

“The China of Santa Cruz”: The Culture of Tea in Maria Graham’s *Journal of a Voyage to Brazil* (Article)

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The notion of Brazilian tea may sound like something of an anomaly—or impossibility—given the predominance of Brazilian coffee in our cultural imagination. We may be surprised, then, to learn that King João VI of Portugal and Brazil (1767–1826) pursued a project for the importation, acclimatization, and planting of tea from China in his royal botanic garden in Rio de Janeiro. A curious episode in the annals of colonial botany, the cultivation of a tea plantation in Rio has a short but significant history, especially when read through the lens of Maria Graham’s *Journal of a Voyage to Brazil* (1824). Graham’s descriptions of the tea garden in this text are brief, but they amplify her thorough-going enthusiasm for the biodiversity and botanical innovation she encountered—and contributed to—in South America. Such enthusiasm for the imperial tea garden echoes Graham’s support for Brazilian independence, and indeed, bolsters it. In 1821 Graham came to Brazil aboard HMS *Doris*, captained by her husband Thomas, who was charged with protecting Britain’s considerable mercantile interests in the region. As a British naval captain’s wife, she was obliged to uphold Britain’s official policy of strict neutrality. Despite these circumstances, her *Journal* conveys a pro-independence stance that is legible in her frequent rhapsodies over Brazil’s stunning flora and fauna. By situating Rio’s tea plantation within the global context of imperial botany, we may appreciate Graham’s testimony to a practice of transnational plant exchange that effectively makes her an agent of empire even in a locale where Britain had no territorial aspirations.

Having left Bahia in northern Brazil, the *Doris* arrived in Rio’s spectacular Guanabara Bay on December 15, 1821. Graham’s *Journal* entry for this day foregrounds the harbor’s exceptional beauty: “Rio de Janeiro, Saturday, December 15th, 1821.—Nothing that I have ever seen is comparable in beauty to this bay. Naples, the Firth of Forth, Bombay harbour, and Trincomalee, each of which I thought perfect in their beauty, all must yield to this, which surpasses each in its different way.”¹

Graham’s allusions to ports previously visited in Italy, Scotland (her homeland), India, and Ceylon serve to emphasize her wonder before this new scene. Indeed, by the time the *Journal* saw publication—the same year as her other South American text, *Journal of a Residence in Chile* (1824)—readers would recognize her as the author of several other travelogues, including *Journal of a Residence in India* (1812), *Letters on India, with Etchings and a Map* (1814), and *Three Months Passed in the Mountains East of Rome* (1820). Her use of hyperbole to describe Rio’s superior bay typifies travel literature and echoes her own previous hyperbolic statements (of a town near the capital of Pernambuco, in northern Brazil, she writes on August 24, “Nothing can be prettier of its kind than the fresh green landscape” [37].) The *Brazil Journal* abounds with similar meditations on its natural beauty, both in close-up (botanical) and distanced (landscape) imagery.

1. Maria Graham’s *Journal of a Voyage to Brazil*, ed. Jennifer Hayward and M. Soledad Caballero (Anderson, SC: Parlor Press, 2010), 91. Subsequent citations will appear in the text.

Graham first mentions the tea plantation in the account of her first visit to the Rio botanical garden, six days after her arrival in the capital. Her botanical expertise stands out in the description, as does her understanding of global plants transfers:

We were to breakfast at the [botanic] gardens, but as the weather is now hot, we resolved first to walk round them. They are laid out in convenient squares, the alleys being planted on either side with a very quick-growing nut tree, brought from Bencoolen originally, now naturalised here. [. . .] This garden was destined by the King for the cultivation of the oriental spices and fruits, and above all, of the tea plant, which he obtained, together with several families accustomed to its culture, from China. Nothing can be more thriving than the whole of the plants. The cinnamon, camphor, nutmeg, and clove, grow as well as in their native soil. The bread-fruit produces its fruit in perfection, and such of the oriental fruits as have been brought here ripen as well as in India. I particularly remarked the jumbo malacca, from India, and the longona (*Euphoria longona*), a dark kind of lechee from China. (96)

