

## A NEWLY IDENTIFIED BRAZILIAN PAINTING BY ROBERT DAMPIER

### UMA PINTURA BRASILEIRA RECÊM-IDENTIFICADA DE ROBERT DAMPIER

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**RESUMO:** Este artigo apresenta uma pintura a óleo recém-descoberta do pouco conhecido artista britânico Robert Dampier (1800–74), retratando o Pão de Açúcar com dois homens escravizados no Rio de Janeiro, pintado no meio da década de 1820. A pintura, que se encontra no Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP), foi anteriormente atribuída a Henry Chamberlain e Nicolas-Antoine Taunay, mas a evidência de que é realmente de Dampier é confirmada por meio de fontes primárias (incluindo desenhos originais de Dampier em posse de seus descendentes) e comparação visual com outras obras conhecidas do artista. Uma segunda pintura da coleção Geyer, no Rio, também é atribuída a Dampier pela primeira vez. Com a confirmação da atribuição a Dampier, o quadro do MASP é comparado com outras obras dos artistas viajantes britânicos. Por fim, tendo em mente o claro interesse do artista pela paisagem tropical, o artigo considera a importância da paisagem em suas obras mais conhecidas, quatro retratos pintados no Havaí em 1825.

**Palavras-chave:** Robert Dampier; Arte Britânica; Artista Viajante; Escravidão; Paisagem Pitoresca

**ABSTRACT:** This article presents a newly discovered oil painting by the little-known British artist Robert Dampier (1800–74), depicting the Sugarloaf

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Mountain with two enslaved men in Rio de Janeiro, painted in the mid-1820s. The painting, in the Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP), was previously attributed to Henry Chamberlain and Nicolas-Antoine Taunay, but the evidence for its really being by Dampier is affirmed using primary sources (including original drawings by Dampier in his descendants' ownership) and visual comparison with the artist's other known works. A second painting in the Geyer collection in Rio is also attributed to Dampier for the first time. With the attribution to Dampier confirmed, the MASP picture is compared with other works by the British travelling artists. Lastly, with the artist's clear interest in the tropical landscape in mind, the article considers the importance of landscape in his best-known works, four portraits painted in Hawaii in 1825.

**Keywords:** Robert Dampier; British Art; Travelling Artist; Slavery; Picturesque Landscape

**Figure 1.** Robert Dampier, *View from the Praia da Glória* ("A Ponta do Calabouço"), ca. 1826. Oil on canvas, 26.5 x 32.5 cm, Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP).



Source: MASP

In the Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP) is a small nineteenth-century painting depicting a view of the Pão de Açúcar (Sugarloaf Mountain) in Rio de Janeiro, with two enslaved Black men and two cows on a beach in the foreground [Figure 1]. It was originally attributed to the English lieutenant and amateur watercolourist Henry Chamberlain, but it has since been reattributed to Nicolas-Antoine Taunay.<sup>2</sup> Using newly discovered primary sources, this article challenges this attribution by proposing that the work is in fact by the little-known English artist Robert Dampier (1800–74). A small painting in the Geyer collection in Rio is also attributed to Dampier here for the first time. These works are thereby reinstated into the category of oil paintings made by British travelling artists in nineteenth-century Brazil, of which there are very few.<sup>3</sup> This also increases the number of known oil paintings by Dampier from eight to ten. Finally, attributing the two pictures to Dampier affirms his interest in the tropical landscape as a key theme, which was further expressed in his portraits painted in Hawaii in 1825.

## DAMPIER'S FORMATION IN THE TROPICS

Dampier was more than a transient visitor to Brazil: he lived in Rio for six years. He was born in Codford St Peter in Wiltshire in 1799, the son of the Reverend John Dampier and one of twelve surviving children.<sup>4</sup> The facts of Robert's early life and artistic training are still unknown. There is evidence that the Dampiers had connections with France, so perhaps Robert received some art tuition there rather than in England.<sup>5</sup> The family's connection with Brazil came about in March 1817, when Robert's sister Mary married William Henry May, an English merchant who had lived in Brazil since at least 1810.<sup>6</sup> Mary accompanied her husband to Rio, followed by Robert, who began working as a clerk in his brother-in-law's firm. The three were mentioned in

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2 MASP still uses the outdated attribution to Chamberlain, despite the information to the contrary.

3 The best-known examples are by Charles Landseer and Augustus Earle from the 1820s, and by Marianne North from the 1870s. For Landseer, see Wilkes (2023).

4 Robert was baptised on 20 December 1799 at Codford St Peter.

5 Author's correspondence with the Dampier family.

6 The couple married in Le Havre on 11 March 1817. Mary was John Dampier's second daughter. A manuscript by May, "Journal of William Henry May, of his Travels, in Company with Sir James Gambier, from Botafogo Bay to the South of Brazil", was published in Brazil as May (2006).

a letter by Thomas Masterman Hardy in November 1819: “She [Mary] is married to a Mr May who is a Merchant here, & the Brother [Robert] is a Clerk with him, She is really a very nice woman & I believe her husband is making money very fast” (Broadley & Bartelot, 1906, p. 181).<sup>7</sup> It appears that Robert and Mary’s sister Catherine also lived in Rio, as there is a record of her marriage in that city in 1825 (*Blackwood’s*, 1825, p. 226).<sup>8</sup>

Dampier’s presence in Brazil therefore resulted from the dominance of British trade in the country. His brother-in-law William had probably gone to Rio soon after the signing of the Treaty of Navigation and Commerce – the so-called Strangford Treaty – by Britain and Portugal in February 1810. This granted special commercial privileges to Britain, whose navy had escorted the Portuguese royal family when they transferred their court from Lisbon to Rio during the Napoleonic Wars in 1807–8. The treaty meant that British manufactured goods imported into Brazil received a maximum tariff of only 15 percent (Bethell, 2018); other countries paid 24 percent, and as Manchester (1933, p. 89) has pointed out, England was afforded an even lower rate than Brazil’s “mother country”, Portugal. The English community in Rio prospered, although in 1819 there were only around 400 such residents in the city, out of an estimated population of 150,000 (*Christian Herald*, 1819, p. 282).

