



BRAZIL

J P DICKENSON

The World's Landscapes

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with a Foreword by

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Brazil



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que se desvenda
aos olhos do leitor'
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Foreword

by Dr J. M. Houston, Chancellor of Regent College, Vancouver

Despite the multitude of geographical books that deal with differing areas of the world, no series has before attempted to explain man's role in moulding and changing its diverse landscapes. At the most there are books that study individual areas in detail, but usually in language too technical for the general reader. It is the purpose of this series to take regional geographical studies to the frontiers of contemporary research on the making of the world's landscapes. This is being done by specialists, each in his own area, yet in non-technical language that should appeal to both the general reader and to the discerning student.

We are leaving behind us an age that has viewed Nature as an objective reality. Today we are living in a more pragmatic, less idealistic age. The nouns of previous thought forms are the verbs of a new outlook. Pure thought is being replaced by the use of knowledge for a technological society, busily engaged in changing the face of the earth. It is an age of operational thinking. The very functions of Nature are being threatened by scientific takeovers, and it is not too fanciful to predict that the daily weather, the biological cycles of life processes, as well as the energy of the atom will become harnessed to human corporations. Thus it becomes imperative that all thoughtful citizens of our world today should know something of the changes man has already wrought in his physical habitat, and which he is now modifying with accelerating power.

Studies on man's impact on the landscapes of the earth are expanding rapidly. They involve diverse disciplines such as Quaternary sciences, archaeology, history and anthropology, with subjects that range from pollen analysis, to plant domestication, field systems, settlement patterns and industrial land-use. But with his sense of place, and his sympathy for synthesis, the geographer is well placed to handle this diversity of data in a meaningful manner. The appraisal of landscape changes, how and when man has altered and remoulded the surface of the earth, is both pragmatic and interesting to a wide range of readers.

The concept of 'landscape' is of course both concrete and elusive. In its

Anglo-Saxon origin, *landschaft* referred to some unit of area that was a natural entity, such as the lands of a tribe or of a feudal lord. It was only at the end of the sixteenth century that, through the influence of Dutch landscape painters, the word also acquired the idea of a unit of visual perceptions, of a view. In the German *landschaft*, both definitions have been maintained, a source of confusion and uncertainty in the use of the term. However, despite scholarly analysis of its ambiguity, the concept of landscape has increasing currency precisely because of its ambiguity. It refers to the total man-land complex in place and time, suggesting spatial interactions, and indicative of visual features that we can select, such as field and settlement patterns, set in the mosaics of relief, soils and vegetation. Thus the 'landscape' is the point of reference in the selection of widely ranging data. It is the tangible context of man's association with the earth. It is the documentary evidence of the power of human perception to mould the resources of nature into human usage, a perception as varied as his cultures. Today, the ideological attitudes of man are being more dramatically imprinted on the earth than ever before, owing to technological capabilities.

Brazil lends itself well to the landscape approach undertaken in this work. In its colonial history there are traceable, differing perceptions of land and landscape which have left their mark on the contemporary scene. Dr Dickenson has identified succinctly the principal factors involved in the shaping of the Brazilian landscapes, in a country that is the fifth largest in the world. As he points out, the very spaciousness of the country has encouraged a wasteful presumption of riches and an instability of occupancy that have scarred Brazil, with cyclical stages of colonial landscape evolution: brasilwood, sugar, gold and coffee. Each was responsible for the settlement of a particular area in distinctive ways. Today, over half of Brazil's population is classified as 'urban', and the range of these urban landscapes likewise reflects the stages and functional activities of modern economic life. Dr Dickenson concludes his survey with a series of suggestive insights on Brazilian attitudes to landscape and its shaping in regional fiction and the image-making of modern tastes and values. The sheer scale of Brazil's territory and its apparent wealth has encouraged profligacy in its use, and fantasy in its image-making. The book is well illustrated and it is an illuminating study that should be of interest to a wide range of readers.

J. M. Houston

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Introduction

This study derives from the combination of three factors – my field observations during geographical research in Brazil over the past two decades, the rising interest in perception studies within geography in recent years, and the opportunities afforded by the approach and format of the ‘World’s Landscapes’ series. My interest in the Brazilian landscape began when I undertook doctoral research on the industrial geography of Minas Gerais, in south-eastern Brazil. As a newcomer I spent a good deal of time looking at the landscapes of Brazil with a geographer’s eyes. In addition to my detailed field studies in Minas Gerais, I was able to travel in other parts of the country. Subsequent visits to Brazil, to research, to teach and to attend conferences, have enabled me to travel extensively, so that I have a reasonable familiarity with the North-east, South-east and South regions of the country, and some acquaintance with the Centre-West and Amazonia.