By noting the provenance of the Bencoolen nut, naming other plants and trees, and including the Linnaean binomial nomenclature for the longona, Graham establishes that she is more than a lay visitor. Her commentary normalizes—indeed, naturalizes—global plant exchange; the transfer of the Bencoolen nut from Sumatra to Brazil, like the transfer of more famous East Indian spices like cinnamon and nutmeg, occurs without further comment.² Her matter-of-fact observation of these transfers suggests that she understands and appreciates the global circulation of plants. A prior encounter in Bahia’s botanical garden has already established her credentials as a sharp observer of colonial botany in Brazil: “Every hedge is at this season gay with coffee blossom, but it is too early in the year for the pepper or the cotton to be in beauty. It is not many years since Francisco da Cunha and Menezes sent the pepper plant from Goa for these gardens, which were afterwards enlarged by him, when he became governor of Bahia. Plants were sent from hence to Pernambuco, which have succeeded in the botanical garden” (78).

The reference to pepper plants transferred from Goa echoes a similar passage in Robert Southey’s three-part *History of Brazil* (1819), upon which Graham relied when writing the lengthy “Sketch of the History of Brazil,” which opens her Brazil volume.³ Passages such as these reaffirm her grasp of the global circulation of plants; more importantly, they also participate in the dissemination of botanical knowledge. She further bolsters her effort to inform readers of Brazil’s agriculture and economy by appending multiple tables about the northeastern state of Maranhão, which she introduces thus: “It will appear from the following Tables of the Imports and Exports of the Province of Maranham, from 1812 to 1821, of how much importance the acquisition of that Province is to the Empire of Brazil.”⁴ The inclusion of both qualitative and quantitative data about Brazil demonstrates that Graham intends for her work to contribute to a growing body of knowledge about a region whose importance to Britain goes unquestioned.

2. Graham’s reference to Bencoolen, in Sumatra, suggests the nut’s origin there. However, a later botanist locates its origin in India; see Thomas Augustus Charles Firminger, *A Manual of Gardening for Bengal and Upper India* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co., 1874), 272.

3. Robert Southey, *History of Brazil, Part 3* (London: Longman et al., 1819), 797.

4. *Journal of a Voyage to Brazil* (London: Longman et al. and John Murray, 1824), 329–35. Hayward and Caballero do not include this appendix in their edition.

The Luso-British alliance has roots going back (for present purposes) to the marriage of Charles II to Catherine of Braganza in 1662.⁵ A diplomatic alliance, this union earned Britain access to trade in both Brazil and the East Indies, in return for British naval support should Portugal need protection from Spain or France (as it did during the War of Spanish Succession [1701–14] and then the Iberian Peninsular War of 1807–1814). In 1807–08, Britain decisively secured its access to South American trade by providing naval protection for Dom João’s court as it fled Napoleon’s advancing forces. The reversal of power between metropole (i.e., Portugal) and colony had long-lasting consequences, making Brazilian independence more likely even after the monarch returned to Portugal in 1821, leaving his son Dom Pedro as his regent in Brazil.⁶ Graham provides witness to the subtle ways in which botanical knowledge accompanies commercial and diplomatic access, lending credence to Lucile Brockway’s portrayal of botanic gardens as a key source of European imperial power:

In the case of both cinchona and rubber, a plant indigenous to Latin America was surreptitiously transferred—in plain English, smuggled—to Asia for development by Europeans in their colonial possessions. The newly independent Latin American states, Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia, each lost a native industry as a result of these [plant] transfers, but Asia acquired them only in a geographic sense; the real benefits went to Europe. In this plant smuggling we see relations of power and powerlessness that contradict and subvert nominal political authority and independence. In its broadest aspects, our unit of analysis is not any one society or empire, but the network of relations emanating from the West that penetrated all societies, binding weak to strong, colonized to colonizers, and colonizers to each other.⁷

By using botanical gardens as her “unit of analysis,” Brockway suggests that the circulation and strategic implementation of botanical knowledge decisively impacted global power relations.

The Brazilian effort to grow tea may seem peripheral to a process whereby botanical exchange effects the ascendance of a global power, as Brockway argues the rubber and cinchona plants did for Britain. But looked at another way, the effort indicates how participation in colonial botany signals Dom João’s shrewd recognition that Portugal’s empire had unique botanical resources around the globe that behooved him to develop them for the empire’s benefit. Anyda Marchant affirms this claim in her description of European efforts to acquire the tea plant, having noted that a “living tea plant reached Europe only in 1763” because of the transportation difficulties and because

the Emperor of China jealously excluded Europeans from his domains and sought by every means to prevent them from learning anything of the cultivation and preparation of tea. The Portuguese had perhaps the best chance to obtain tea plants and to learn about their culture, since Macao, off the coast of south China, on the west side of the entrance to the Canton river, was the oldest European outpost in the trade with the

5. In fact, this alliance goes back even farther, to the fourteenth century, but here the union of the Houses of Stuart and Braganza provides the most relevant context.