Consequently, British goods flooded into the Brazilian market after 1810. Maria Graham’s description of Rio in 1823 eloquently captures the proliferation of English commerce in the capital:

There are a good many English shops, [...] and plenty of English pot-houses, whose Union Jacks, Red Lions, Jolly Tars, with their English inscriptions, vie with those of Greenwich or Deptford. [...] Most of the streets are lined with English goods: at every door the words London superfine meet the eye: printed cottons, broad cloths, crockery, but above all, hardware from Birmingham, are to be had little dearer than at home, in the Brazilian shops. (Graham, 1824, p. 189)

Certainly, May’s business would have thrived in this environment, as mentioned in Hardy’s letter. After 1823, May’s firm was conducted in part-

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7 Letter from Hardy to “Jos”, 20 November 1819, Rio de Janeiro. Robert is mentioned in another Rio letter from Hardy, 7 September 1822 (Broadley & Bartelot, 1906, p. 190).

8 “March 1. At Rio de Janeiro, John L. Macfarquhar, Esq. to Catherine, daughter of the Rev. John Dampier, Rector of Codford [Wiltshire], Dorset, and Langton Thactraver [*sic*], Wilts.”



nership with another Englishman, Charles Lukin, and was based in the Rua do Ouvidor. It was eventually dissolved by May and Lukin in August 1825 (*London Gazette*, 1826).<sup>9</sup>

The details of Dampier's life in Rio are not known, but he evidently liked it there, later writing that he "should have been extremely unwilling to have gone back to England" after living there for six years (Dampier, 1971, p. 3). He also developed a proficient knowledge of Portuguese. His descendants have speculated that it was in Rio that Dampier learnt to paint, and this is certainly possible as he was only about eighteen when he went there. Notably, he appears in Maria Graham's *Journal of a Voyage to Brazil*, perhaps the best-known nineteenth-century British text about the country. Dampier met Graham through the Mays, whom she mentions several times in her diary: William was a friend from her childhood and Mary was one of the few English people whose company she enjoyed at Rio (Graham, 1824, p. 159).<sup>10</sup> In August 1823, when Graham went on an excursion to visit Santa Cruz near Rio, Dampier offered to accompany her. She described him on this occasion as "a well-bred, intelligent young man, whose taste for the picturesque beauties of nature agrees with my own" (Graham, 1824, p. 274). He therefore shared Graham's delight in the natural scenery around the city and it is likely that she also knew of his artistic capabilities.

Dampier and Graham undertook the six-day round trip to Santa Cruz and back, passing through several villages and farms along the way. The travellers were awed by the tropical scenery; they "loitered a little" to wonder at the scenery around Campo Grande, "where the rocks, trees, plains and buildings, seem all placed on purpose to be admired" (Graham, 1824, p. 281). In his own travel diary, Dampier used similar language to describe the scenery of Chile: "The country [...] presenting continually very picturesque views", confirming Graham's supposition that his taste was an all-encompassing one (Dampier, 1971, p. 82). Graham's South America sketchbook in the

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9 William May and Charles Lukin's partnership, "carried on at Rio de Janeiro, [...] under the firm of May and Lukin, and in London, under the firm of Charles Lukin, junior", was "dissolved by mutual consent" on 16 August 1825.

10 "I had the pleasure of seeing on board Mr W. May, who has long been resident in Brazil, and with whom I had spent many happy hours in early life". On 6 October 1823, Graham wrote: "of the English I see, and wish to see, very little of any body but Mrs May" (Graham, 1824, p. 316).

British Museum contains several drawings which were made during this trip, as the inscriptions correspond to places named in her journal.<sup>11</sup>

**Figure 2.** Robert Dampier, *Self-portrait*, ca. 1826. Oil on canvas, private collection, England.



Source: the artist's descendants

On 18 December 1824, Dampier left Rio aboard the HMS *Blonde*, bound for Hawaii. He was invited by the captain, George Anson Byron (cousin of the poet), who had been tasked with transporting the bodies of King Kamehameha II and queen consort Kamāmalu back to Hawaii following their deaths during a visit to England in July 1824 (Dampier, 1971, p. vii). It is not known how Dampier and Byron became acquainted; according to Pauline King Joerger, “There is evidence that Byron knew of him and his family through acquaintances in the Navy” (Dampier, 1971, p. ix). During his three-month stay in Hawaii from May until July 1825, Dampier painted four portraits representing Prince Kamehameha III and Princess Nahi’ena’ena and an indigenous boy and girl, ‘Karaikapa and Tetuppa [Figures 13–16], which will be discussed in more detail

<sup>11</sup> “Sketches, mainly of South America”, 1821–5, British Museum, 1845,0405.14, nos 37, 39, 109, 112, 113, 116, 117.

below.<sup>12</sup> Probably around this time, he also painted a self-portrait in oils [Figure 2], which shows his confidence with the medium by this period. In 1826, after his return to England, he also painted two seascapes depicting events from the HMS *Blonde's* voyage, probably for Captain Byron: the ship avoiding an iceberg at Cape Horn and discovering the wreck of the *Francis Mary*.<sup>13</sup> After this, Dampier seems to have stopped practising art professionally. He married Sophia Francis Roberts in London in November 1828, began studying law at Christ's College, University of Cambridge and eventually became an ordained minister (Cambridge, 1830, p. 416).<sup>14</sup> He continued to sketch as a hobby later in life but did not make any more paintings before his death in 1874.

**Figure 3.** Robert Dampier, *View of the Outeiro da Glória and Guanabara Bay*, 1824. Oil on canvas, 25.5 x 32.5 cm, Museu Castro Maya, Rio de Janeiro.



