INTRODUCTION

KNOWLEDGE, PLACE, PERSPECTIVE

> The historian who visits a place writes a different history than the historian who stays home, satisfied to read about a place someone else once visited.
>
> —BARRY LOPEZ

A blinding tropical sun forces me to seek shade beneath the dense trees surrounding the shattered headstones of the British graves scattered atop this quiet Brazilian hill. These broken shards of once-stately burial markers offer visible yet silent testimony to once-mighty empires and fortunes now long gone. Nestled in the rugged, mountainous interior of the state of Minas Gerais (General Mines), the dead rest uncomfortably atop the exhausted gold mine that slices a mile and a half into the earth beneath them. On a small shelf of land jutting out to the east, just below the British graves, no gravestones—broken or intact—mark the resting place of the decaying bones of hundreds of enslaved women and men who once labored for the British mining company. The lives and deaths of these Africans and Afro-Brazilians left even fewer visible traces than the British miners and managers once interred more respectfully and ceremoniously just a few dozen yards up the hill above them.

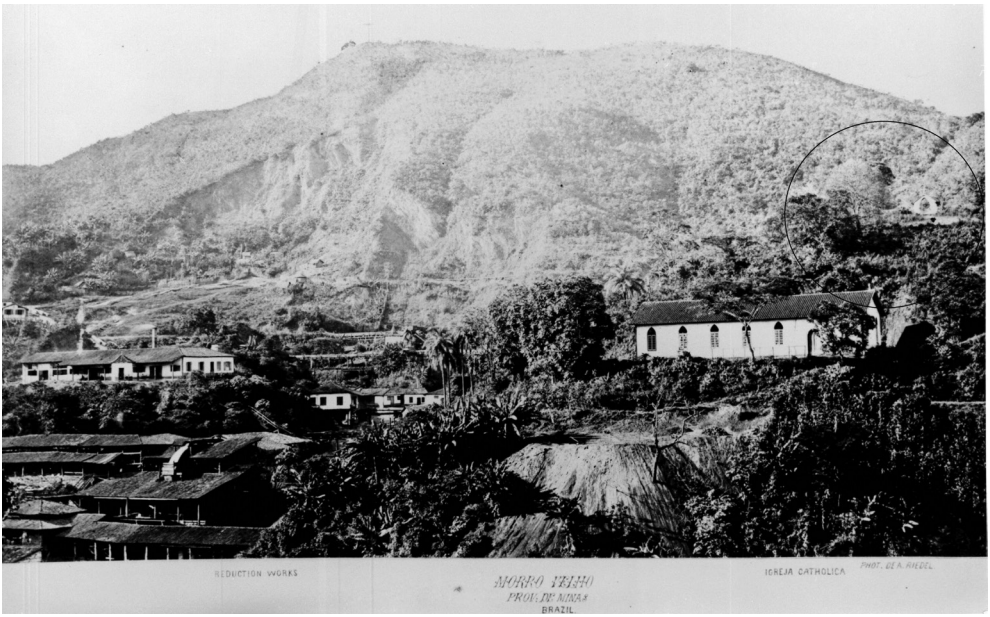


FIGURE I.1. Morro Velho with mine reduction works (*bottom left*), Catholic church (*right*), and British cemetery (*in circle*). Image in the public domain. Auguste Riedel.

THE SOULS OF MORRO VELHO

Trudging through the thick brush and clumps of trees in the sweltering heat, I am acutely conscious of the difficulties of recovering the past, of even this small but poignant fragment of human history, of ever truly comprehending the lives of the people who once inhabited this centuries-old mining town. Multitudes of men and women came to their segregated, final resting places on this steep "old hill" (Morro Velho, pronounced *mohoo velyoo*) in southeastern Brazil. How is it, asks the historian, that we can come to understand people from such different times, places, and cultures—enslaved people from many parts of the African continent, men and women from the British Isles, Brazilian peasants, merchants, and wealthy landowners? Can we ever hope to come close to comprehending them and the worlds they once inhabited? Can we even truly make sense of those who are our contemporaries in the early twenty-first century, and who will one day be figures in a distant past for historians in future decades and centuries?

FIGURE I.2. Morro Velho, British cemetery, 2022. Marshall C. Eakin.

One hundred and fifty-eight years ago, when Richard Francis Burton walked among these English graves, they numbered only a few dozen, and the cemetery of the enslaved, slightly down hill, probably contained some two hundred poorly marked burials. Most of this hill and the surrounding region had been stripped of trees to supply fuel and timber for the deepening gold mine below. Today, these hillsides are lush, green, and heavily forested. Only the older inhabitants of this town would know that these neglected cemeteries sit in the middle of what was, for two centuries, a sprawling complex of industrial machinery, thousands of workers, and the constant din of massive stamping and rock-crushing machines. The final dismantling of the Morro Velho mine over the past two decades has largely stripped the valley below of most of the buildings and refining works. Scrubby grass and stunted trees have reclaimed the rusting industrial equipment, and the steady roar of the machinery has been silenced. The burial ground of the enslaved, an overgrown field of bushes and gnarled vines, has been completely forgotten. Vandals have gradually destroyed nearly all the once-impressive headstones in what was at one time a beautifully landscaped British graveyard.

