locate others. The instrument was brought to Brazil during the transatlantic slave trade and appears in 19th-century naturalist paintings, though it has not survived there to the present day.

In Portugal, 23 *ocisumba* are preserved in five ethnographic museum collections dating from the late colonial period, though no historical use is record in the country.

Ethnomusicological research included literature review; mapping and organological study of 26 instruments (23 in Portuguese museums and 3 in Angolan museums); and fieldwork in Caimbambo to document the music making, repertoire, knowledge, and perspectives of the only living practitioner. His instrument was also studied in depth and a new one was built during the fieldwork. Local musical practices were observed, helping to understand the instrument's role within the local cultural ecosystem. The collected data were then analysed to shed light on the *ocisumba*'s role and relevance.

The research aimed to expand knowledge of the instrument and its Atlantic circulation (fieldwork in Brazil is planned for next winter), and to contribute to its safeguarding through the study of its organology, acoustic features, and the living oral tradition in which it still plays a role in Angola.

There are prospects for deepening the knowledge about the *ocisumba* through two approaches: (a) the formation of a multidisciplinary team that includes, in addition to two ethnomusicologists, specialists in digital humanities, museology, art history, archaeology, and dendrology; (b) a new fieldwork trip by the team to the same region.



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FIGURE 1

Sick Slaves (painting by Henry Chamberlain, 1822). Collection of the State Art Gallery of São Paulo, Brasil.

FIGURES 2 AND 3

Master Paulino Katimba playing his *ocisumba* (August 25, 2024) – Lucas de Campos collection.