Source: Museu Castro Maya

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- 12 Dampier described the process of painting them in his diary (Dampier, 1971, pp. 43–44, 49).
  - 13 Both paintings are now in Washington Place, Honolulu. They were bequeathed, along with Figures \* and \*, to Washington Place by Frederick Byron, 10th Baron Byron.
  - 14 He is listed as a member of the university beginning in 1830; *The Cambridge University Calendar for the Year 1830*. Cambridge: J & J. J. Deighton, 1830, p. 416.

The only painting from Dampier's Brazilian phase previously known to scholars is his view of the Outeiro da Glória (Glória Hill) with Guanabara Bay [Figure 3]. The painting was acquired by the Brazilian collector Raymundo Castro Maya and is on permanent public display in the Museu da Chácara do Céu in Rio (Castro Maya, 1996). In the background on the right is the Pão de Açúcar, with Niterói across the bay on the left, while atop the hill is the striking eighteenth-century church of Nossa Senhora da Glória, which was frequently depicted by European travelling artists.

An inscription on the back of the painting dates it to 1824, while Dampier was still living in Brazil, and states that the Mays lived in a house behind the church.<sup>15</sup> They were some of the hill's numerous English residents: Chamberlain even described it as "an English Village" in 1821 because of the quantity of British people who chose to live there. A merchant, Robert Maiden, built himself a "very excellent mansion" on the hill, together with "three or four neat houses, all occupied by English gentlemen", according to James Henderson (1821, p. 52), who visited Rio in 1819. Besides the Maidens and Mary and William May, the Outeiro's residents during the 1820s included the merchants Edward Fry and George Thomas Standfast, the reverends Robert Prentice Crane and Robert Walsh and the naval captains Basil Hall and Charles Orlando Bridgeman. Dampier himself may have lived on the hill with his sister and brother-in-law. In March 1823, after returning to Brazil from Chile, Maria Graham and her cousin William Glennie also rented a cottage there, "close to Mr May's [...] It is pleasant to me on many accounts: it is cool, [...] almost surrounded by the sea, which breaks against the wall" (Graham, 1824, p. 221).

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15 On the back of the canvas are three inscriptions: "View of the entrance into the harbour of Rio with the Sugarloaf, & Gloria church", "Rob<sup>t</sup> Dampier / 1824" and "Mrs May's house situated / behind the church". I am grateful to Denise Matos of the Museu Castro Maya for providing this information.

**Figure 4.** Attributed to Robert Dampier, *View of Botafogo Bay*, ca. 1818–26. Oil on panel(?), 19 x 33 cm, Casa Geyer/Museu Imperial, Rio de Janeiro (CG.315)



Source: Enciclopédia Itaú Cultural

Dampier probably also painted a small oil which is now in the Geyer collection in Rio, which has been tenuously attributed to Chamberlain [Figure 4].<sup>16</sup> (Though an adept watercolourist, Chamberlain lacked the technical skills necessary to execute sophisticated works in oil.) The Geyer painting is a picturesque representation of Botafogo Bay in Rio, dominated by the lofty peak of the Corcovado on the right and with a boat landing on the beach in the immediate foreground. Its softening approach to the tropical landscape recalls English paintings like Richard Wilson's prospect of the pagoda and bridge at Kew from 1762 [Figure 5], which also includes a boat and a twilit landscape. Dampier's painting reflects Chamberlain's description of the bay as "interesting and romantick [...] a retreat from the bustle of the City", which made it "a favourite place of residence, and of fashionable resort when the heat of the day is over" (Chamberlain, 1821). The villas which had sprung up along the shore of the bay were a point of interest for Dampier, who carefully depict their red-tiled roofs and whitewashed walls

<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that these observations are based only on reproductions of the painting (the Casa Geyer in Rio is currently closed to researchers, so it has not been possible to see the original in person).

lining the shore. The way that these elements have been painted, together with the slender trees on the extreme left and the overall colour palette, suggest the same artist's hand as the prospect of the Outeiro da Glória by Dampier.

**Figure 5.** Richard Wilson, *Kew Gardens: The Pagoda and Bridge*, 1762. Oil on canvas, 47.6 x 73 cm, Yale Center for British Art, USA.



Source: Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection

## REATTRIBUTING THE PAINTING IN MASP

Having provided some background to Dampier's life in Brazil, we can now turn to the painting in MASP [Figure 1]. This is one of several oils which were misattributed to Chamberlain in the twentieth century (Ferrez, 2000, p. 198). It was reattributed to Taunay by Pedro Corrêa do Lago in 2000 (Aguilar, 2000, pp. 116–7), and this was accepted by Schwarcz (2008, p. 253) and Jouve (2003, pp. 292–3).<sup>17</sup> For these scholars, the Pão de Açúcar in the picture was painted in a similar way to Taunay's representation of the same mountain in his

<sup>17</sup> There is also a document written by Schwarcz in MASP's archives, folder no. 821 P, providing justifications for the reattribution from Chamberlain to Taunay.



view from the convent of Santo Antônio [Figure 6], while the cows in the foreground evoke Taunay's Brazilian landscapes, which often feature cattle (Aguilar, 2000, p. 116). However, the rediscovery of two sketches by Dampier which very closely match the MASP painting effectively confirms his authorship. It should be noted that, although the painting has been titled *The Calabouço Point* [A Ponta do Calabouço], referring to the Calabouço Prison, it more likely depicts the view from the *praia* (beach) that once existed below the Outeiro da Glória, in a different part of the bay (Ferrez, 2000, p. 198).<sup>18</sup> Hence a more accurate title, *View from the Praia da Glória*, will be used here.

