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## Brian Vale, Independence or Death! British Sailors and Brazilian Independence, 1822-1825

Judy Bieber

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*Independence or Death! British Sailors and Brazilian Independence, 1822-1825*. By Brian Vale. (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1996. x + 219 pp. Illustrations, maps, tables, appendix, notes, index. \$59.50 cloth.)

In *Independence or Death!* Brian Vale argues that Brazilian independence required the creation of a modern navy to isolate Portuguese troops and pro-Portuguese factions within Brazil, and that British naval leadership, personnel, and ships were essential to Brazil's success. Vale highlights the role of Thomas Cochrane, a British naval officer who turned mercenary after being stripped of his title and honors because of his involvement in an 1814 London investment scandal. Cochrane built his reputation abroad by organizing the Chilean navy and subsequently entered into service with the Brazilian government in 1823.

Although Vale states that the book will examine ordinary soldiers as well as Cochrane, he does not succeed in this intent. Throughout the text he highlights Cochrane and a handful of notable officers, whereas the ordinary soldiers come across as an undifferentiated mass of potential insubordinates and habitual drunkards. Indeed, after describing the vital role of other officers in naval engagements and negotiations, Vale still insists that "Cochrane had probably made a greater contribution to Brazilian Independence than any other

single individual apart from José Bonifacio and the Emperor himself. And he made it with skill, dash and astonishing success" (p. 159). He does, however, critically interpret Cochrane's self-serving autobiography in an attempt to arrive at a more balanced assessment of the naval commander's strengths, failings, and eccentricities. His emphasis on personalities follows the "great man" style of history writing: the role of character traits in shaping historical events are apparent in descriptions of the "timidity" of the "bewildered king," Dom João VI, "that quirky genius Lord Cochrane," and the "youthful, impetuous and charismatic" Dom Pedro I. This tendency also manifests itself in numerous digressions about a "great woman," diarist and British navy widow Maria Graham.

The style is lively and immediate, giving a "you were there" effect which may exceed his sources. It is often difficult to determine where Vale got his information because he purposely has kept scholarly references to a minimum while simultaneously providing a wealth of factual minutiae, commenting, "I hope that it is not only Mr. Gradgrind who finds pleasure in the result" (p. ix). Indeed, Vale does include abundant details about the ships, their size, type, capabilities, and names before and after Brazilian acquisition. Yet certain statements demand more complete citations. For example, in a typical passage Vale asserts that Pedro I declared independence, "pale with fury and defiance" (p. 8). On what basis he was able to recreate Pedro I's appearance and state of mind is unclear to this former Ms. Gradgrind who would have appreciated more extensive documentation of the text.

This analysis would have been strengthened had the author paid less attention to personalities and placed more emphasis on broader social and political structures and relationships. For example, a more nuanced discussion of the balancing act required by the British government in its negotiations between its long-standing ally, Portugal, and its lucrative market, Brazil, would have enhanced this work. Vale does, however, aptly convey the complexity of the internal politics of Pernambuco, Maranhão, and Pará, albeit emphasizing the role of the elite. On balance, he provides a detailed narrative of a chapter in Brazilian history that has received comparatively little attention, the role of the British in the independence struggles and in the subsequent development of the Brazilian imperial navy.

Judy Bieber  
*Department of History*  
*University of New Mexico*