More than four decades ago, in a previous century, I first began to intrude into the lives of the hundreds of people interred beneath the rocky soil on this hilltop, the gold mine that brought them to this mineral-rich state, and the country that took shape around them.[1] I began with the (perhaps naive) assumption that *we can* come to some reasonable understanding of those around us in our own society, those from cultures other than our own, and, by extension, those who inhabited the past. As an English novelist so famously once wrote, "The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there."[2] A historian, especially this historian of

Brazil, acts as a sort of cultural intermediary, much like an anthropologist, seeking an understanding of and an empathy for peoples other than his own, and strives to communicate this understanding to his own. Cultural translation is always imperfect, and its flaws increase not only with distance but also over time. My hope is that this multiple translation—of Richard Burton's Brazil, my reading of Burton, and Brazil—will reveal both the richness and the limits of the historian's empathetic efforts to bridge time and space.

I am a historian committed to my craft. I believe that the past matters, that it continues to shape the present and the future. Just as in the case of humans, nations bear the imprint of their birth, and the phases of their development—and Brazil is no exception. For nations today, threats to their survival were woven into the very fabric of their being as they first emerged and then developed over centuries. Some nations more than others are an amalgam of regions, ethnicities, religions, and classes. Their survival and ability to thrive have been built and depend on subsuming those many identities and interests below the surface of a cohesive, encompassing, and overarching sense of national identity an "imagined community," to use the inspired image of the late Benedict Anderson.[3] The story of the construction of nations has been the successful efforts to build these national identities, and persuade the multiplicity of groups within their borders that, despite all their differences, each inhabitant could lay claim to a place in the big tent of the national community. Richard Burton witnessed the very tentative efforts to bring the many groups in Brazil into an incipient nation-state in the late nineteenth century. My reading of nineteenth-century Brazil and Burton benefits from a century and a half of hindsight, and the specter of the possible implosion of Brazil's imagined community—and others—in the early twenty-first century.

A Rage to Live

Richard Francis Burton—travel writer, linguist, translator, ethnographer, explorer—is one of the most fascinating figures of the nineteenth century. In the words of one scholar of Victorian exploration and empire, he was a "furiously energetic multidisciplinarian."[4] Along with David Livingstone and Henry Morton

Stanley, he was one of the most famous explorers of the century, gaining initial recognition for his daring pilgrimage in 1853 to the inner sanctum of the Great Mosque at Mecca disguised as a Muslim.[5] His fame and notoriety increased as he tenaciously pursued the source of the Nile River in East Africa in the mid-1850s, leading to a deadly dispute with one of his former colleagues turned adversary, John Hanning Speke. As a British consul in West Africa, Brazil, Syria, and Trieste from 1861 to 1890, he continued to explore foreign regions, publish popular accounts of his travels, and edit and translate numerous works from Portuguese, German, Arabic, and Sanskrit. One of the two or three greatest linguists of his century (reputedly he mastered two dozen languages, including Arabic, Hindi, and Urdu), he gained even greater notoriety in the 1880s translating and publishing uncensored editions of the *Arabian Nights* (sixteen volumes), the *Kama Sutra*, and a major Arab treatise on sexuality. Richard published some of this work anonymously to avoid prosecution under Britain's strict obscenity laws.[6]

Richard Burton always made a strong and lasting impression on everyone he met. When fellow Brit Wilfrid Blunt encountered him in Buenos Aires in late 1868, the world-famous explorer had just finished his travels through Brazil and his three-year tour as British consul in Santos. He was at one of the lowest points in his life, depressed, and drinking heavily. Blunt later described Burton's face as "the most hideous I have ever seen, dark, cruel, treacherous, with eyes like a wild beast's. He reminded me of a black leopard, caged but unforgiving." Nevertheless, Blunt went on, "even the ferocity of his countenance gave place at times to more agreeable expressions, and I can just understand the infatuated fancy of his wife that in spite of his ugliness he was the most beautiful man alive."[7] On a "medical leave" after his posting in Brazil, he drank his way across the battlefields of Paraguay, the pampas of Argentina, and over the Andes to Chile and then Peru. In early 1869, while sitting in a café in Lima, Peru, a Foreign Office colleague spotted him and congratulated Burton on his appointment as consul in Damascus. Startled by this good news, he immediately boarded a ship to Buenos Aires via the Straits of Magellan—a five-thousand-mile voyage. In Buenos Aires he found months of accumulated mail from his wife, Isabel, and he immediately wrote

FIGURE I.3. Richard Francis Burton in 1870s. Etching of painting by Lord Leighton. Image in the public domain. Léopold Flameng, after Frederic, Lord Leighton.

the Foreign Office to accept his appointment. The South American chapter of his life drew to a close, but only after one more visit to the battlefields of Paraguay.[8]