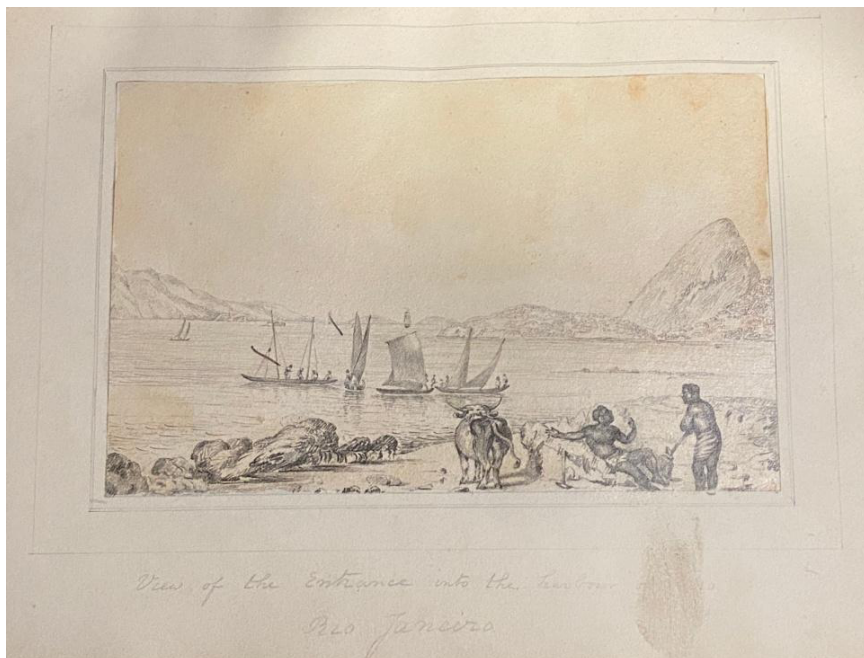
**Figure 6.** Nicolas-Antoine Taunay, *View of Rio de Janeiro from the Convent of Santo Antônio*, 1816. Oil on canvas, 45 x 56.5 cm, Museu Nacional de Belas Artes, Rio de Janeiro



Source: Wikimedia Commons

<sup>18</sup> Ferrez identifies the location as the former Praia da Glória.

**Figure 7.** Robert Dampier, *View of the Entrance into the harbour of Rio, Rio Janeiro*, ca. 1818–26. Pencil on paper, private collection, England. Study for Figure 1.



Source: the artist's descendants. Reproduced by kind permission of the Dampier family.

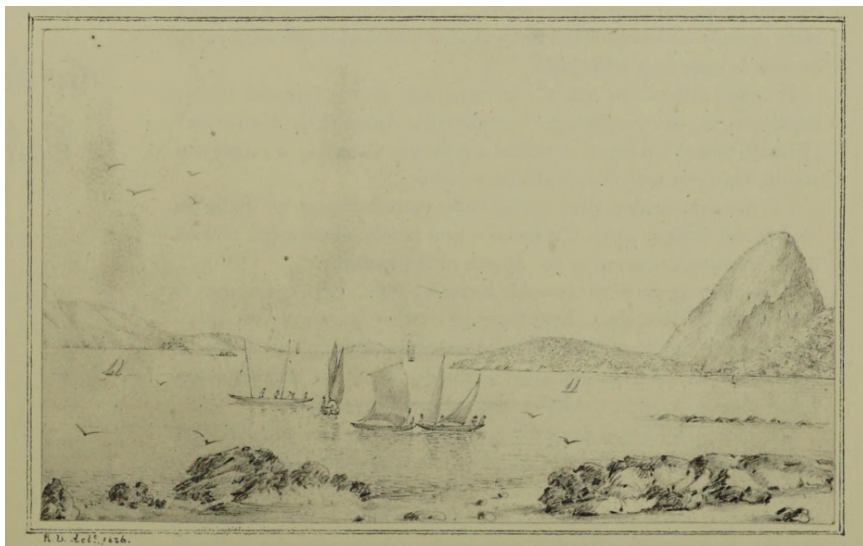
One of Dampier's drawings [Figure 7], which has never been published before, is identical to the MASP picture, lacking only one of the cows.<sup>19</sup> It was probably done while the artist was still living in Rio; the beach was situated close to his sister and brother-in-law's house on the Glória Hill, making it a natural choice for a leisurely landscape sketch. The second sketch [Figure 8] is inscribed "R.D. del<sup>t</sup> 1826" and lacks the foreground figures but is otherwise identical. The date of 1826 demonstrates that this drawing was not done in Brazil, as Dampier had permanently left the country two years earlier. He probably reused the first, undated sketch [Figure 7], simply omitting the Black men and

19 The drawing is inscribed below: "View of the Entrance of the harbour of Rio / Rio Janeiro". It is one of 24 sketches of Brazil and Hawaii by Dampier which were bound into an album by his grandson, Cecil Dampier, and is still in the family's possession. There are two more Brazil drawings in the album, both of which have been reproduced (Dampier, 1971, p. 11 [inscribed "View near Rio de Janeiro" in the family album], p. 7 [inscribed "View of the outer harbour of St Catherine's Brazil"]).



cows. The purpose of the 1826 drawing may be explained by the fact that several of Dampier's Hawaii landscape sketches are also dated 1826 and were reproduced as engravings for the official account of the HMS *Blonde's* voyage which was published in 1827 (Byron, 1826).<sup>20</sup> Not all of Dampier's drawings were used; as Thompson (2015, p. 53) has shown, his prospect of the crater of the Kilauea volcano in Hawaii, for instance, was deemed insufficiently accurate for publication. He was eventually paid £30 for his drawings by the book's publisher, John Murray, a fee negotiated by his friend Maria Graham, who had edited the book using Dampier's travel diary as one of her sources (Skinner, 2010, p. 12).

**Figure 8.** Robert Dampier, *The Praia da Glória*, 1826. Pencil on paper, location unknown.



Source: Dampier, *To the Sandwich Islands*, p. 4 (original drawing unlocated).