6. Leslie Bethel, “The Independence of Brazil,” in *The Cambridge History of Latin American, Volume III*, ed. Leslie Bethel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 167–75.

7. Lucile H. Brockway, “Science and Colonial Expansion: The Role of the British Royal Botanic Garden,” *American Ethnologist* 6, no. 3 (1979): 449–65 (52).

Chinese. However, so strictly did the Chinese control trade at Macao and Canton, that no attempt to smuggle out tea plants was successful.⁸

Marchant goes on to describe the decisive influence of a minister close to Dom João, Dom Rodrigo de Sousa Coutinho, later Count de Linhares. A well-traveled and educated man who followed advances in the sciences, he spearheaded the efforts to bring useful plants to Brazil. He advised Dom João in the establishment of a garden that was to be “the focal point for the acclimatization and dissemination of plants useful in the Portuguese domains” (266). As we saw previously in Graham’s description of the Rio gardens, Brazil succeeded in transplanting cinnamon, nutmeg, clove, camphor, and breadfruit. Indeed, two of Brazil’s largest crops—coffee and sugar—are the result of plant transfers. It is fair to say, then, that with the foresight of the monarch and his advisors, the Portuguese empire managed to leverage its geographical and botanical advantages with lasting results, although as we will see, tea did not contribute to these successes.

With Dom Rodrigo’s guidance, Dom João established a reward system whereby anyone bringing plants beneficial to the Portuguese domains would receive “favors,” such as exemption from customs duties for crops resulting from such cultivation.⁹ Eventually, in 1812, Dom Rodrigo succeeded in having one of his botanical suppliers send him seeds for the tea plant; and, according to Marchant, “when these seeds germinated, the planting of tea on a large scale was undertaken” (271). And again, the location of Macau gave Dom João an advantage in tea cultivation—this time by enabling him to bring a colony of two hundred Chinese to Rio, who were to provide instruction for tea cultivation. By 1817, this colony was able to set out six thousand tea plants. But soon thereafter the authorities abandoned the tea plantation. John Luccock, a British merchant traveling in Brazil, attributed the failure to the high cost of labor and noted that “the Chinese, though diligent, are too precise and slow in their modes of culture.”¹⁰ Graham’s enthusiastic description of the thriving tea plantation suggests that she encountered it in the early stages, when authorities still expected it to supply the Rio market, as it initially did. Multiple sources affirm that the tea plantation eventually failed; more mysterious is the fate of the Chinese laborers brought over to tend it.¹¹

When considered alongside parallel narratives of European efforts to grow tea, the Brazilian tea episode exposes the historical (and climatic) contingency of such a lucrative crop. As David Mackay, Lisbet Koerner, and others have demonstrated, other Europeans—among them Linnaeus himself—made concerted efforts to acquire tea plants and seeds; he

8. Anyda Marchant, “Dom João’s Botanic Garden,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 41 (1961): 259–74 (270–1). Subsequent citations occur in the text.

9. Marchant, “Dom João’s Botanic Garden,” 266–67.

10. Qtd. in Marchant, “Dom João’s Botanic Garden,” 272.

11. Marchant attributes the curtailed tea effort to Dom Rodrigo’s death in 1812: “With Dom Rodrigo went the planning and organizing power behind the tea scheme.” Marchant, “Dom João’s Botanic Garden,” 272. Neill Macaulay alludes cryptically to a rumor that Dom Pedro’s younger brother Miguel hunted the Chinese for sport: “The tea plantation failed and the Chinese disappeared; Dom Miguel is supposed to have hunted them down with horses and hounds.” Macaulay, *Dom Pedro: The Struggle for Liberty in Brazil and Portugal, 1798–1834* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1986), 68. Jeff Lesser corroborates Macaulay’s claims and also finds evidence that the Chinese were frustrated by their inability to bring women from home. See Lesser, *Negotiating National Identity: Immigrants, Minorities, and the Struggle for Ethnicity in Brazil* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 16–17.