Although he worked on at least a half dozen book projects that he later published, Richard's years in Brazil form a gap in his enormous literary productivity. From 1850 to 1865, he published

no less than seventeen books, most of them multiple volumes. He published another two dozen between 1870 and 1890 (and the *Arabian Nights* was sixteen volumes)! During his nearly four years in Brazil, no books appeared. *Travels in the Highlands of the Brazil* appeared shortly after his departure from South America in 1869.[9] He clearly did not stop writing during his years in Brazil. Short articles and essays appeared on a regular basis, and he formulated plans for several more books including a second (never written) book on the "lowlands" of Brazil. *Letters from the Battle-Fields of Paraguay* covering the months between his departure from Brazil and making his way across the pampas came out in 1870. We know very little, however, about Richard's peregrinations through Argentina, Chile, and Peru in 1869. As one biographer has noted, it is the most undocumented portion of his adult life.[10] Given Wilfrid Blunt's frank assessment during their meeting in Buenos Aires at the end of Richard's tour of duty in Santos, we can fairly well believe that he was at one of the lowest points in his life. The appointment to his dream job in Damascus, putting him back into the Middle East, no doubt reenergized him and snapped him out of his depression.

Richard's "midlife crisis" in Brazil marked a turning point, an interlude between the two great halves of his adult life. His expedition down the São Francisco River—however tame it might have been compared to his previous explorations—was his last. He would make other trips over the last twenty years of his life back to the Middle East and West Africa, but none of them came close to the explorations of the 1850s and 1860s. Just as his extraordinary travels would define the first half of his life, translations defined the second half. Richard's years in Brazil formed the transitional moment between the audacious explorer in his thirties and forties to the bold translator in his fifties and sixties.

Most of Richard's biographers spend very little space on his time in Brazil, dismissing its importance in comparison with his earlier explorations through the Middle East and Africa, and his later translations of Arabic and Indian works. One of his biographers, Byron Falwell, bitingly describes his Brazilian writing as "even duller and less popular than usual." An anonymous British reviewer quite rightly lambasted Richard for "letting his text tell only half of what he means to say, and adding the other half in

FIGURE I.4. Isabel Burton, 1864. Image in the public domain. From Isabel Burton's autobiography.

a note," forcing the reader "to break off two or three times in a page"![11] Richard's prose is often turgid and filled with the overwhelming detail that so often appeared in the travel accounts of the nineteenth century. At times, the approach of the ethnographer combined with the encyclopedist leads to minutiae that bore

the reader.[12] A couple of his biographers have astutely pointed out that Richard was something of a mix of Montesquieu and Humboldt. He missed nothing "and can bring to bear on each unique experience a vast range of comparative instances." Burton, says Frank McLynn, "is always interesting."[13] For the historian, however, this bounty of detail on everything from local food prices to the sartorial habits of rich and poor alike offers us some of the very rare glimpses into daily life that the mountains of government-produced, official documentation ignore.

Despite the infamous destruction of what was likely the most interesting material in Richard and his wife Isabel's personal papers, we do have an impressive amount of documentation on Richard Burton's time in Brazil. In addition to Richard's two-volume *Explorations in the Highlands of the Brazil* (dedicated to the "Right Hon. The Lord Stanley, P.C., M.P."), we have Isabel Burton's biography of Richard, her two-volume "autobiography," an extensive surviving correspondence for both Burtons that has been compiled on a website, Foreign Office records, surviving personal papers scattered from the Huntington Library in California to Chippenham, England, and a raft of biographies produced over more than a century. These sources, at times, allow us with the opportunity to cross-check information and opinions.[14]

To complicate matters, although we see Richard and Brazil in the 1860s through Richard's eyes, especially through his two-volume travel account, our view of Richard and the Brazil he experienced has also been shaped through Isabel's letters, her biography of Richard, her own autobiography, and her role in editing his works. The destruction of the couple's most personal journals and papers on Richard's death in 1890, and thereafter by her executors (following Isabel's detailed instructions), also profoundly shaped our view of both of them. For this chapter of their life, Isabel's editing and destroying shaped the surviving writings of Richard about Brazil. In particular, his deeply hypermasculine imperial gaze was consciously reframed and refined by Isabel's eyes and hands. This may be my interpretation of Richard's Brazil, but it is deeply inflected, in ways we cannot fully appreciate, by Isabel's role as his editor, publicist, and biographer.

A parade of foreign travelers moving through Brazil in the nineteenth century have left us with a profusion of rich and detailed

information, in accounts that we must read with great care and the customary skepticism of the historian.[15] For several decades now, historians, anthropologists, and literary scholars have analyzed, deconstructed, and decolonized travel accounts of North Americans and Europeans who fanned out across Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and the Americas, especially in the nineteenth century.[16] We are now well sensitized to the biases and prejudices that so often accompanied the "imperial eyes" of travel writers, especially the British. At its heart, the historian's challenge in using these accounts lies at the core of the fundamental dilemma of all historians in their craft—how to recover the past through sources that are always tainted by the attitudes and beliefs of their creators. No information, by definition, is neutral. One of the most important skills of the historian is the ability to read closely, carefully, attuned to the circumstances surrounding the creation of the source material, whether it be a diary, letter, government document, photograph, or travel account. In the best of cases, we have multiple sources from a variety of perspectives that allow us to cross-check and build a stronger case for the historical narratives we create. Too often, however, especially the farther one moves back in the past, the number of sources shrink, and the ability to cross-reference diminishes.