My interest as a geographer in place and landscape has been heightened since the early 1970s by the growth of the field of perception studies, stimulated in particular by the writings of David Lowenthal, Hugh Prince, Yi Fu Tuan and others. In consequence my more recent visits to Brazil have had the dual function of pursuing my interest in geographical aspects of economic development, and of attempting to identify, appreciate and interpret the landscapes of the country.

The broad area of perception studies encompasses a number of sub-fields which relate to different scales and techniques of analysis and description, not all of them relevant to the study of landscape. The term landscape itself has a range and ambiguity of meanings. The ‘World’s Landscapes’ series facilitates some exploration of these ambiguities within the frame of its general concern for what James Houston describes as ‘the tangible context of man’s association with the earth’. (Houston 1970: v–vi)

The opportunity to write the present volume has provided the spur to read more systematically within the growing literature of perception studies and to develop and apply the ideas contained in this literature to the Brazilian landscape. During the writing of this volume two new books provided particular



Fig. 0.1 A rural scene in central Minas Gerais

stimulus and encouragement – D. W. Meinig's *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes* and E. B. Burn's *The Poverty of Progress*. The former has been a particular challenge and reassurance, in articulating clearly approaches to landscape which I was tentatively trying to explore in a Brazilian context. Among the essays included, that by Lewis on axioms for reading the North American cultural landscape touches on a number of themes relevant to Brazil, while Meinig's exploration of the way we look at landscape – as nature, habitat, artifact, system, problem, wealth, ideology, history, place, and aesthetic – confirms the diversity of approaches available. His case for the study of symbolic landscapes is also apposite in the Brazilian case. Samuel's discussion of the biography of landscape, of the virtue of seeking to identify the makers of landscape is also relevant, as is his counter-argument that the biographers of many landscapes are not identifiable, as these have been shaped by millions of unknown and unknowing individuals. This argument links closely with that developed, in a specifically Latin American context, by Burns, who explores the roles of both the élite minority and the impoverished majority in the development process, and thus in landscape change.

At a late stage in my writing also I came across the work of the Liverpool businessman William Hadfield, author of several books on Brazil in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Writing from the other bank of the Mersey he

observed that books on Brazil should avoid 'the Scylla of extreme succinctness and the Charybdis of needless diffuseness' – salutary warning indeed! (Hadfield 1854: 88). The present volume does not seek to be a comprehensive survey of the Brazilian landscape, for the sheer scale and diversity of the subject is incompatible with the limited space available. Instead, what I have attempted here is to build up a portrait of the present-day landscape of Brazil, using a range of approaches rather than a single one. The objectives set are twofold – primarily to describe and interpret the landscape or landscapes of Brazil as they have evolved and currently exist, and secondly to explore and demonstrate the viability of differing approaches to landscape description and analysis. It is also hoped that this work will prompt further work on these themes, for in its preparation many lacunae in the literature on the Brazilian landscape and landscape-shaping factors were evident.

The book follows an evolutionary approach, examining the perceptions of land and landscape held at different times in Brazil's history, giving particular emphasis to elements which persist in the landscapes of today. If the contemporary landscape is a palimpsest, built up by the generally slow process of change in the physical environment and more rapid change brought about by man, then the 'layers' can be viewed from different perspectives as man has perceived, used and created the landscape. In the past, as Hugh Prince has noted (1971), there were real, imagined and abstract worlds, and these have helped to shape the landscapes of the present. Hopefully I have identified at least the principal factors involved in the shaping of the Brazilian landscape.

For our purpose the physical landscape of Brazil may be treated as a *tabula rasa*, since, in historical terms, man appears to have been a relatively recent immigrant into what is now Brazil. This therefore permits us to describe the physical environment in essentially scientific terms, giving as far as possible an objective portrait of the natural landscape within which and upon which man has operated to create the landscapes which currently exist.

The legacy of early man in the Brazilian landscape is limited. The Amerindian in Brazil appears to have been less advanced than his counterpart in Andean or Meso-America. He was less numerous and less civilized, and in the face of European expansion after 1500 the number of Indians has declined and the area occupied has dwindled, so that the present contribution of the Indian has diminished both absolutely and relatively. The impact of the Indian has been, almost literally, little more than a scratching of the surface of the land.

