

Daniela Dyck

Experiencing Transit

On British Emigrant Ships to Australia in the 19th Century

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On British Emigrant Ships to Australia in the 19th Century

von
Daniela Dyck

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Dedication and Acknowledgments

Diese Arbeit ist meiner Familie gewidmet:

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Ich liebe Euch.

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liebvollen Ermutigerinnen und Ermutigern,

geduldigen Zuhörerinnen und Zuhörern,

weisen Ratgeberinnen und Ratgebern,

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IHM gehört meine Biografie, mein Leben, meine Geschichte.

List of Abbreviations

ANMM	Australian National Maritime Museum
AJCP	Australian Joint Copying Project
BLFES	British Ladies' Female Emigrant Society
CLEC	Colonial Land and Emigration Commission
CO	Colonial Office
LSE	London School of Economics
NLA	National Library of Australia
NSW	The Australian State of New South Wales
PROV	Public Record Office of Victoria
Qld	The Australian State of Queensland
SA	The Australian State of South Australia
SLNSW	State Library of New South Wales
SLQ	State Library of Queensland
SLV	State Library of Victoria
SPCK	Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge
UK	United Kingdom
VIC	The Australian State of Victoria

Introducing Transit:

1 An Encounter in the Library

During my first archival research trip, I found myself sitting in Sydney's Mitchell Library in the State Library of New South Wales next to the Botanical Gardens. It was summer outside, but the air conditioning allowed everyone to forget the blazing heat outside the historic walls of Australia's oldest library. I was not sure I knew where to look for what I was looking for. To be honest, maybe I did not even know exactly what I was looking for. I had ordered a few boxes, started filling out the form declaring the pictures I was going to take were for my own research purposes only, and then I noticed the signature of the box I had just received: MLK 2335. This was one of the boxes I had been really excited about because of the rather mysterious content description in the OPAC:

Include subject files, lists and indexes on various research interests, including convict and emigrant ships, Australian maritime history, Australian Encyclopaedia, and World War II and the Pacific; correspondence relating to his books, including Australian Shipwrecks, Chartmaker, Convict Ships, Early Sailor, Early Soldier, First into Italy, Gold Commission, Gold Fleet to California, and Spitfires over Malta; scrapbooks, newscuttings, printed and pictorial material, and maps.¹

Everything and nothing could be in here. However, the special glamour of this collection was that it had belonged to Charles Bateson (1903–1974). Ranked among the greatest historians on Australian settlement history, he was the author of a ground-breaking study on convict ships.²

¹ State Library of New South Wales, "Charles Bateson Papers, ca. 1916–1974: Textual Records – 125 Boxes (MLK 2328–MLK 2452. 5) Outsize Items Held Onsite (KV 11970–KV 11974), updated 2021/08/10 <collection.sl.nsw.gov.au/record/YEGmdyKn>, accessed 2021/08/27.

² Fletcher, Brian H., "Art.: 'Bateson, Charles Henry (1903–1974)'" updated 1993 <adb.anu.edu.au/biography/bateson-charles-henry-9452/text16621>, accessed 2023/06/08. Bateson's most famous book is Bateson, Charles, *The Convict Ships: 1787–1868*. Glasgow: Brown, Son & Ferguson, 1959.

The box standing in front of me now offered insight into his last years of active research. Bateson never really retired, continuing to collect various sources until his sudden death in 1974. The Mitchell Library holds the remains of this devoted historian's work, who died as he was gathering source material and drafting fragments for future chapters. In the end, this box was not of utmost importance for the research question I am primarily seeking to answer in this present book, but it was invaluable in enabling me to look over an experienced historian's shoulder, learning from his to-do-lists, address notes, book summaries, pieces of remark, oblique copies, letter beginnings. I started reading and realized: Before his death, Bateson had been working on a publication on emigrant ships – something I was now about to dive into! He had started collecting information on the first vessels, scandals, and problems; he attempted to understand the legal situation in Australia in the 1840/50s; and he issued public requests asking for emigrant diaries from private family archives. The following excerpt from the introduction is analytically remarkable: although drafted in the 1970s, it is much in line with today's prevalent microhistorical approaches:

Whatever the aspect or problem of ~~emigration or~~ immigration under scrutiny it must never be forgotten that stripped of its bare essentials it concerns human beings. Any history of ~~emigration or~~ immigration is the history of a segment of the lives of thousands upon thousands of men, women and children — of human beings diverse in race, religion, character, mental capacity and physical ability, each with their own hopes, fears and anxieties, *their own strengths and weaknesses*. While ~~the emigrants and~~ immigrants are the central figures, there are also the departmental and civic officials, merchants, shipowners, officers and seamen, medical practitioners, clergymen and other people, official or ~~non-~~unofficial, who in one way or another, and in lesser or greater degree, help to formulate and carry into practical effect ~~emigration or~~ immigration policies. All are liable to human passions, *human prejudices* and human errors. Even the people at large in the respective countries, although not directly involved in the machinery of ~~emigration or~~ immigration, exert through their social customs, prejudices and idiosyncrasies a profound influence on ~~those who emigrate or immigrate~~ the attitudes of immigrants.