Compounding the task of the historian is the enormous imbalance in sources. Not only do the victors write history, but elites generate most of the material for those narratives. One of the greatest challenges are the "silences" of not only the vanquished but also the non-elites, the vast majority of those who have lived on this earth. The historian of Brazil, for example, has dozens of accounts written by foreign visitors and ample material generated by government officials and wealthy Brazilians. For the nineteenth century, the voices of the so-called subalterns are rare, and those few that exist are almost always "mediated" through the hands of others—notaries, courts, police, clergy.[17] As Richard Burton condescendingly observes and records bits of the lives of the enslaved and the lower classes, we have no records of what they may have been thinking of the many foreign travelers moving through their world. (How surprising and rewarding it would be to have accounts of the enslaved and the peasants about their encounters with these foreign travelers and their hosts!) Unlike in the United States, we

do not even have "slave narratives" for Brazil. How can the historian construct a reliable narrative in the face of the cacophony of elite voices and the almost complete silence of the poor and dispossessed?[18]

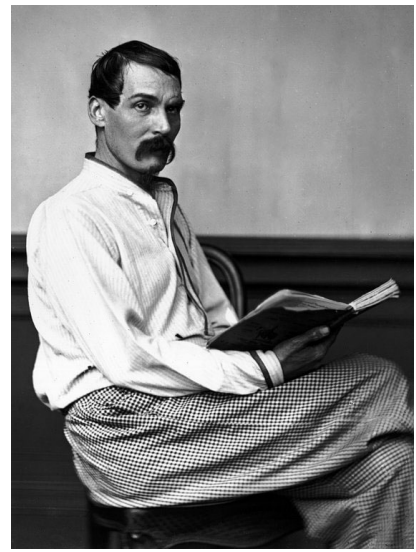


FIGURE I.5. Richard Francis Burton, 1864. Image in the public domain. Rischgitz.

When Richard Burton traversed the Brazilian backlands (*sertão*), he was only a year older (forty-six) than the Brazilian nation that had declared its independence from Portugal in 1822. In the aftermath of the wars for independence across all the Americas (1770s–1830s) Brazil became the only new nation to follow the path of empire and monarchy.[19] Like the new American republics, the Empire of Brazil (1822–1889) faced the daunting challenges of creating a new nation out of a former European colony. The Brazilian elites inherited a state apparatus (the instruments and institutions of power) from the Portuguese, but they would have to create a nation (an imagined community). On paper, Brazil was larger than what eventually became the forty-eight contiguous US states. In theory, it was six times the size of the young United States of America in 1822.

This Victorian empire in the tropics with its fair-haired, blue-eyed Emperor Pedro II was in some ways the most stable nation in the Americas for much of the nineteenth century. Bloody wars wracked much of North and South America, including the United States, and the old viceroyalties of Spain's American empire eventually fragmented into sixteen different countries. Brazil, a colony of truly continental dimensions, held together despite a series of internal rebellions from the1820s to the 1840s. The long reign of Pedro II (1840–1889) made Brazil unlike any other country in the Americas.[20]

During his three years as a British consul in Brazil, Burton personally regaled the emperor (in fluent Portuguese and French) with tales of his Middle Eastern and African exploits. As he did

everywhere he went, he read voraciously about local history, literature, economics, and politics, and he studied and wrote about the Brazilian nation in its youth with all its struggles, problems, and promise. With his excellent language skills in Portuguese, he stood out from so many of the foreign travelers who passed through Brazil in the nineteenth century, who were rarely able to speak the local language.

FIGURE I.6. Brazilian royal family, 1864. *Left to right, standing:* Princess Isabel, Comte d'Eu, Princess Leopoldina, Duke of Saxe-Coburg; *seated*, Pedro II, Empress Teresa Cristina. Image in the public domain. Joaquim Insley Pacheco.

EMPIRES AND EXPLORATIONS

Richard Burton's arrival in Brazil in 1865 came just as Great Britain was reaching its peak as the most powerful and expansive empire in world history.[21] A generation after Burton's death in 1890, World War I would mark the beginning of the end of four centuries of European global expansion and power. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, many different peoples and polities had surged outward from Europe, initiating waves of conquest and colonization that would reach their peak in the late nineteenth century, eventually circling the entire globe. When he stumbled into the islands of the Caribbean in late 1492, Christopher Columbus unknowingly set the planet on an irreversible and ongoing process of globalization and integration. Columbus and those who followed him—westward across the Atlantic and eastward into the Indian and Pacific Oceans—connected the Old World (Europe, Africa, Asia) with the New (the Americas) to create a rudimentary but truly global economy. Powerful and long-developing historical forces drove the Europe-

ans outward around the globe: the most advanced nautical technology, the revolutionary market forces of an emerging capitalist economy, and a cultural and religious worldview that envisioned the earth and its peoples as resources and souls that needed to be understood, subdued, and saved. The combination of these factors propelled Europeans outward in search of goods, souls, and conquest on a scale never seen before in world history.[22]