As his Rio drawing was not included – whether it was rejected by Murray or withdrawn by Dampier himself is unclear – Dampier may have

<sup>20</sup> For example, the sketch of a view near Honolulu by Dampier (1971, p. 40) appears as the print *View near Honoruru, Oahu* in Byron (1826); also the waterfall at Wailuku River by Dampier (1971, p. 50), repr. in Byron (1826) as *Waterfall in Byron Bay*. This book was compiled by Graham from Dampier's and George Byron's travel journals, but only the latter was named on the title page. The book's title page gives the publication date as 1826 but it was really published in 1827.

decided to develop his first sketch [Figure 7] into an oil painting, perhaps to take advantage of his recent exposure in Graham's book. His published drawings were described as "exquisite" by one reviewer, while another declared that they had "evidently been made by a practised hand", so Dampier may have felt encouraged to continue the painting practises which he had developed in Rio and Hawaii (*Meyer's*, 1827, p. 414; *Eclectic Review*, 1827, p. 299). He might also have seen Landseer's painting of the Pão de Açúcar [Figure 10] which was exhibited at the annual exhibition of the Society of British Artists in London in 1827. In the same year, William Havell sent a watercolour to the exhibition of the Society of Painters in Water Colours, inspired by his own trip to Rio in 1816.<sup>21</sup> It depicts the lush tropical garden of the *chácara* (country house) called Braganza, in Niterói, which was originally gifted by Dom João VI to Admiral William Sidney Smith in 1808. It is not improbable that Dampier saw this and Landseer's oil in London, and that they inspired him to paint his own picture derived from his earlier sketch, possibly for exhibition purposes.

In light of this new evidence, it is difficult to see the *View from the Praia da Glória* in MASP as a work by Taunay. Would Dampier, a competent draughtsman, have needed to copy a picture by another artist and pass it off as his own? If the painting is by Taunay, where could Dampier have copied it? Jouve (2003, p. 292) has stated that the MASP painting was once owned by the Chamberlain family, although she appears to have confused this with the misattribution to Henry Chamberlain. According to Lago (2008, 146), *View from the Praia da Glória* can only trace its provenance back to the Brazilian collector João Fernando de Almeida Prado, who acquired it in around 1935.<sup>22</sup> As Almeida Prado was in frequent contact with auctioneers and book dealers in London (for example, he bought an album of watercolours by Chamberlain there in 1925), he likely acquired the picture from an English source. Still, as its nineteenth-century provenance is unknown, it is hard to know where Dampier could have seen the painting to draw a copy of it, supposing it is by Taunay.

21 Now in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, entitled *Garden Scene on the Braganza Shore*.

22 Marquez (1998) says that the painting was donated to MASP by Almeida Prado but does not give a year. MASP's website says that the painting was donated in 1987, but there are documents in its archive detailing Almeida Prado's donation in October 1981 (MASP archives, folder no. 821 P).

There are also stylistic elements which align the MASP picture with Dampier's two other landscapes discussed in this article. The paint was applied more loosely than in Taunay's works, which are finely detailed and densely structured. The boats were thinly overlaid onto the sea background, while the human figures inside them were conveyed using quick dabs of paint, with additional horizontal strokes for the reflections in the water. The same characteristics appear in *View of Botafogo Bay*, discussed above [Figure 4]. Furthermore, the visible, sketchy brushwork used for the Pão de Açúcar and surrounding mountains recalls Dampier's painting of the Outeiro da Glória [Figure 3], and these two pictures have similar tonal ranges of light pinks, greys and greens in the mountain sections. Jouve (2003, p. 292) has suggested that the cows in the foreground of the MASP painting were added by Taunay in collaboration with one of his artist sons, but this seems improbable, as Lago (2008) concurs.<sup>23</sup> As the newly published drawing by Dampier [Figure 7] demonstrates, he included one of the cows in his first idea for the scene. Cattle appear in another of his Rio drawings in the Dampier family album [Figure 9], which may have been sketched during the artist's trip to Santa Cruz with Maria Graham.

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23 Jouve wrote: "les vaches curieuses, telles que Taunay les faisait alors, sans doute en collaboration avec ses fils, Félix ou Adrien".

**Figure 9.** Robert Dampier, *View near Rio de Janeiro*, ca. 1823. Pencil on paper, private collection, England.



Source: the artist's descendants. Reproduced by kind permission of the Dampier family.

In fact, Taunay painted almost the same landscape as Dampier's picture, and it provides a clear point of contrast [Figure 10].<sup>24</sup> The viewpoint faces more towards the left, cropping out the Pão de Açúcar on the right. When compared with Dampier's *Praia da Glória*, Taunay's style is very different, communicating the close textures of the rippling water and breaking waves and providing ample details of the boats and their passengers, unlike those in Dampier's picture. If the latter is by Taunay, it was not executed with the same high level of finish. In fact, of the four paintings which were reattributed from Chamberlain to Taunay in 2000, the MASP picture is the weakest match; Lago (2008, pp. 146, 148) even declared that it could be mistaken for a

<sup>24</sup> This painting was part of the Rev. Chauncey Hare Townshend's bequest to the V&A in 1868, but how it came to be in Townshend's possession is unknown. It is signed and dated by Taunay.

“lesser work”, and that it is an anomaly in Taunay’s oeuvre because it is much smaller than his other Rio landscapes.<sup>25</sup>

**Figure 10.** Nicolas-Antoine Taunay, *Coast scene, Rio de Janeiro*, ca. 1817. Oil on canvas, 45.7 x 56.5 cm, Victoria & Albert Museum, London.