These human factors, which are so often overlooked, have a direct bearing upon the success or failure of official policies, especially in the field of assimilation, and explain much that is irrational in our immigration history. They account for one group of immigrants being warmly welcomed and quickly assimilated and another almost identical group being coolly received and finding themselves misfits in their new environment. They explain why one person suddenly tears up all his roots and carves for himself a new and better life in a distant country, while another fails in a similar attempt and quickly returns home, disgruntled and disillusioned. Human elements also have been responsible for suffering and brutality, for death and disease in immigrant ships, for callous treatment of immigrants on leaving their homeland or on arrival at their destination, and for the creation in the receiving country of minority settlements of particular nationalities or groups, whose assimilation is long delayed or never attained.³

I felt like a dwarf standing on the shoulders of giants when reading through Bateson's introductory passages, arguing for migration history to focus on the human beings. This focus is one of anthropological history, looking at past individuals defending values, embodying mentalities, nourishing hopes, carrying out political decisions, supervising rules, fighting anxiety.⁴

I will use Bateson's thoughts as food for my own research when developing a conceptual approach concerned with human beings' experiences of one exemplary long-distance migration process. This in-between state of transit is historicized and taken to be both

- (1) a temporal period with social, cultural, and political ramifications, and
- (2) an abstract, conceptual framework for special experiences as human beings.

3 Bateson, Charles, Collection of Textual Records (State Library of New South Wales) MLK 2331+MLK 2335; MLK 2335, 7–9.

4 See Müller, Philipp, "Historische Anthropologie: Fragen und Konzepte zur Einführung," *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 69, 5/6 (2018): 334–345.

A quick overview of Australian migration and the historiographic tradition will now help to contextualize my approach.

1.1 Migration to Australia

Long-distance migration crucially shaped the increasingly mobile world in the 19th century, with three major systems across the globe: (1) Transatlantic, (2) Southeast Asia-Indian Ocean, and (3) Northern Asia.⁵ This study focusses on the second system, with its attention on a selection of the roughly 1.6 million assisted and free migrants from the United Kingdom to Australia who built the core of the white Australian society today. The assisted and free migrants far outnumbered the previously transported 160,000–165,000 convicts. From these non-convict settlers, about 50% received governmental support.⁶

The Australasian route was the geographically longest one-way passage in 19th century migration to British colonies, covering 12,000–14,000 miles. In 1862, the annual *Colonization Circular* magazine, which from the 1850s until the 1870s offered information about possible settler destinations, noted that “the usual length of the voyage to the Australian Colonies [was] about 3 1/2 months, and to New Zealand a little longer”⁷. With the opening of the Suez Canal and the advance of the steamship, this period was reduced to 90 days by sail and 65 days by steam in the 1870s. Sailing vessels tended to go non-stop via the “Great Circle Route” across the Atlantic Ocean and around the Cape of Good Hope before heading towards the Australian continent. The range of climate zones, temperatures and winds was immense. Difficulties often came with

5 McKeown, Adam, “Global Migration, 1846–1940,” *Journal of World History* 15, no. 2 (2004): 155–189; 156–160.

6 Maxwell-Stewart, Hamish, and Rebecca Kippen, “Sickness and Death on Convict Voyages to Australia,” in *Lives in Transition: Longitudinal Analysis from Historical Sources*, ed. Peter A. Baskerville and Kris E. Inwood. Carleton Library 232. Montreal, et al.: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2015: 43–70 and Richards, Eric, *Britannia’s Children: Emigration from England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland since 1600*. London, New York: Hambledon and London, 2004: 126.

7 Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners, *Colonization Circular* (No. 21. Issued by her Majesty’s Emigration Commissioners), London 1862 (Cambridge University Library) OP.3100.0.038 (22): 11.

the “doldrums” – the often-windless belt around the equator (latitude: N 5°–S 5°) – or the fierce headwinds of the “Roaring Forties” (latitudes: S 40°–50°) when approaching Cape Horn.⁸ The illustration below shows one example of an emigrant ship route taken from a passage in 1875.⁹



Figure 1: The “Great Circle Route” (1875)

Steamships went through the Mediterranean Sea and the Suez Canal before crossing the Indian Ocean – a journey including stopovers in port cities and islands for coal-loading and touristic purposes. One argument for taking this migration system to study ‘transit’¹⁰ is the quantitative advantage of the Australian passage over contemporary one-way-journeys in terms of miles and duration, but another argument is the prevalence of the Atlantic passage in other research projects.