In the sixteenth century, the Spanish and the Portuguese formed the vanguard of this expansion. Over several centuries after the Columbian voyages, Spain built a colonial empire, primarily in the Americas, stretching from what today is the US Southwest and Southeast to Tierra del Fuego. Abundant silver extracted from the high deserts of northern Mexico and the Andes fueled the construction and maintenance of this empire, one that stretched its tentacles as far west as the Philippines (named after Philip II, 1556–1598) and southward into West Africa.[23] Unlike the Spanish, the Portuguese were primarily traders, not settlers. Between 1450 and 1550, they built the first truly global commercial empire that included coastal trading posts down the shores of Atlantic Africa, around the perimeter of the Indian Ocean, and into the Pacific to China (Macau) and Japan (Nagasaki). On the second Portuguese voyage to India in 1500, the fleet veered to the southwest in the Atlantic, stumbling upon what they believed was an island. Over the next century as the Portuguese profited immensely off trade with the East (trading spices and silver), this "island" played a very small part in their larger global and imperial ambitions.[24]

Increasing French incursions along the coast of South America compelled the Portuguese monarchy to pay more attention to the "Island of the True Cross," which gradually became known for the dense wood of the brazil tree that produced a deep red dye. In the last decades of the sixteenth century, the Portuguese planted sugar cane on the northeastern coast of Brazil in the new colonial captaincies of Bahia and Pernambuco. After all, they had more than a century of experience cultivating this luxury crop on the tiny islands of the eastern Atlantic: the Azores, Madeira, Cape Verde. Unable to cajole or compel the Native Americans to work on the rapidly expanding sugar plantations, the Portuguese began to import enslaved Africans, primarily from the areas that today

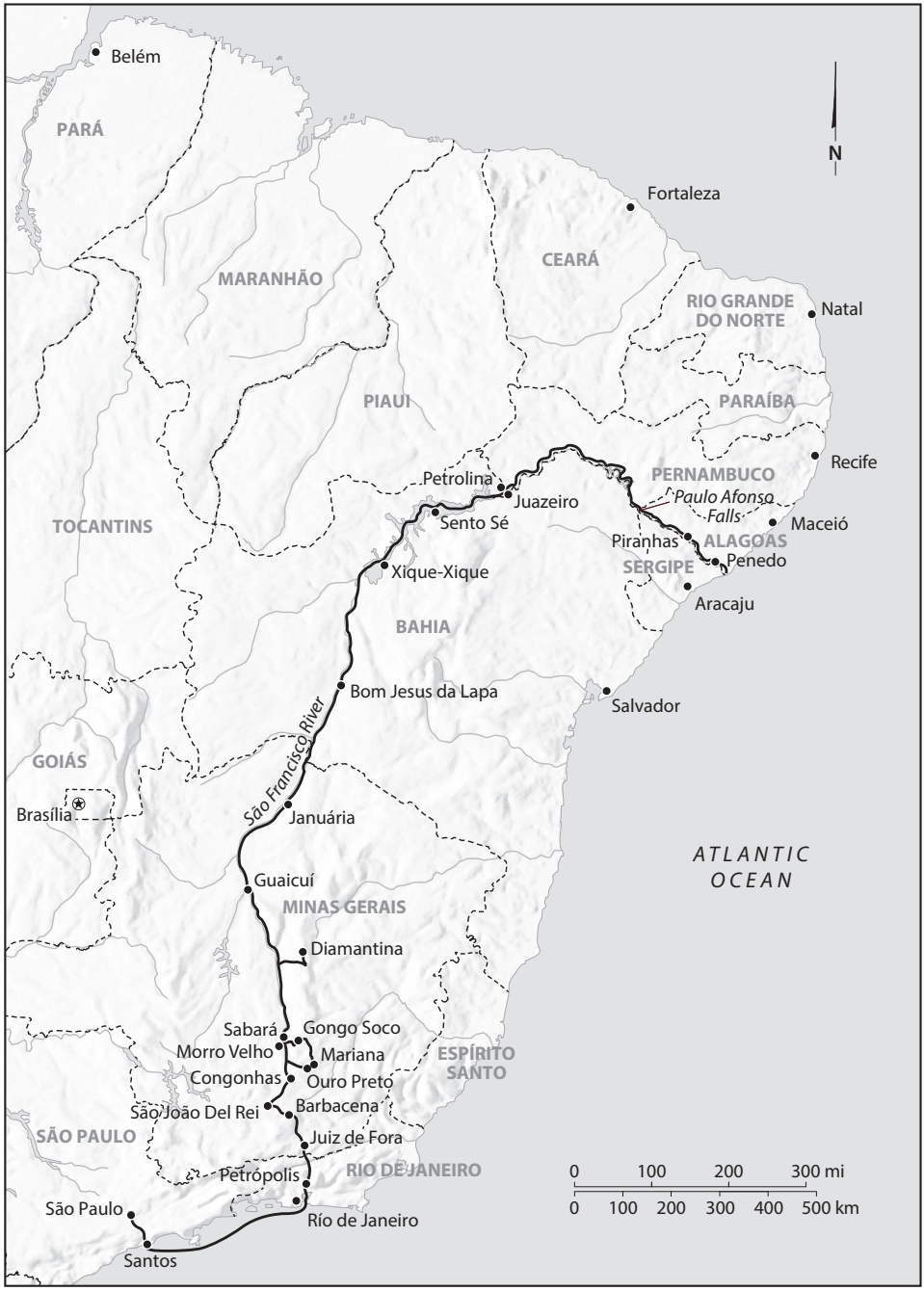


FIGURE I.7. Richard's route through eastern Brazil.