Source: Victoria & Albert Museum

The resemblances between Dampier’s and Taunay’s paintings invite alternative questions: did Dampier see the French artist’s works in Rio and derive inspiration from them? He may have seen the two Taunay pictures owned by the Chamberlain family, one of which places the Pão de Açúcar at the extreme right, as in *View from the Praia da Glória*. That there are similarities is undeniable, but this does not mean that the MASP painting is by Taunay – the evidence presented here all points to Dampier as the true

<sup>25</sup> Lago wrote: “Esta é a menor das vistas pintadas por Taunay no Brasil [...] A retribuição deste quadro a Taunay enriquece a compreensão de seu trabalho entre nós, apesar da tela poder passar por uma obra menor – em função apenas de seu tamanho”.

author. Yet as he was only 18 years old when he moved to Brazil, he may have continued to receive artistic training in Rio, improving his technique so that he was able to paint the portraits in Hawaii, which will be discussed below.

The reattribution of *View from the Praia da Glória* to Dampier does not lessen its significance, as it places two enslaved Black men in a prominent position – a relatively rare characteristic in nineteenth-century British art. Schwarcz (2008, p. 253), following the painting's other title, *The Calabouço Point*, has explained the men's presence by the beach's presumed proximity to the Calabouço Prison, where enslaved people were imprisoned and tortured. As mentioned, however, the painting depicts the beach below the Outeiro da Glória, in a different part of the bay; moreover, the prison had been transferred to the Morro do Castello in 1813, long before Dampier arrived in Brazil. It could thus be argued that Dampier was simply creating a bucolic, picturesque scene in keeping with his other Brazilian landscapes, avoiding any unpleasant associations. The contrast with Earle's and Landseer's drawings of enslaved men being whipped, or Earle's violent painting of a slave market in Recife (ca. 1823, Casa Geyer/Museu Imperial), could not be greater.<sup>26</sup> The men's hammers included by Dampier hint at the gruelling work which they have been undertaking, but he has avoided showing the work itself. With their relaxed, conversational poses, there is little to distinguish the men from the rural labourers who repose in the foregrounds of many early nineteenth-century English landscapes.

Yet there is a striking difference: the men are African slaves, and the setting is visibly Brazilian. Their inclusion in the painting feels to some extent politicised, particularly as the Brazilian Empire's participation in the slave trade after the independence of 1822 was difficult for British residents in Rio to ignore. Dampier would have been aware of it: from 1823 his brother-in-law's firm for which he worked, May & Lukin, was tasked by Admiral Thomas Cochrane with auctioning Portuguese slave ships which had been apprehended by the British Navy as part of their campaign to suppress the forced transportation of African people into South America (Ramos, n.d.). Alexander Caldcleugh, who spent three years travelling in Brazil from 1819–21, declared that “the traffic which has been abandoned for some years by England, and successively by the other nations of Europe, is still carried on by Brazil”, implying a feeling of British moral superiority (Caldcleugh,

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26 Landseer's drawings, done in 1825–6, are now in the Instituto Moreira Salles.



1825, vol. 1, p. 90). (However, the idea that Britain's Abolition Act of 1833 necessarily improved the lives of enslaved Africans is deceptive.) Caldeleugh's account was published in 1825, shortly after Dampier left Brazil.

**Figure 11.** Charles Landseer, *View of the Sugarloaf Mountain from the Silvestre Road*, ca. 1826–7. Oil on canvas, 61.5 x 93 cm, Pinacoteca de São Paulo.



Source: Wikimedia Commons

It is here that Dampier's work recalls those by his British contemporaries, who included Black male figures in the foregrounds of their Brazilian works in the 1820s. In Landseer's painting of the Pão de Açúcar [Figure 11] and the drawing of the palace of São Cristóvão by Dampier's friend Graham [Figure 12] – both of which Dampier may have seen, or certainly at least Graham's sketch – Black men occupy the places which were usually reserved for shepherds or agricultural workers in European landscapes. Graham abhorred slavery, voicing her abolitionist feelings frequently in her Brazilian journal. Landseer may also have been critical of it, as he made sketches recording the flogging of an enslaved man and copied some of Debret's watercolours depicting Portuguese enslavers' cruel punishments (Bandeira & Lago,

2022).<sup>27</sup> Yet their approach was inconsistent, as their artworks which were viewed by the public tended to be picturesque rather than emotionally charged. That Landseer's painting and Graham's sketch do not openly depict violence echoes the written accounts of Brazilian slavery, which often counter-balance sensations of horror with a perception that things "could be worse". Graham wrote: "The negroes, whether free blacks or slaves, look cheerful and happy at their labour. There is such a demand for them, that they find full employment, and of course good pay, and remind one here as little as possible of their sad condition". That was until she encountered the infamous slave market in the Rua do Valongo in Rio – "then the slave-trade comes in all its horror before one's eyes" (Graham, 1824, p. 170). This perception that enslaved people appeared "cheerful and happy" despite their "sad condition" is more present in Dampier's painting than any explicit stance for or against slavery – as such, it is emotionally ambiguous, noncommittal picture.

**Figure 12.** Edward Finden after Maria Graham, *San Cristovao [São Cristóvão]*, published 1824. Aquatint, 19.5 x 25.7 cm, British Museum.



Source: British Museum

27 For Landseer's copies after Debret, see: Bandeira e Lago (2022).



## TROPICAL PORTRAIT, TROPICAL LANDSCAPE

Knowing the extent of Dampier's fascination with tropical landscapes – the subject of three Brazilian-themed oil paintings and an album of sketches of Brazil and Hawaii – provides new insights into his best-known paintings, four portraits of royal and indigenous Hawaiians. The four children are each represented individually against backgrounds of tropical foliage and landscapes. At that time, the independent Kingdom of Hawaii was only recently formed, beginning with Kamehameha I (the grandfather of the young prince whom Dampier painted) who unified the five islands as one nation in the mid-1790s.

