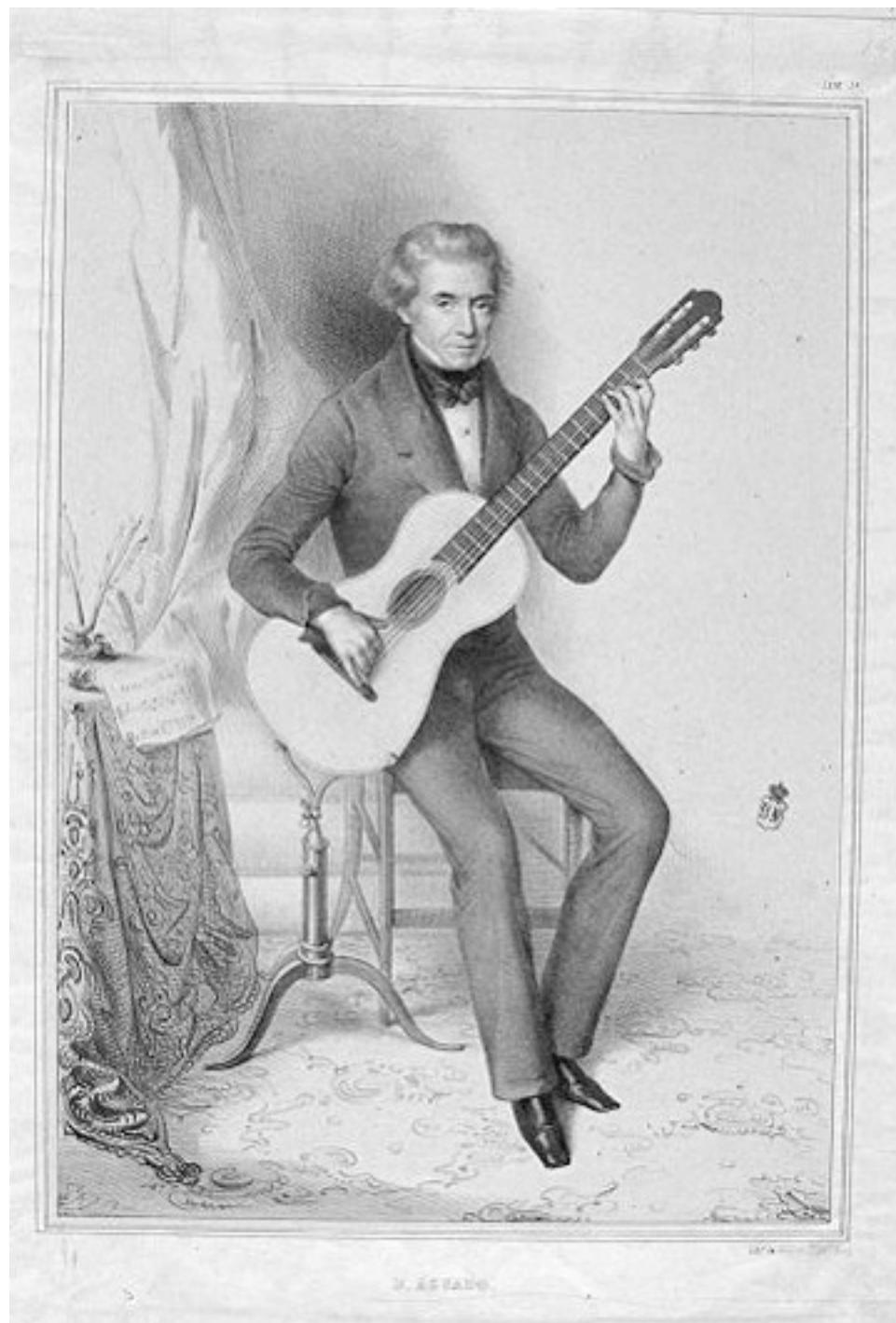


**During the restoration of a Lacote guitar, made in 1851, some observations and reflections brought us to construct a facsimile of the famous “Tripodison” imagined by Dioniso Aguado.**

Lacote and Aguado: about a Tripodison.



On this Lacote, dated 1851, a detail, visible on the photos made available to us, particularly attracted our attention: at the lower part of the back made in lemon-wood, a small filled later hole, also in lemon-wood.

Ian Watchorn, in his book on romantic guitars, showed a very beautiful Lacote "à tempérément réglable" (or 'enharmonique') built around 1850 that he had restored. The head design of 'our' guitar is similar, including the head's back side (but not the graft), as well as the general dimensions and the wood used. On the one restored by Ian\*, a curious 'button' and two ebony disks can be seen on the back.