are coastal West Africa and Angola. Although enslaved Africans had been shipped to the Americas since the 1490s, the traffic to northeastern Brazil massively accelerated and consolidated a transatlantic slave trade that would forcibly transport millions of captive Africans and last until the second half of the nineteenth century.[25]

Sugar and slavery transformed Brazil into the heartland of the Portuguese world empire in the seventeenth century and created the plantation-slavery complex that the Spanish, English, French, and Dutch would reproduce in the islands of the Caribbean and the US South. The rise of the Dutch and English global navies after 1600 drastically challenged and weakened the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean and Asia, fueling the rise of new European world empires. The Dutch, French, and English moved into the Americas, challenging Spain and Portugal, and spread the sugar and slavery complex.[26]

The discovery of gold in the interior of Brazil around 1700, about 250 miles north of the small port of Rio de Janeiro, reinforced the central role of Brazil in the increasingly weak Portuguese empire.[27] The demand for labor in the region that the Crown called Minas Gerais again accelerated the Atlantic slave trade, shifting the major port of entry from Pernambuco and Bahia in the Northeast to Rio de Janeiro in the Southeast. Along with the rapid expansion of plantations in the French, Dutch, and English Caribbean, the gold rush in Brazil helped make the eighteenth century the most tragic for the Atlantic slave trade. Of the 11 million to 12 million enslaved Africans who arrived in the Americas between the late fifteenth century and the late nineteenth century, probably half crossed the Atlantic in the eighteenth century. Most of those captive souls endured the so-called Middle Passage—between Africa and the Americas—on British ships.[28]

With the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo in 1815, the British emerged as the dominant power in Europe and around the globe. They constructed an empire on which the "sun never set." Although they lost their thirteen colonies on the Eastern Seaboard of North America to rebellious colonials in the 1770s, they retained control of Canada, parts of the Caribbean, and coastal settlements and islands around the globe. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the British began to move into the

interior of Africa and India. On the South Asian subcontinent, they gradually gained greater control over peoples and terrains they had known and observed for centuries. For the British, and most of the world, the interior of Africa was a vast unknown. European explorers, especially British explorers, spread out across the globe in the nineteenth century in search of fame and fortune. They consciously followed in the tradition of Columbus, Magellan, and the great navigators of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The earlier explorers had navigated and charted the seas. The great frontiers of the nineteenth century were the inland regions of Asia, Africa, and the Americas.[29]

Just as the voyages of the navigators in earlier centuries had expanded the scope and power of the emerging European empires, the explorers of the nineteenth century advanced imperial ambitions even when operating independently of governments and armies. As in Richard Burton's case, the lines between officially sanctioned and private expeditions often blurred.[30] The British Admiralty, for example, commissioned the "scientific" expeditions of Captain James Cook across the Pacific Ocean in the second half of the eighteenth century. Although he sought to advance understanding of currents, climates, flora, fauna, and peoples of the Pacific, Cook's work was clearly designed to further the commercial and military goals of the British Empire.[31] The fledgling naturalist Charles Darwin went along on the HMS *Beagle* in the 1830s as a private citizen, but Captain Robert FitzRoy's objective was to map his way around the world to ease the path of British ships—military or commercial.[32]

Richard Francis Burton began his career as a surveyor in the army of the British East India Company in the 1840s, to generate some of these maps of empire. When he sought out the source of the Nile River in East Africa in the 1850s, he was on leave as army officer, partially financed by the Royal Geographical Society in London.[33] Often critical of British society and mores, and much too independent to follow faithfully the orders of officers or bureaucrats, Burton nonetheless served the aims of empire in his explorations, even when he did not consciously mean to do so. After he became an employee of the Foreign Office in 1861, a consul for the next three decades, Burton rarely explored (or published) to fulfill official duties, yet his findings served the voracious

needs of imperial expansion and control. As many British social anthropologists would come to realize in the twentieth century, any knowledge they generated not only helped the well-meaning to understand seemingly strange and exotic peoples, but that same knowledge could also be used to subdue, or eliminate, them.[34]

The Expedition, the Traveler, and the Historian

In June 1867 Richard Burton headed north from Rio de Janeiro into the Brazilian interior on an expedition that would last five months. He had convinced his superiors that this foray would provide valuable information on economic assets of the interior, especially on mineral resources.[35] After thoroughly inspecting the mountainous mining region for nearly two months, he boarded an improvised riverboat with abundant supplies, several Brazilian crew members, an expatriate US Southerner, and a young enslaved man from Morro Velho to serve as his cook. Richard and his constantly changing crew navigated 1,300 miles north and east along the São Francisco River, through the arid northeastern backlands, eventually emerging on the lush, tropical Atlantic coast in early November. In June 2022, 155 years later, I set out in Burton's footsteps beginning from São Paulo (where he lived), through the port of Santos (where he was British consul), to Rio de Janeiro and then north into the mining zone. Difficult to navigate in the nineteenth century, large sections of the upper São Francisco (where Burton began his voyage) no longer allow even the smallest boat traffic. The last 1,300 miles of my "voyage" combined time on the river and on the roads alongside it through the arid backlands of the Northeast.

