ALBERT RICHARD DIETZE:
PHOTO CHRONICLER OF THE PROVINCE OF ESPÍRITO SANTO

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Biography

Albert Richard Dietze was born in 1838 in Kaja, located in today’s Saxony-Anhalt. After completing his military service and apprenticeship at an agricultural college, he headed to Brazil in 1862. Initially, he lived in Santa Catarina, but soon moved to Rio de Janeiro where he spent 14 months working at the Botanical Gardens. His work at the gardens may have involved cataloguing and photographing the various species.

He subsequently took over the photo studio Photographia Allemã and embarked on his career as a photographer. With regard to Dietze’s experience as a photographer, Pedro Vasquez writes: “He [Dietze] received thorough training as a photographer in his country of origin, where he already spent a period of time working as a professional portrait photographer for the upper classes, including Kaiser Wilhelm I”. There is, however, no record of any photographs from the time before he emigrated to Brazil (Vasquez 2000: 130).

On his numerous trips to the province of Espírito Santo, he discovered a range of subjects for his photographs: he portrayed the lives of the colonialists, the indigenous population and slaves, as well as landscape scenes and views of towns. In 1869 he moved to Vitória, the capital of the province. However, he kept his photo studio in Rio de Janeiro until 1873, when he set up another studio in his new place of residence, again calling it Photographia Allemã. At the beginning of the 1870s, he embarked on at least one trip to Europe, which he used to learn about the latest developments in the field of photography. His main interest appears to have been stereoscopy.

While travelling through the province, Dietze met the Sacht family in Santa Leopoldina and married Frederike Henriette Christine Sacht in 1873. Three years later in 1876, Dietze took all of his photographic equipment and moved to Santa Leopoldina. Here he purchased some land, which he cultivated until he died in 1906.

In the 1880s Dietze ultimately stopped working as a portrait photographer and devoted his energies to his trading company and his estate. However, he continued to take photographs. From that point on, Dietze’s photographic work was geared towards realizing his artistic ambitions. This did not, however, bring him significant commercial success.

In addition to his varied professional life, Dietze also worked as a consular agent until the start of the 20th century, which would account for some of his trips across the country. This role involved assisting the colonialists in all matters: representing their interests, ensuring their well-being, giving them guidance and acting as their spokesperson and even as their interpreter (Lopes 2003: 124). He was particularly dedicated to the inhabitants of Santa Leopoldina. On 7 April 1886, for example, he opened a school there, arranged for teachers to be sent from Germany and developed a coursebook: Leseschule für deutsche Kinder in Brasilien (A guide to reading for German children in Brazil – Lopes 2003: 129). He was also committed to improving the cultural life of the town, which was
Albert Richard Dietze's photo studio in Santa Leopoldina (1876)
virtually non-existent. To this end, he set up a gymnastics club and founded a family orchestra to play at religious ceremonies and dances, which were sometimes held at Dietze’s own house.

Austrian photographer Moritz Lamberg had the following to say after visiting Santa Leopoldina:

> The next day, which was a Sunday, I visited the consular agent who resides in the town, Mr. Dietze. Although he appears to have made many an enemy, I found him to be a friendly, intelligent man whose disposition is, I believe, too idealistic for his environment. (Lamberg 1899: 218)

Work and impact

From the outset, landscapes and views of cities, which were exotic by German standards, formed the focal point of Dietze’s body of work. He made his living, however, by taking numerous portrait shots of immigrants and their families. Up until 1873, he developed these images in his photo studio in Rio de Janeiro and then sent them to his customers or delivered them in person while on the road. In 1873 he set up his own photo studio in the Rua General Osório 46 in Vitória and published an advertisement to inform his customers that he had developed his skills as a photographer during a trip to Europe\(^1\) (Lopes 2003: 147). Dietze had good reason to make this known: by that time he already had competition from other photographers in Vitória.

Dietze also continued to make frequent trips in search of interesting subjects for his photographs. He transported his sensitive photographic equipment on foot, horseback or by boat and travelled through various regions of Espírito Santo and into neighboring Bahia. His photo studio, which he ran on his own, was closed during these trips. Dietze’s views of landscapes in particular demonstrate his extraordinary artistic skill. He tried to sell his images to travelers and foreign collectors through specialized dealers. He most frequently used the trading company *Flor da Bahia* in Vitória (Lopes 2003: 155).

However, in his advertisements in the local press, he merely referred to his work as a portrait photographer. In order to attract as many potential customers as possible, he only promoted his cheapest photographic services. His expensive portraits printed in large format or on costly paper were only affordable to a limited number of the local elite and they were not the target audience of these adverts.