began his search in 1745 and had fleeting success, but by 1765 all the plants were dead.¹² The famous Swedish botanist's attempt adds another dimension to the global history of tea cultivation, for he designated tea as one of several key crops that would, if adapted for local cultivation, free Sweden from dependence on foreign markets. It could, moreover, slow the hemorrhaging of European wealth in the form of specie to China, India, and the East Indies; in this respect the Linnaean quest for tea issues from his cameralist political agenda. Though the effort was doomed due to Linnaeus's ignorance of climatic factors affecting the growth of tea, it is significant that a Swedish nationalist cause had the unintended consequence of provoking other European nations' imperialist efforts. Koerner notes the decisive impact of European attempts to acquire tea: "In the eighteenth century, tea would change the Eurasian sea trade [. . .] which hastened a long-term trend: for almost 2,000 years Europe had collected specie, 'only to lose it to India, China, and the East Indies.'"¹³ This eighteenth-century "pre-history" of Dom João's tea plantation situates Brazilian botanical experimentation within a broader effort to integrate botany into various European strategies for participating in global commerce. It is worth pointing out that the Brazilian attempt to grow tea recapitulates the Linnaean effort insofar as both parties resorted to what David Mackay calls "commercial espionage" in their attempts to acquire botanical specimens that were closely guarded by the Chinese government.¹⁴ Yet the apparent advantages provided by uncommon access to Chinese ports (in Macau) and a potentially suitable climate were not enough to enable the Brazilian experiment to overcome the challenges of growing a crop that demanded highly skilled cultivation.

The story in Britain is more familiar, given tea's status as the English national beverage and Britain's singular success in transplanting and acclimatizing tea to its Southeast Asian colonies. In this respect, the national appetite for tea, which began during the Restoration (when Catherine of Braganza brought tea to England) and continued apace through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, operated as an engine of empire with fortuitous results for Britain. Like Dom João, King George III also had an experienced and well-connected botanist who served as a key advisor in his imperial botanical endeavors. Sir Joseph Banks, Britain's preeminent botanist and president of the Royal Society, had sailed on Captain Cook's first voyage and presided over a vast network of botanical collectors throughout the British dominions. Accordingly, Banks served as advisor to the British East India Company in London when it was considering a proposal to establish a botanic garden in Calcutta. The terms of this proposal, written by Colonel Robert Kyd, make explicit the commercial and political—in this case, imperial—purposes the garden would serve, as he makes his case to the Governor-General of Bengal: "I doubt not, under your Lordship's influence and direction, we shall in a few years be enabled not only to afford all the articles now required from India, China and Arabia but to effect plantations of them to the

12. Lisbet Koerner, *Linnaeus: Nature and Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 136–68, 150–51.

13. Lisbet Koerner, "Purposes of Linnaean Travel: A Preliminary Research Report," in *Visions of Empire: Voyages, Botany, and Representations of Nature*, ed. David Philip Miller and Peter Hans Reill (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 117–52 (132–33). She quotes Ferdinand Braudel in her final phrase.

14. David Mackay, "Agents of Empire: The Banksian Collectors and Evaluation of New Lands," in *Visions of Empire: Voyages, Botany, and Representations of Nature*, ed. David Philip Miller and Peter Hans Reill (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 38–57 (47).

aggrandisement of the power and commerce of Great Britain, and to the increase of the wealth and happiness of the nations subjected to your Lordship's government."¹⁵

Kyd's emphasis on the strategic commercial advantage to be gained over China proved prescient, for it was in fact tea that drove Britain to break the Chinese monopoly. As was the case for Linnaeus, so too did Banks see tea acclimatization in India as a way to staunch the flow of silver to China. As Adrian Thomas explains, "When tea consumption in Britain boomed in the 1780s and 1790s there was a good deal of concern about the consequent drain of silver to China. One possible solution to the problem was to introduce tea cultivation to Bengal, which was directly controlled by the East India Company. Banks suggested ways in which the tea shrubs could be obtained and conveyed to Bengal, 'where they will find the Botanic Garden ready to receive them, 20 acres of which might at least be allotted to their immediate reception.'"¹⁶