\*For the purpose of simplicity, we will denominate the Lacote restored by Ian "Ian's Lacote" and the one we are restoring "our Lacote", even if these two instruments have a story of their own and different owners.

This small hole - even if filled very carefully – that had attracted our attention, is located exactly where the 'button' is on the back of 'Ian's Lacote'. Inside, a solid block is glued at this same position. We verified with Ian and on the back of 'his' guitar, inside, against the exterior 'button', a strong block can also be found. The second common thing on the back of these guitars is an identical 'crack': same position and same size.

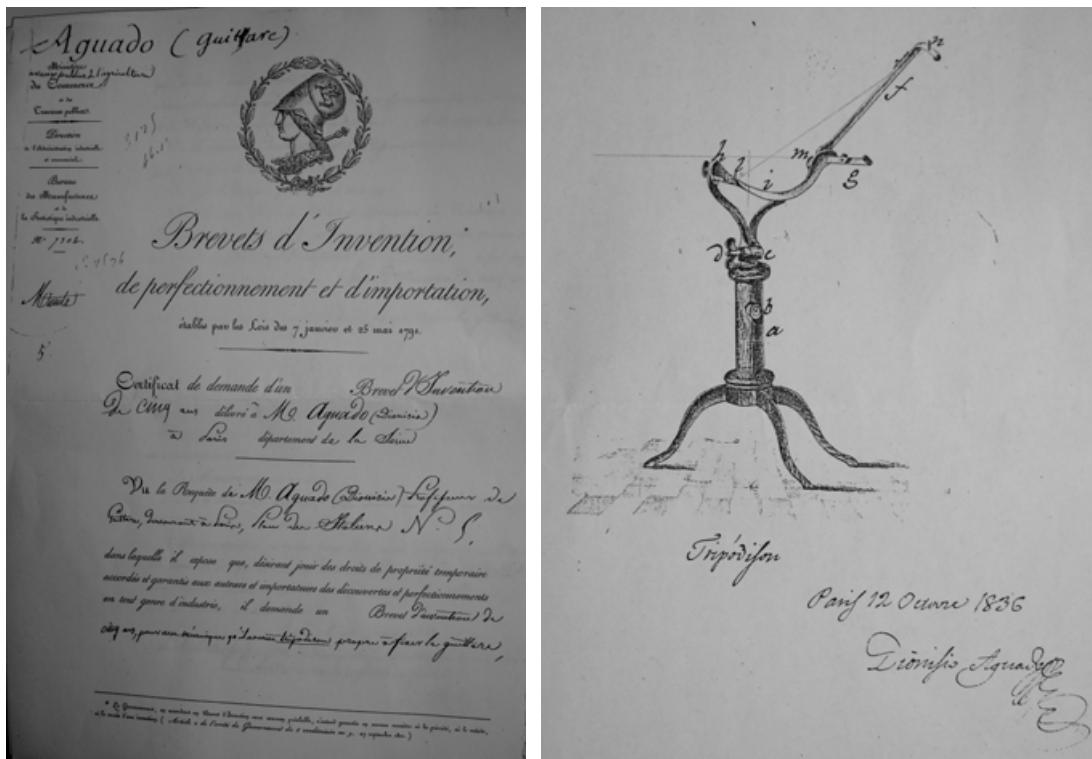


Ian had already mentioned these two curious 'buttons' on the back of his Lacote and suggested as a logic explanation regarding this luthier known for his strictness and creativity the eventuality of an adaptation of the guitar to the "triposidon", patented in 1836 by his friend and client Dionisio Aguado.

This second Lacote, dating of the same period, 1851, has traces of the same ‘button’ (however without the two ebony disks) and unusual marks, rather deep on the upper ribs— very close to the heel. This confirms Ian’s appreciation of this particular set-up and our opinion that the guitar went through the same operation: a ‘button’ and its interior support were inserted to be able to play the instrument on a “triposidon”.

The crack was caused by the fact that ‘button’ + back + inside support create an important mass as regards the back’s thickness, and that the handling to install or uninstall the guitar from this triposidon resulted in creating a crack where the back is weakest – between the two bars, the block and the inner linings; a crack that got larger with the years.