On 30 June 1877 Dietze wrote to the Brazilian imperial house for the first time to request their support for his plans to publish a brochure illustrated with his photographs. The publication would aim to encourage people in Europe to emigrate to Santa Leopoldina. To have the desired effect, it would need to be published in various languages and have a sufficient print run. In his letter, Dietze explained that no photographic album had yet documented the cultivation and harvest of coffee. This branch of agriculture was clearly unfamiliar to colonialists from Europe, even to those who had trained as farmers, yet it played a major role in the Brazilian economy. The 24 photographs which Dietze planned to feature in the brochure not only depicted the various stages of coffee cultivation, but also the success and the prosperity of the immigrants. For the second part of this advertising brochure, Dietze proposed five themes: the colony of Santa Leopoldina, its foundation and current status; an overview of the cultivation of key products; a description of common pests in the colony and how to protect one’s crops against these pests; the climate and health in the colony; the happiness and prosperity of the colonialists. As Dietze did not have the means to finance this publica-
The Dietze family orchestra (c. 1895)
tion, he wrote to the crown princess and requested the necessary funds (Lopes 2003: 159-161). It would seem that his proposal went unanswered.

The following year, Dietze contacted the imperial house once again, this time addressing the emperor himself, who had visited Espírito Santo while travelling through the empire’s northern provinces from 1859 to 1860 (Rocha 1960: 5). He requested financial assistance for a series of photos featuring views of landscapes from Santa Leopoldina and the surrounding area (Lopes 2003: 174). This time he also enclosed 28 photographs, mainly in large and medium-sized formats, which illustrated the work he had produced in this field from 1869 to 1877. His sample photographs also included an image of his photo studio. Again, there is no record of a response to this letter.

In the 1880s Dietze stopped working as a portrait photographer and began submitting his work to international exhibitions. The first conclusive evidence of this dates back to 1882 and was followed by enthusiastic articles in the local press documenting the prizes he had been awarded for his photographs of plants, landscapes and colonialists (Lopes 2003: 176). Dietze also exhibited photographs at the world fair in Paris in 1889. The world fair saw the publication of the book *Le Brésil*, which contained numerous photographs and drawings and became known under the title *Album de Vues du Brésil*. It aimed to document and highlight the participation of Brazil in the fair. The province of Espírito Santo is not a focal point of the book, but it does feature in two of Dietze’s photographs. Although neither picture is attributed to Dietze, it has to be his work, as he was the only photographer participating in the world fair from this province (Lopes 2003: 189).

Dietze’s photographs proved very popular at these exhibitions, prompting him to compile third albums. Publications as expensive as these would only have appealed to a very small target audience. However, it seems that Dietze was more interested in producing artistic work than making financial profit.

At the end of the 19th century, Dietze was the first person in the province to produce picture postcards of Espírito Santo. The first series was published in 1899, featuring views of Vitória and Santa Leopoldina, among other motifs. Although the series mainly focuses on views of cities and landscapes, it also includes images with cultural and folklore-related themes. Each postcard features a montage of two to four pictures of various sizes. Dietze had stopped working as a professional photographer by this point and these projects allowed him to maintain his ties to the world of photography (Lopes 2003: 195).

**Documenting the history of emigration**

Albert Richard Dietze’s photographs of the colony of Santa Leopoldina provide an interesting glimpse into the history of German emigration to Brazil in the 19th century. His images depict numerous different aspects of day-to-day life, such as farming, the houses of the colonialists, their clothes and their leisure activities. These photographs could provide an excellent basis for a more in-depth exploration of the history of migration.

**Collections**

The holdings of the Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut (Ibero-American Institute, IAI) include a photo album featuring numerous photographs by Dietze, mainly depicting scenes from Vitória and Santa Leopoldina, including the famous image of his photo studio. Walter Lehmann’s papers also contain a number of Dietze’s photographs...
Luxembourg waterfall in Santa Leopoldina (year unknown)
The images discovered in these papers to date depict the Botocudo people from the province of Bahia. It is likely that these papers and the papers of Paul Ehrenreich (1855-1914) contain further photographs by Dietze. Berlin Ethnological Museum also owns a collection of his photographs.  

The photographs that Dietze enclosed with his two letters to the Brazilian imperial house are still part of the D. Thereza Christina Maria collection which comprises some 20,000 photographs. Emperor Pedro II donated these pictures to the national library in 1891 when he was already living in exile. Some of the images were also exhibited in the 20th century as part of this collection (Biblioteca Nacional 1997: 51).  

1 Unfortunately, no further details are known about this advertisement.  
2 It has not been possible to locate any of these albums to date (Lopes 2003: 184).  
3 At this time, there were no companies that published professional photo albums in Espírito Santo, unlike in Rio de Janeiro.  
4 Picture postcards featuring drawings were in circulation in Brazil from 1883; from 1891 they featured photographs (Lopes 2003: 194).  
5 38 images can be accessed in the digital collections of Berlin State Museums.  
6 The photographs can also be viewed online on the homepage of the Biblioteca Nacional Digital.  

Bibliography  


The city of Vitória with two churches: Matriz (center), Nossa Senhora do Rosario (right) (year unknown)
“Botocudo” in Sa. Leopoldina, Espírito Santo (year unknown)
“German engineers surveying the land” (year unknown)