Because full institutional support for tea cultivation in the Calcutta Botanic Garden was initially lacking, commercial tea growth did not thrive there until the late 1830s. As Brockway explains in her analysis of botanic gardens as sources of imperial power, opium was ultimately the weapon that enabled the British to break the Chinese monopoly on tea. Because the opium trade was dangerous (given that it was contraband in China), Britain faced a more urgent need to cease its dependence on Chinese tea (for which it traded opium grown in Bengal). According to Brockway,

The defeat of China in the Opium Wars (1839–42) gave the [British East India Company] the opportunity it sought in regard to tea. In 1848–51 it brought off a great plant transfer, whose success guaranteed that it would be repeated: under the auspices of the British East India Company a plant collector named Robert Fortune brought 2000 tea plants and 17,000 tea seeds [. . .] out of China. [. . .]. Tea, one of the hottest commodities in international trade and already the British national beverage, would no longer have to be bought from China, but could be grown on British soil.¹⁷

The foregoing may be a circuitous way to advance to my initial claim that Graham's *Journal* makes for a compelling window into Brazilian tea cultivation. In light of the geopolitical circumstances surrounding the tea trade, and the decisive advantages Britain gained by acquiring a means to grow its own supply, we may begin to appreciate how colonial botany could in some ways serve as a hinge upon which the fate of an empire swings. How might the relative positions of Portugal and Britain in global politics have differed if Rio's tea plantation had succeeded, or if Calcutta's had failed? Speculation of this sort may ultimately be fruitless; yet, it helps to illuminate the role that botanical knowledge and access to specimens could play in the distribution of imperial power.

The rich scholarship on Britain's culture of tea offers another intriguing perspective on the cross-cultural encounters in which Graham participated in Brazil. Tea serves as a measure of the culture's sophistication in Graham's eyes, as seen in a visit to a baronesa's home in Rio in August 1823. By this time Graham had traveled to Chile and back, during which time she lost her husband to illness. After spending about eight months alone there, she returned for a seven-month stay in Rio before embarking for England. She describes the tea

15. Quoted in Adrian P. Thomas, "The Establishment of Calcutta Botanic Garden: Plant Transfer, Science and the East India Company, 1786–1806," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* Third Series 16, no. 2 (2006): 165–77 (168).

16. Thomas, "Establishment of Calcutta Botanic Garden," 173.

17. Brockway, "Science and Colonial Expansion," 455.

service in a way that reveals her assumption that one's conduct in this ritual speaks volumes about one's breeding, and about the very culture's degree of civilization:

[Aug.] 3d. [1823]—I drank tea at the Baronesa de Campos'; and met a large family party, which always assembles on Sundays to pay their respects to the old lady. The tea was made by one of the young ladies, with the assistance of her sister, just as it would be in England. A large silver urn, silver tea-pots, milk-jugs, and sugar-dishes, with elegant china, were placed on a large table; round which several of the young people assembled, and sent round the tea to us, who sat at a distance. All sorts of bread, cakes, buttered toast, and rusks were handed with the tea; and after it was removed, sweetmeats of every description were presented, after which every body took a glass of water. (193)

Noting with approval that the occasion proceeds “just as it would [. . .] in England,” Graham rejoices that polite Brazilian society meets her manifestly English standard. Itemizing the accoutrements of the tea service, she implies that her hostesses display the conduct, and the taste, to qualify them for membership among the elite. The scene uncannily stages the convergence of imperial botany, material culture, and female British subjectivity. Tea and sugar, two of Britain's most important cash crops, and the latter no less important to Brazil, perform a kind of alchemy when displayed on the table alongside other precious commodities such as silver—a prized raw material extracted from South American mines—and china, whose very name is a synecdoche for the exotic Far East, now domesticated for polite consumption. And considering Graham's prior encounter with the tea garden, in addition to several visits to *ingenhos* (sugar plantations) both in Bahia and near Rio, the passage conjures the produce of the horticultural, chemical, and commercial processes that are embodied in the porcelain and metal receptacles before her. Moreover, her reception in a private home—the baronesa's—affirms the feminine quality of the tea service. For, as Beth Kowaleski-Wallace, Eugenia Zuroski Jenkins, and Piya Chatterjee have variously argued, the tea table represents the essence of cultured femininity. Jenkins asserts, “The tea table was the site of semiotic transactions and aesthetic transformations, where woman and chinaware fused in a display of modern taste.”¹⁸ Similarly, Chatterjee claims, “Women's tea tables and parlors suggested not only a feminized fetishism of the commodity, it was a feminization intimately connected to ideologies of leisure. The parlor and the tea table are positioned in stillness and plenitude. The women are ever present in this tranquil picture because they are not compelled to leave their interiors.”¹⁹ By communing over tea and sharing a convivial and leisurely meal, Graham and her hostesses enact a ritual of privilege that affirms their common gentility, determined in part by their access to the spoils of empire. And while Jenkins and Kowaleski-Wallace analyze tea as a signifier of female aristocratic taste, David Porter traces a class-specific pattern in literary representations linking women and tea.