In his travel diary, Dampier wrote a detailed account of his work on these portraits while he was staying Hawaii from May–July 1825 (he had left Brazil a few months earlier). It was he who approached the Hawaiian royal family, and they were pleased with the idea of having their likenesses painted. That of Princess Nahi'ena'ena [Figure 13] was begun first, in mid-May: “The little Princess sat uncommonly well, and I was enabled to make a very good beginning” (Dampier, 1971, p. 43).<sup>28</sup> Work on this portrait stalled while Nahi'ena'ena was ill, so Dampier began one of the adolescent prince, Kamehameha III [Figure 14], the successor to the king who had died in England (whose body was brought back to Hawaii by the HMS *Blonde*). Dampier asked his sitters to wear traditional dress of the islands, the vibrant red *‘ahu‘ulas* (feather mantles) shown in the finished paintings; but “this desire they treated as most unreasonable”, he wrote, “and [they] came decked out in their best black silk gowns, [...] Despairing of reasoning my sitters out of their absurd prejudices, I confined my attention to the faces alone” (Dampier, 1971, p. 43). Nevertheless, in the finished portraits, he included the mantles. The creation of Dampier's portraits was one of racial tension: Dampier's account is littered with derogatory comments about the Hawaiian people, their customs and even their diet, which a British surgeon opined was the cause of a rash from which Kamehameha was suffering while he sat for his portrait (Dampier, 1971, p. 44).<sup>29</sup>

28 See also “May 15 [1825]. [...] Mr Dampier has begun portraits of some of the royal family, and has made some sketches of the landscapes around Honoruru [sic]” (Byron, 1827, p. 130).

29 Dampier painted a third portrait, of Ka'ahumanu the queen consort, which is now untraced.

**Figure 13.** Robert Dampier, *Nahiena'ena (Sister of Kamehameha III)*, 1825. Oil on canvas, 59.1 x 49.8 cm, Honolulu Museum of Art.



Source: Wikimedia Commons

**Figure 14.** Robert Dampier, *Kamehameha III*, 1825. Oil on canvas, 59.1 x 49.8 cm, Honolulu Museum of Art.



Source: Wikimedia Commons

Dampier's two other portraits also depict named individuals from the island, although they were not royalty: a boy named 'Karaikapa [Figure 15] and a girl, Tetuppa [Figure 16]. These are mentioned in Dampier's diary as having been done after the royal portraits, and he considered the sitters "less noble, but more interesting" (Dampier, 1971, p. 49). As they were not nobility, Dampier could bribe them into posing "arrayed in their Native Costume" (Dampier, 1971, p. 49).<sup>30</sup> 'Karaikapa holds a spear or staff and wears a bead necklace, while Tetuppa has a *lei*, a garland of orange flowers, encircling her head. Both figures wear *tapa* cloths wrapped around their waists, together with another piece of

<sup>30</sup> Dampier says that he offered "a small compensation" to them for the sittings.

*tapa* “which at night, or in cold weather, they make use of as a shawl” (Dampier, 1971, p. 46). Three of the four paintings (excluding the one of ‘Karaikapa) were engraved by Edward Finden and published in the account of the HMS *Blonde*’s voyage to Hawaii, edited by Maria Graham. The original paintings were not exhibited and remained in private hands until the 1950s, when they were bequeathed to Hawaiian institutions (Dampier, 1971, p. 122).<sup>31</sup>

**Figure 15.** Robert Dampier, ‘Karaikapa, 1825. Oil on canvas, Washington Place, Honolulu.



Source: Wikimedia Commons.

<sup>31</sup> The portraits of ‘Karaikapa and Tetuppa “were left to the governor of the Sandwich Islands in the will of F. E. C. Byron, 10th Baron and ordained minister [descendant of Captain Byron], together with two oil paintings of the *Blonde* at sea. Byron died in 1949, and the paintings arrived in Hawaii in 1952. All four now hang in Washington Place, Honolulu, the official residence of the governor of Hawaii”. The portraits of Kamehameha III and Princess Nahi’ena’ena were donated to the Honolulu Museum of Art by the Cooke family, an old Hawaiian family, in 1951.



**Figure 16.** Robert Dampier, *Tetuppa*, 1825. Oil on canvas, Washington Place, Honolulu.



Source: Wikimedia Commons.

The semi-nudity of ‘Karaikapa and Tetuppa suggests that Dampier intended the pair to form a thematic contrast with the royal portraits, together illustrating “civilised” (noble) versus “uncivilised” (aboriginal) Hawaiians. The feather *‘ahu’ulas* and the feathered kahili held by Princess Nahi’ena’ena were used only by Hawaiian nobility. This kind of contrasting was common to European representations of indigenous, non-European peoples. They evoke the pictorial tradition established by the Dutch painter Albert Eckhout, who painted life-sized depictions of indigenous and enslaved African men and women in Brazil for Johan Maurits of Nassau-Siegen (National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen). A key difference is that Eckhout did not portray named individuals, like Dampier; for Rebecca P. Brienens, Eckhout’s paintings are “ethnographic portraits” as they “identify and represent aspects of a par-

ticular culture that can be distilled into visual form; they highlight broadly shared characteristics of the group, not unique qualities of the individual” (Brienen, 2013, p. 234). Although Dampier’s paintings *are* portraits of specific people, his detailed depictions of the Hawaiian royals’ traditional clothes and accessories were motivated by similar ethnographic interests – after all, he explicitly stated that he wanted to depict the royals “in their Country’s Costume”, even against their wishes. By insisting on representing the prince and princess in their seldom-used Hawaiian clothing and not in the European outfits which they preferred, Dampier emphasised their racial difference from the British monarchs of whom he would have been far more respectful if he had painted them. His caricaturing of the queen consort in his travel narrative shows a lack of deference; by saying that “she wished a full [i.e. full-length] Portrait to be taken in order to give King George a good idea of her dignity and sublimity of appearance”, Dampier sarcastically contrasted her with the English monarch, exaggerating a reasonable request – naturally, monarchs were fond of full-length portraits – for comic effect (Dampier, 1971, p. 46).