A seasoned and cosmopolitan explorer of South Asia, the Middle East, the Americas, and Africa, Burton provides us with a panoramic view of Brazil in mid-century, commenting on politics, economics, race relations, social structures, cultural norms, and the environment. Understandably, Richard embodied many of the conceits and prejudices of the Victorian Englishman, despite his highly unusual and truly cosmopolitan life.[36] His enormous curiosity and compulsion to provide detailed information on all that he observed made Richard something of a self-taught anthropologist. In fact, he became one of the founders of the Anthropological Society of London in 1863, an organization notorious among historians today for its explicitly racialized and racist view

of humankind. Richard's incredibly detailed descriptions of the peoples he encountered on multiple continents—natives of India and Africa, Arab pilgrims, Mormons in Utah, Brazilians of all types—remain invaluable firsthand observations by an astute, observant, and highly opinionated Victorian Englishman.

As a citizen and diplomat of the world's most powerful empire, and one of the most seasoned travelers of his time, he provides us with a complex interlocutor for seeing Brazil from within and without, and in the larger context of the Americas and the world in the nineteenth century. As a citizen (but certainly not diplomat) of the most powerful empire of the twentieth century, I bring with me the some of the conceits and prejudices of the early twenty-first century native of the United States, profoundly tempered by fifty years studying, writing about, and traveling around Brazil and Latin America. My hope is that the reader will benefit from my analysis of Richard Burton's Brazil in the late 1860s—the perspective of the nineteenth-century British explorer via the twenty-first-century American historian. Along the way, I ponder Burton's view in his bit of the shattered mirror with my own, and what these reflections tell us about Brazil, Brazilians, and the pursuit of historical knowledge.

The River and Road Map

The allure of gold and diamonds drew Richard Burton into the heart of the eastern Brazilian Highlands. Just as the Morro Velho gold mine takes up half a dozen chapters and about seventy-five pages in volume 1 of *Explorations*, the reconnaissance of the diamond workings around Diamantina spans four chapters and sixty pages in volume 2. About one-third of the nine hundred pages of these two volumes focuses on detailed sketches of the gold mines and diamond deposits of Minas Gerais. About half of the first volume recounts the trek into the mining zone, and the second volume focuses entirely on the voyage down the São Francisco River—except for ten days at the beginning dedicated to the side trip overland to Diamantina. Burton's *Explorations*, then, tells three stories: the trek from Rio to gold mining zone, surveys of the gold and diamond mining zones, and then the river expedition to the Atlantic. Given Richard's view of the trip from Rio to Minas as a "holiday" excursion, the two-volume account offers two kinds of

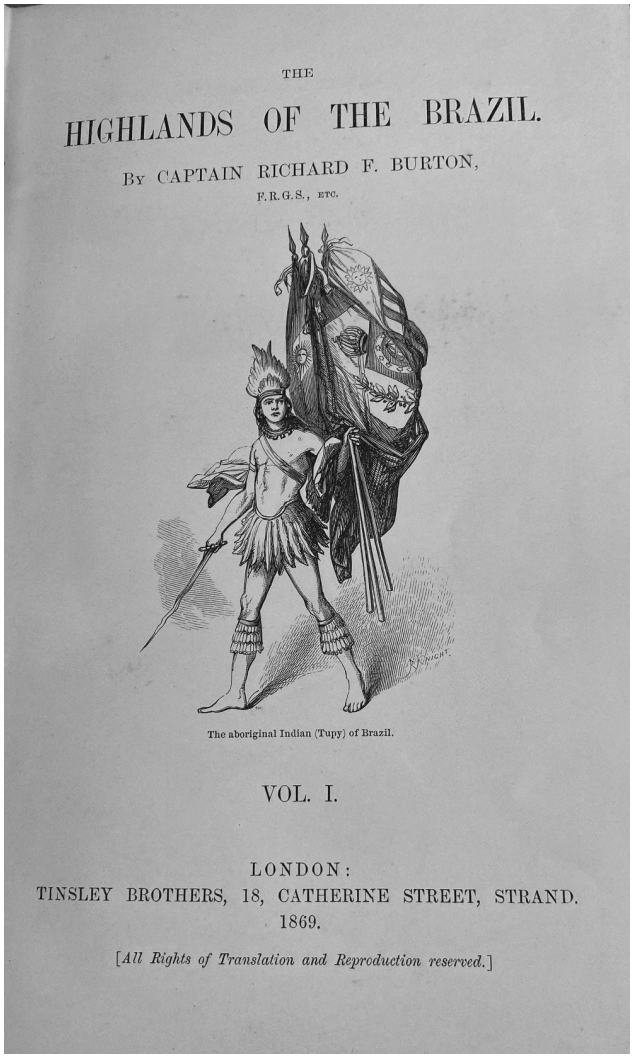
accounts—the first aimed at those interested in the economic opportunities of mining in Brazil, and the second at those who might see the potential of the São Francisco to become a vibrant economic corridor for the nation. In the first volume, Richard plays the role of the economic development promoter and in the second, the intrepid explorer.