Referring to the “commercially active, outspoken, vigorous, defiant, and lusty women who inhabit” early eighteenth-century depictions of tea and chinaware, Porter notes a subsequent shift toward a more restrained female sensibility: “While the breathless escapades of earlier heroines leave them little time for leisure, Jane Austen's women are forever

18. Eugenia Zuroski Jenkins, *A Taste for China: English Subjectivity and the Prehistory of Orientalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 136. See also Beth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects: Women, Shopping, and Business in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 19–36.

19. Piya Chatterjee, *A Time for Tea: Women, Labor, and Post/Colonial Politics on an Indian Plantation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 40.

drinking tea. [. . .] Indeed, by the Regency period the afternoon consumption of tea seems to have become so natural and indispensable a part of the daily household routine in England that we tend to overlook the historicity of the ritual and its role in the consolidation of the modern ideology of maternal domesticity.”²⁰

While in many ways Graham defies the ideology of domesticity by insisting on traveling alone in South America and protesting her exclusion from the proceedings of the government assembly, in other ways—in her careful and consistent attention to female manners and conduct—she enacts the ethos of domesticity even outside the confines of the household.²¹ She expects women to uphold the virtue of the nation and sees herself as doing so for Britain. In fact, Graham has earned a reputation as a snob among some scholars because of her tendency to condemn those people—whether Portuguese, Brazilian, or British—who did not meet her standards of refinement. Her supercilious tendencies prompt one critic, M. Soledad Caballero, to interpret Graham’s presumed superiority as effecting an ephemeral kind of imperialism that enlists the foreigners she meets to share her view of Britons as arbiters of culture: “Her texts structure British economic contact as an infusion of British civilization and progress whose primary agents are gentility and manners rather than as the conquest of land and the extraction of raw resources.”²² The assessment of Graham’s hostesses according to the quality of their tea service exemplifies this presumption of British cultural superiority; tea serves as the material object—and botanical product—around which she organizes her judgment and further instantiates tea as the consummate marker of Britishness.

Near the end of her sojourn in Brazil, Graham undertakes a journey to a royal estate at Santa Cruz, a region at some distance from Rio where cattle graze and several *ingenhos* process sugar cane. Here she encounters another tea plantation, which prompts her to repeat the information she has previously given regarding Dom João’s project of importing Chinese tea plants and cultivators:

Sunday [Aug.] 24th [1823]—I walked up to the tea-gardens, which occupy many acres of a rocky hill, such as I suppose may be the favourite *habitat* of the plant in China. The introduction of the culture of tea into Brazil was a favourite project of the King Joam VI., who brought the plants and cultivators at great expense from China. The tea produced both here and at the botanic gardens is said to be of superior quality; but the quantity is so small, as never yet to have afforded the slightest promise of paying the expense of culture. Yet the plants are so thriving, that I have no doubt they will soon spread of themselves, and probably become as natives. His Majesty built Chinese gates and summer-houses to correspond with the destination of these gardens; and, placed where they are, among the beautiful tea-shrubs, whose dark shining leaves and myrtle-like flowers fit them for a parterre, they have no unpleasing effect. The walks are bordered on either hand with orange trees and roses, and the

20. David Porter, *The Chinese Taste in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 148.

21. Regarding women’s exclusion from politics, she complains, “I take it very ill that ladies may not attend the sittings of the assembly, not that I know there is any formal prohibition; but the thing is considered as so impossible, that I cannot go.” Graham, *Journal of a Voyage*, 193.