We were able to obtain the patent and study it, together with the few illustrated documents showing this strange invention. Around the 1830s, patents were registered for a period of 5 years, renewable if wished by the inventor. These patent registrations were expensive and in case the invention registered did not meet an immediate success, often they were not renewed. Perhaps this is what happened in the case of Aguado. His invention not having met the enthusiasm that could bring him fame and fortune, he did not renew the patent that he had received on February 18<sup>th</sup> 1837. Or, perhaps he lost interest in his invention, since in 1838, he returned to Spain...



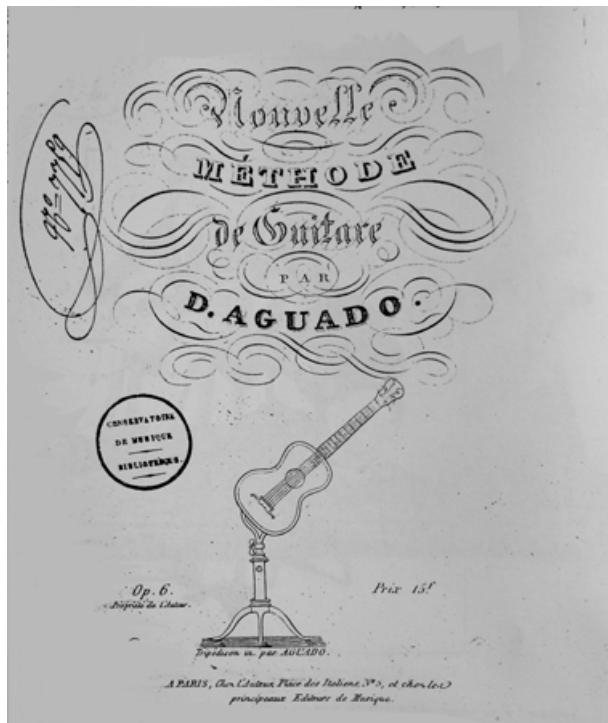
At this point, we decided to take on a ludic and demonstrative experiment to try to understand the reasons why this invention failed; so we built a triposidon, helped by the patent which we copied, and the marks still visible on the guitar. This invention was not of primordial importance in the history of the guitar and did not meet any success, as it turned out to be unpractical.

*"Définition du Tripoidon propre à fixer la guittare".*

*a* est une colonne avec 3 pieds en bois dans laquelle est ajusté un cylindre en cuivre serré par un bouton *b*, pour hausser ou descendre la mécanique qui est attachée à cette colonne par une

charnière **c** et fixée par un écrou **d** pour donner à la guitare l'inclinaison convenable. La pièce **i** qui porte 3 bras, **f**, **g**, et **h** est attachée par **i** et se meut en **h** dans un trou allongé, et fixé par une vis pour incliner le manche de la guitare à volonté. Dans le bras **h** est un pivot **j** qui rentre dans le trou de la guitare. Le bras **f** qui est mobile par **m** a une goupille **n** qui entre dans le manche, et le bras **g** qui a une élévation au bout et dans lequel le corps de la guitare entre c'est pour empêcher le rabattement. Dans le bras **f** il y a une vis qui sert pour incliner cette même branche à volonté. De manière qu'en faisant entrer le point **j** et la goupille **n** la guitare se trouve fixée. Tous les trois bras sont mobiles à modifier, et fixées par des vis pour qu'on puisse mettre des guitares de différentes dimensions (sic).

Paris le 12 octobre 1836".



In studying the patent, we realized in a first stage that neither our Lacote nor Ian's could be used with the system described by this patent. As a matter of fact, in the patent, the guitar is attached to its triposidon by a metallic axle **j**) that fits in the opening usually taken by the button and that goes through the lower block. The body is leaning on a kind of arm **g**) that holds it in the wider part of the body and another arm **f**) holds the instrument by a spur (**n**) that fits in a hole (??!) made in the lower part of the neck. We know of a triposidon of unknown origins in a private collection, without any guitar.