The phase of Portuguese occupation is an important one, representing one of the pioneering phases of European imperialism, and we can see, from the colonial period, both the vision and the exploitation of 'far places'. During this period, of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, major elements in the pattern of settlement and land ownership, urban fabric, demographic mix and economic organization were laid and persist to the present.

After independence in 1822 Brazil became closely enmeshed with European powers engaged in the Industrial Revolution and with their economic expan-

sion overseas. This did not result in new formal colonial links, but European influences had a profound effect on Brazil's development and thus on its landscape. Several aspects of these influences are explored in Chapter 5. In the early nineteenth century the Brazilian élite deliberately sought and consciously aped the fashions of Europe. During the colonial and early post-colonial period Brazil's development was dependent on slave labour, but with the abolition of slavery alternative labour sources, in the form of European immigrants, became important. These groups were attracted to Brazil by images presented by recruiting agencies, they created distinctive ethnic landscapes in the areas in which they settled, and left some record of their reaction to the New World in the tropics in which they found themselves.

Increasing involvement in international trade also brought foreign investors to Brazil. Their views of the country's economic potential afford a differing perspective on the landscape and their actions were important in the shaping of the late nineteenth-century landscape, through the provision of infrastructure and urban services and in directing the nature of economic development. This was also a period of travel and exploration by European gentlefolk and scientists in Brazil, and their writings provide us with an external impression of the country and are responsible for some of the persisting images held of Brazil by foreigners.

In the twentieth century, in common with other Third World countries, Brazil has sought to develop and modernize. Efforts have been made to secure economic advance, diversify the economy and improve the living standards of the population. In this process the State has been a major element in shaping the path and structure of development, and thus having an impact on the landscape. The role of the State in landscape modification, particularly in non-socialist countries, appears to be little considered in the landscape literature. Furthermore, landscapes of economic progress in general seem to be neglected, presumably because factories, chimneys, gas works, power stations, railroads and highways are the very antithesis of aesthetically pleasing landscapes. Yet, in a developing country, such features provide new and distinctive elements in the landscape, and contrast with the natural landscape and the more slowly evolved and conservative rural landscapes. In addition, such developments are powerful stimuli to other landscape changes, in the fostering of urban growth as people find employment in factories or migrate in search of it.

Economic progress has brought substantial change to the Brazilian landscape, with movement from a rural, primary product-based economy to a more diversified urban one. By 1970 over half of Brazil's population was living in places defined as urban. The urban landscape has become both the objective and the norm for many Brazilians. In addition Brazil has sought to create specific urban landscapes, whether through simple and small-scale company towns, built for factory workers, or larger and more ostentatious projects.

Brazil's economic progress in the period since 1945 culminated in the 'economic miracle' of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The instigators and benefi-

ciaries of this miracle are the principal shapers of the contemporary landscape and the arbiters of landscape 'taste'. Yet this group represents only a minority of the population. Many people have not benefited greatly from this advance, and comprise the urban and rural poor, who live in landscapes of relative or absolute poverty. In spite of rapid urbanization it is estimated that one-third of the population in 1980, some 40 million people, live in rural areas, either in established farming areas or on the persisting dynamic frontier. Non-urban land still constitutes the bulk of Brazilian territory. These landscapes of development are explored in Chapter 6.

The study concludes with a series of shorter essays on attitudes to landscape and the shaping of landscape tastes. Increasingly the landscapes we see or believe we see are shaped or created by the media. The field of literary landscapes is an established one in perception studies and indeed pre-dates it in



Map 1 Brazil: regions and states

'regional' writing. In Brazil there is a substantial body of such regional fiction. The country's close involvement with the capitalist model of development has involved increasing acceptance of many of the image-making trappings of capitalist economies. A good deal of development has been linked to upper class acceptance of the aspirations and artifacts of capitalist consumer society, particularly via the activities of multi-national corporations, so that 'universal' elements intrude increasingly into the Brazilian landscape. A significant area of growth in recent years has been the rise of domestic and international tourism, which both projects and creates distinctive landscape images. In the development process the State has played an increasing role, modifying old landscapes and creating new ones, and has also sought to create images of Brazil both internally and overseas. Influences such as this shape the landscape we see or promote its modification.

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