22. M. Soledad Caballero, “‘For the Honour of Our Country:’ Maria Dundas Graham and the Romance of Benign Domination,” *Studies in Travel Writing* 9, no. 2 (2005): 111–31 (112). Caballero refers to both Graham’s *Brazilian Journal* and her *Journal of a Residence in Chile during the Year 1822*.

garden hedge is of a beautiful kind of mimosa; so that the China of Santa Cruz forms really a delightful walk. The Emperor, however, who perceives that it is more advantageous to sell coffee and buy tea, than to grow it at such expense, has discontinued the cultivation. (212)

The passage displays Graham's signature combination of economic and aesthetic sensibilities; she gives readers the historical background for the tea and laments its failure to turn a profit but then meditates on the overall aesthetic effect of the garden in a way that dismisses the notion of crop failure, since the beautiful landscape continues to dazzle. By noting that the tea both here and at the botanic garden is "of superior quality," she maintains an optimistic outlook, such that the news of its discontinued cultivation barely registers since her description renders the tea more as an aesthetic object than a botanical commodity. By composing a visual scene featuring "Chinese gates and summer-houses" alongside the tea plants, and adding detail about the orange trees, roses, and garden hedges, she invests the garden with an aesthetic value that surpasses the use and exchange value that motivated Dom João to undertake the tea plantation in the first place.

We find further testimony of the Rio tea garden's lasting impression on Graham in a document she dictated some ten years after her final journey there in 1824–26. Near the end of her seven-month stay in Rio, their Imperial Highnesses invited her to serve as governess to their daughter, Princess Maria da Glória (the future queen of Portugal). After traveling to England to gather teaching materials, Graham returned in the fall of 1824 to assume her duties; however, the emperor soon dismissed her under mysterious circumstances. The most we may infer from her account of this episode is that palace hangers-on objected to her close friendship with Empress Leopoldina, and they succeeded in turning Dom Pedro against her. Upon Dom Pedro's death in 1834, Graham (now Lady Callcott, having remarried) decided to dictate her memoirs of the imperial couple, whom she had come to know well while in their employ. The resulting document is a typescript held at the Bodleian Library of Oxford University, cataloged as "Lady Callcott's account of her life in Brazil during 1824–1826—dictated to the Hon. Caroline Fox in 1834–35." An attempt to capture her detailed knowledge of Brazil's first independent ruler, this document contains rich material about palace life and Graham's personal impressions of the early stages of Brazilian independence. The tea garden appears in the course of Graham's description of the imperial couple's day-to-day routine. She informs readers that, in the mornings, "their favorite ride was to the Botanic Gardens, where the Padre always had a cold fowl or stewed rice, or at least, coffee and cheese for his Imperial Guests." She continues:

The Emperor's object in going so often to that establishment was the hope, now happily about to be realized, of the cultivation of the tea plant, introduced in his father's reign during the minority of Count Sousa, would extend so as to become of consequence to Brazil and he never failed to inspect the Plantation, and the lodgings of the Chinese, who had been settled there for its cultivation. Besides the Tea, the Emperor was anxious about the Bread Fruit which appears to suit with the climate, admirably. Every year, a certain number of plants is reared and distributed, gratis, to whoever will apply either the Bread Fruit, or any of the Spice Plants or other Fruits, imported from China or the West Indies for the improvement of the Brazilian gardens. I scarcely knew a piece of flattery more acceptable to the Emperor than the application for plants from the Botanical Gardens.²³

23. Bodleian MS. Eng. c. 2730, 36–7. Bodleian Library, *Special Collections and Western Manuscripts*.

It is remarkable that nearly ten years after her last days in Brazil, Graham continues to remember Dom Pedro's investment in his tea plantation. Indeed, from greater distance than the journal she kept while living in Brazil, this oral history elides the discontinuation of the tea cultivation. In this retrospective account, the tea instead joins the breadfruit and other "Spice Plants or other Fruits" as evidence of the emperor's (and his father's) botanical projects. Given the brusque manner in which Dom Pedro dismissed her from the imperial palace (and refused her the courtesy of a palace carriage, no less), she displays considerable magnanimity, for she faced financial and logistical hardships while shifting for herself in Rio after her expulsion.

Graham finds solace after this humiliation by immersing herself in Brazil's cultural and botanical splendor. After settling into her cottage in Rio, she occupies herself with gathering specimens for drawing and drying:

I had always been fond of flowers and the splendour of the untouched forest behind my cottage, naturally attracted me. I borrowed Aublet of the Minister of Marine and was disappointed to find that his figures were, in many instances, imperfect and that in some cases he had been obliged to give leaves, fruits, and even dry calixes of many of the forest trees having missed the flowering season in their native places. I determined to make drawings of as many of these as I could, attempting at the same time to dry specimens for Dr. Hooker of Glasgow, although I had little convenience, my cottage being very damp. In pursuit of this scheme, it was my custom to leave Black Anna to play her part as laundress and the Mulatto to buy and cook my dinner while I went off to the woods to procure specimens of flowering shrubs and trees for my botanical undertaking.