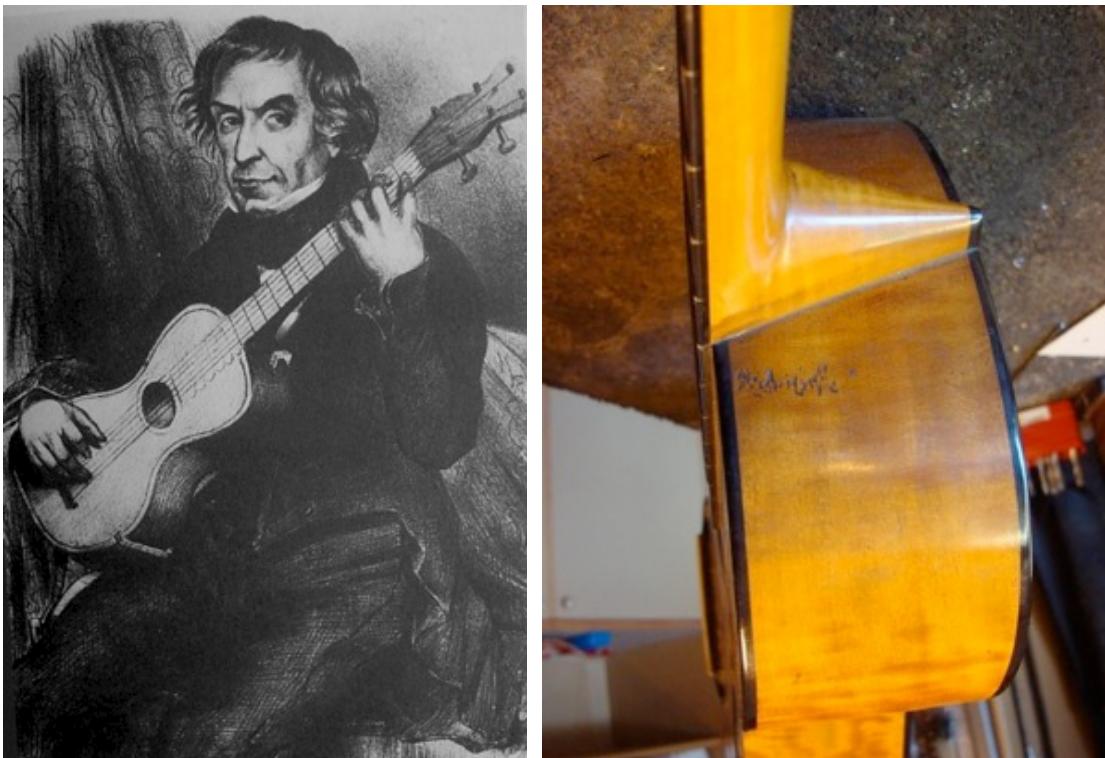
Whether it is a Lacote – as can be seen on the method – or a Laprevotte as on the illustration, the balance is difficult to find as both guitar heads become very heavy because of the solid neck and the hidden mechanics that give the instrument a very highly positioned centre of gravity. Moreover, we do not see on the patent traces of “buttons” to be added on the guitar backs, nor we see on the Lacote holes (or traces) on the necks.

We decided to shape on lathe a ‘button’ inspired by the one shown on Ian’s guitar that could fit the hole on our Lacote, exactly under the support.

We then created a support to which we added the mechanism described in the patent but very quickly we had to come to the conclusion: it does not work! The guitar is not held sufficiently, it

shakes in the support. We were not in favour of making a hole in the neck so we tied the neck to point n) with a string but the ‘button’ – connected to nothing – has absolutely no sense...

We concluded that the ‘Triposidon’ in its “patent” form does not work, but the idea remains ‘enticing’; perhaps it was improved at a certain moment, since these two guitars made at the same period (circa 1851) show similar ‘buttons’ in the same positions, added by Lacote himself? We tried to adapt this patent to our guitars equipped with buttons.



We kept the arm i) sustaining the guitar body and we added a piece of tin to cover and grip the button. Parts a)b)c) and d) create no problems and are kept identically. Rest (part-g) remains, the small arm with a spur j) is suppressed, as it has no corresponding mark on the ribs. We kept arm f), modifying it so that the spur n) can rest on the body, on the exact marks found on our guitar, not in a hole made especially in the neck. A print showing Aguado playing a guitar with a similar mechanism – for which no spur n) penetrates the neck – encouraged us to try this set up.

In this way, the guitar is perfectly maintained. The modification of adding a button and its interior support can be easily done without opening the instrument and is a much less intrusive operation than making a hole in the neck –the latter thus remaining free - more comfortable for the musician’s arm and hand. This allows to solidly secure the guitar to its triposidon in a radical way, preventing any ‘parasite’ vibration.



If, as we suspect, Lacote was the author of these modifications and wanted to demonstrate that when following the original patent Dioniso Aguado's triposidon did not work?

Or, in order to spare his illustrious client's susceptibility, he waited for the latter's death in 1849, more than 10 years after the patent, to modify and perfect his invention? Invention that – we confess – did not meet any success.

These questions remain unanswered for the time being and our hope is that one of the numerous historians-musicologists studying the history of music, its authors and protagonists, will one day be able to give us an answer.

Sinier de Ridder – Summer 2010