Dampier would not have seen Eckhout’s works, as they had been in Denmark since the sixteenth century. Nevertheless, the Eckhoutian conventions of representing individuals from the tropics with landscape elements as signifiers were established in European visual culture. In her novel *Belinda* (1801), Maria Edgeworth created a fictional portrait in a Royal Academy summer exhibition: a young woman posing as Virginie from Jacques-Henri Bernardin de St Pierre’s novel *Paul et Virginie* (1788). Edgeworth never directly describes the portrait, but we see it through the eyes of Lady Delacour: the sitter “seems to be a foreign beauty, [...] if one may judge by her air, her dress, and the scenery about her – cocoa-trees, plantains” (Edgeworth, 1994, p. 190). Delacour insists that the sitter should be interpreted as Virginie: “she added, pointing to the landscape of the picture, ‘These cocoa-trees, this fountain, and the words *Fontaine de Virginie*, inscribed on the rock’” (Edgeworth, 1994, p. 192). With its profusion of tropical imagery (St Pierre’s novel takes place on Mauritius), it is easy to see Edgeworth’s imagined painting in the manner of Reynolds’s portrait of Mai from the island of Raiatea in French Polynesia, which had been exhibited at the Academy in 1776 [Figure 17], with its gently tropical landscape elements. Therefore, it was through landscape and botanical additions that artists affirmed their sitters’ identities as tropical subjects, whether they were from Hawaii or Raiatea.

**Figure 17.** Joshua Reynolds, *Mai* (“*Omai*”), 1776. Oil on canvas, 236 x 145.5 cm, National Portrait Gallery, London and the J. Paul Getty Trust.



Source: National Portrait Gallery, London and Getty

Reynolds's portrait of Mai [Figure 17] offers a useful comparison with Dampier's paintings of the Hawaiian prince and princess. Mai arrived in London in 1774, having travelled with Captain James Cook from Tahiti. He was received by London society as a celebrity; his being painted by Reynolds, the most fashionable portraitist of the day, signified his attraction

as an “exotic” visitor. Reynolds’ combining of traditional Polynesian dress and tattoos with a classicised standing pose has been described as marking “the moment when two worlds encountered each other for the first time” – Mai was the first known Polynesian person to visit Britain.<sup>32</sup> In this way, Reynolds’s and Dampier’s intensions align, as they depicted their sitters wearing their traditional clothing, even if, in Dampier’s case, it was against their wishes.

For both painters, too, the landscape backgrounds were essential for their intentions to represent subjects from the Global South. Reynolds’s scenery is presumably meant to evoke Mai’s homeland of Raiatea, which the artist never visited. Instead, he adapted the generic plein-air backgrounds of his Grand Style portraits, simply adding palm trees for pictorial effect. Dampier’s portraits differ here, as he really saw the tropical scenery in which he located his sitters and probably used his observational sketches as references. In the portrait of Nahi’ena’ena, a ship – perhaps the HMS *Blonde* itself – is visible in the distance, its masts silhouetted against the sky. Behind the young prince is a banana tree, with a view facing towards the interior of the island beyond it, including houses, palm trees, a lagoon and distant mountains (stylistically, the latter recall the mountains which Dampier painted in his Rio pictures). Meanwhile, the landscapes in the portraits of ‘Karaikapa and Tetuppa are wilder, showing forest-clad hills and indigenous dwellings, once again accentuating the sitters’ “uncivilised” origins.

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<sup>32</sup> Catalogue entry for Reynolds’s painting on the National Portrait Gallery website: <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw304993> (accessed 19 January 2024).



**Figure 18.** Thomas Lawrence, *Princess Sophia (1777–1848)*, 1800–24. Oil on canvas, 141.2 111.9 cm, Royal Collection Trust, UK.



Source: Royal Collection Trust, UK

Of course, portraits, especially royal ones, often included landscapes which were important to the sitter, such as Thomas Lawrence's likeness of Queen Charlotte (1787; National Gallery, London) which shows a view of Windsor Park. No doubt when Lawrence painted Charlotte's daughter Princess Sophia [Figure 18], he allowed her to wear a dress that she would customarily choose herself, and the portrait was carefully arranged in collaboration with George IV, Sophia's affectionate brother. The lands-

cape behind her is not a specific place, nor does it not overshadow the royal sitter, but keeps a respectful distance. Yet in Dampier's own image of a princess, not only was she compelled pictorially to wear something which she did not generally like, but the landscape fills half the composition. The classical pillar and red drapery of Lawrence's scene – derived from historic European culture and indicating an indoor setting – are substituted in Dampier's portrait for dense foliage, showing the princess outdoors. These elements combine to stress the fact that we are looking at a non-European person from a tropical island, and the same applies to Dampier's three other Hawaiian portraits. A similar substitution occurred in his *View from the Praia da Glória*, as mentioned above, when the rural labourer figures who would usually occupy the foregrounds of a British landscape were replaced by enslaved Black men. As Hawaii (like Brazil) was unknown to most British people, Dampier's scenery-portraits would have had a novelty factor like St Pierre's *Paul and Virginia*, the popularity of which in Europe partly derived from its lengthy descriptions of "exotic" tropical environments.

Ultimately, Dampier's Hawaiian portraits, like the paintings from his Brazilian phase, demonstrate the British colonial gaze, even if motivated by a natural curiosity about these tropical lands and their inhabitants. In both phases of his career, Dampier turned his attention to non-European human subjects: in the case of the newly attributed MASP painting, they were enslaved Africans. We do not know his personal opinions about the slave trade, but it is clear from his own diary that he considered Hawaiians – even their royal family – as inferior in their manners and customs to the British. In all his works, landscape plays a key role in affirming both his personal interest in the tropical landscape, but also his expression of its difference from his home country.

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