Referring here to French explorer and botanist Jean Baptiste Christophore Fusée Aublet, Graham reveals her eye for precision in her botanical studies. Finding the Frenchman's drawings inaccurate, she sets out to correct his errors and plans to share her knowledge with William Hooker, a professor of botany at the University of Glasgow, who went on to serve as Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew. As her detailed letters to Hooker illustrate, she eagerly collected seeds and specimens. Indeed, as Betty Hagglund has argued, Graham demonstrates scientific expertise that was unusual for women of her time, such that Hooker listed her among plant collectors in his publications, as did other botanists who drew on her work. Hagglund also distinguishes Graham for her pursuit of folk knowledge from local sources—at the time an uncommon practice for botanical collectors.²⁴

We find detailed evidence of Graham's intrepid pursuit of botanical knowledge in one of multiple letters she wrote to Hooker while in Brazil. One letter reaches almost two thousand words in length and mentions at least fifteen species, from moss and ferns to Jungia, Heliconia, and Bromelium. The depth of detail testifies to Graham's curiosity and persistence:

I am not quite strong enough to seek for plants as I would, & every body here has other business—but the Number & variety of palms would be interesting to you. I am also very ignorant—but I will not be negligent & I think I may be of use in exciting other people to be busy.—I am very very fond of plants and sensible neither muddy

24. Betty Hagglund, "The Botanical Writings of Maria Graham," *Journal of Literature and Science* 4 (2011): 44–58.

feet nor torn clothes for their sake—& I will watch[?] seeds—those one buys here are often old & sometimes fictitious—what I gather myself I can answer for.²⁵

Her commitment to accuracy—determining to gather seeds for herself rather than purchasing any that might be misidentified—justifies Hooker’s reliance on her as a trustworthy source for botanical specimens and drawings. Her Portfolio Rio de Janeiro, held in the Herbarium at Kew, contains roughly one hundred drawings, many with notes and supporting illustrations of seed pods, close-ups of leaves and flowers, and so forth.

Graham’s botanical record of Brazil’s biodiversity stands out insofar as it captures her role in an ongoing effort to maximize the tremendous variety of plants that could adapt to cultivation there. But the fact of the tea plantation’s failure is all the more curious, suggesting how she participates in a dynamic process whereby the colony, and then the young nation, experiments with botanical transfers and determines which crops will best thrive there. Her encounters with tea both in the Royal Botanic Garden in Rio and at the Crown’s Santa Cruz estate feature her characteristic optimism about the fertility and botanical diversity of this place. Her failure to comment further on the Chinese laborers who were brought over to tend the tea is on one hand surprising, given the in-depth attention she pays elsewhere to the natives and African slaves whose condition she deplors. On the other hand, as seen previously in references to her servants, “Black Anna [. . .] and the Mulatto,” she condones their subservience and at times resorts to apologist claims about the slaves’ good treatment and contentment with their servitude.²⁶ From our twenty-first-century vantage, Graham offers sobering insight into the entrenched inequality that sustained imperial powers—inequality that she was obliged to participate in while living there. From another vantage, though, Graham offers an inspiring example of women’s contributions to the acquisition and dissemination of botanical knowledge and a corrective to the assumption of women’s wholesale exclusion from exploration and scientific discovery.

25. Maria Graham to William Hooker, 30 June 1825. MS. Directors’ Correspondence, vol. 43, folio 49, Royal Botanic Gardens, London.

26. For a detailed account of British abolitionist efforts in regard to Brazil, and an evaluation of Graham’s abolitionist rhetoric in comparison to the absence thereof in her fellow Britons’ accounts of Brazil, see Jennifer Hayward and M. Soledad Caballero, “Introduction,” in *Maria Graham’s Journal of a Voyage to Brazil* (Anderson, SC: Parlor Press, 2010), xxviii–lii. While noting Graham’s relative progressiveness compared to these others, the editors also scrutinize her own implication in the attitudes undergirding slavery.