The first chapter of *this* book summarizes Burton's extraordinarily full life to place his Brazilian experience within the larger context of five decades of travels on five continents. Richard's sojourn in Brazil came at roughly the middle of his seven decades of an eventful life (he arrived in Brazil at the age of forty-four and lived for another twenty-two years after his departure). For those uninitiated in things Brazilian, the second chapter provides a brief overview of the historical and geographical context of Brazil and the Burtonian moment in the 1860s. The next twelve chapters reconstruct each stage of his travel account, beginning with his principal residence (São Paulo), the port of Santos where he served as British consul, and the imperial court in Rio de Janeiro. This portion of his trip took a matter of days. Burton was already very familiar with these three cities, and his primary objective was to move into the rich gold mining zone of Minas Gerais before embarking on his long trek down the São Francisco River. Chapter 3 takes the Burtons from Rio through the summer imperial residence of Petrópolis and into southern Minas Gerais. Chapters 4–8 cover Richard and Isabel's weeks circuit through the mining zone. During these weeks, he and Isabel stayed at the most successful gold mining enterprise in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Brazil, the Morro Velho gold mine in the village of Congonhas de Sabará (today Nova Lima). Burton inspected and wrote in detail about the mine and the village, descending into the depths of the earth and walking amid the graves on the hill above the mine. By the time the Burtons arrived, the London-based St. John d'el Rey Mining Company had been burrowing ever deeper into the earth, following the rich vein of gold ore for more than three decades. The mine would continue to produce into the early twenty-first century, and the graves in both cemeteries atop the "old hill" would steadily increase.

In early August 1867, Burton began his river expedition at Sabará (a larger and more substantial town some fifteen miles

north of Congonhas de Sabará). Initially, he made his way down the winding Rio das Velhas (River of the Old Women) that flows north into the São Francisco (Saint Francis) just northeast of the town of Pirapora. His keen interest in mining shows, as he paused his voyage for a week to cross overland to the diamond mining zone around (the appropriately named) Diamantina. After thoroughly studying the local diamond deposits, he returned to the river and, in mid-September, finally reached the São Francisco. Chapters 9–11 focus on this time on the Rio das Velhas. The final three chapters, 12–14, recount the two-month-long voyage down the São Francisco River. He and his crews (he changed them a half dozen times) carefully making their way through a series of rapids that made the river unnavigable for boats or ships of any serious size. Near the end of his trip, Richard abandoned his rough-hewn vessel and approached on foot the impressive Paulo Afonso Falls, one of the prime objectives of his expedition. His published account ends rather abruptly after his detailed description of the falls, as he made his way the short distance to the Atlantic coast and caught a steamer back to Rio de Janeiro in early November 1867.

Months later, Richard fell deathly ill. Gradually nursed back to health by a distraught Isabel, he resigned his consular position and took a medical leave, heading for Argentina and Paraguay hoping to witness firsthand the bloody war Argentina and Brazil had been waging for three years against Paraguay. Isabel packed up their belongings, including the manuscript of a book on his expedition. On her arrival in England, she was able to persuade the Foreign Secretary, Lord Stanley (a friend of her family), to appoint Richard as consul in Damascus. She also arranged publication of the book, but not before adding her own short preface complaining about Richard's "anti-Catholic" comments in the two-volume account![37] Although the Burtons would never return to Brazil, he took with him a project that he had been wrestling with during his time there, a translation of the epic poem *The Lusiads*. Written in the sixteenth century by Portugal's most legendary author, Luís de Camões, the saga captures Portugal at the moment of its greatest imperial reach, from Brazil to Japan. The Portuguese consider the epic a poetic rendering of the formation of their national identity. Richard would not finish and publish the six-volume translation until 1880.[38]


THE

HIGHLANDS OF THE BRAZIL.

By CAPTAIN RICHARD F. BURTON,

F.R.G.S., ETC.

The aboriginal Indian (Tupy) of Brazil.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18, CATHERINE STREET, STRAND.
1869.

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FIGURE I.8. Title page of *Explorations in the Highlands of the Brazil*, vol. 1. Image in the public domain.

Richard Burton carefully and enthusiastically scrutinized a Brazil in the 1860s that was just starting to become a nation, just beginning to construct the institutions and symbols of a national identity and community. The Brazil of the early twenty-first century, a nation that has come of age over the last century and a half, seemingly bears little resemblance to Richard Burton's Brazil. Nevertheless, to invoke the great novelist William Faulkner,

"The past is never dead. It's not even past."[39] All nations, like all individuals, bear the burdens of their history. Brazil is no different, and perhaps feels those burdens more acutely than most countries. As I retrace Richard Burton's steps in the following chapters, I seek to stress the particular historical moment that he witnessed in mid-nineteenth-century Brazil—its landed aristocracy, slave society, and coffee economy, with a monarchy attempting to bridge deep regional, racial, and cultural divides through the construction of national infrastructure, and early efforts to create some sense of national identity. In the epilogue I reflect on the Brazil of the 1860s, the nation it became, and the fragility of historical knowledge, place, and perspective.