⁸ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, “What are the Doldrums?,” updated 2021/02/26 <oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/doldrums.html>, accessed 2021/09/24.

⁹ Zouche, Isaiah de, Surgeon’s Diary on Board the ‘Star Queen’ (Original and Transcript with Further Sources (Letters, Examination Protocols, Newspaper Extracts, Notes, etc.)), 1875/04/19–1875/10/30 (State Library of Queensland) OM 67–8; Box 8630: [65 in transcript].

¹⁰ A quick note on formatting: Throughout the book, I will use single quotation marks when referring to the abstract/conceptual meaning of a word, such as ‘transit’, ‘mediator’, ‘fear’, etc.

This book can therefore be read as a contribution to related studies on the “inner life of empires”.¹¹

In order to reduce the number of voyages being studied, my work focuses on the Eastern Australian colonies of New South Wales, Victoria, and Queensland, where similar schemes and structures of assisted and unassisted migration were offered to intending emigrants from the United Kingdom. The chosen time span for the study covers a period of about 50 years: it begins with the 1850s after convict transportation had come to a stop in the aforementioned colonies and ends in the 1890s, shortly before the New Australian Federation Act in 1901. For statistics and numbers, I can build on Australian migration research from the 1990s onwards.¹²

Broadly speaking, whereas Australian historians look at these events from an “identity” approach, British historians generally deal with this “Down Under” territory as if it was one settler colony among others in the later Commonwealth community.¹³ My study is situated between the different approaches and extends the settler studies to the pre-colonist period: the period when the future Australian citizen was still a passenger – still “in-between”.¹⁴

11 See Rothschild, Emma. *The Inner Life of Empires: An Eighteenth-Century History*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013; Fischer-Tiné, Harald, and Christine Whyte, “Introduction. Empires and Emotions,” in *Anxieties, Fear and Panic in Colonial Settings: Empires on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, ed. Harald Fischer-Tiné. Cambridge Imperial and Post-Colonial Studies. Houndmills, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016: 1–23:3.

12 Starting with a workshop in 1989, the series “Visible Immigrants” collected migration research previously unknown: Richards, Eric, David Fitzpatrick, and Richard Reid, eds., *Visible Immigrants: Neglected Sources for the History of Australian Immigration*, 5 vols., Visible Immigrants 1. Canberra: Department of History and Centre for Immigration and Multicultural Studies, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University, 1989, etc.

13 See e.g. Reid, Richard E., *Farewell My Children: Irish Assisted Emigration to Australia 1848–1870*. Sydney: Anchor Books Australia, 2011: 9.

14 This formative period during the journey has gained attention in convict studies as well: Foxhall, Katherine, “From Convicts to Colonists: The Health of Prisoners and the Voyage to Australia, 1823–53,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 39, no. 1 (2011): 1–19.

1.2 The ship as laboratory

Paying attention to the ships sailing or steaming across the “British Sea” expands a merely land-based narrative¹⁵ centred around Britishness and the related struggles of national narratives and identity.¹⁶ The sea proved to be and was perceived as something forever foreign and unreliable. In spite of impressive advances in natural and technical sciences, attempts to tame and govern the waves often remained unsuccessful, although innovative technology and improvements in navigation, safety and provision made it possible for 19th century emigrant guides to sell the journey as a safe trip around the world, neatly situated in the realm of the familiar empire.¹⁷

While the historiographic beginnings of maritime research were primarily concerned with naval warfare, technical inventions and economic affairs¹⁸, the field recently began to include fresh aspects such as agency. This actor-based approach, focussing “not only on leaders but also on common and anonymous agents” brings with it more abstract and more anthropological topics such as emotions, values and motives.¹⁹

15 Pietsch, Tamson, “A British Sea: Making Sense of Global Space in the Late Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of Global History* 5, no. 3 (2010): 423–446. doi:10.1017/S1740022810000215. Pietsch’s more abstract concept of the “British Sea” can be read against a recent volume on “empires of the sea”, in which the British Empire is not numbered among the “maritime empires” as it is declared to be “very much land-based”: Strootman, Rolf, “Introduction: Maritime Empires in World History,” in *Empires of the Sea: Maritime Power Networks in World History*, ed. Rolf Strootman, Floris van den Eijnde and Roy van Wijk. Cultural Interactions in the Mediterranean 4. Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2020: 1–35.

16 “[...] a maritime perspective [...] is a salutary way of de-parochializing the history of the British empire” (Cannadine, David, “Introduction,” in *Empire, the Sea and Global History: Britain’s Maritime World, c. 1760–c. 1840*, ed. David Cannadine. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007: 1–5:2.)

17 Pitt & Scott, *The Emigrants’ Guide for 1883*. London: Pitt & Scott, 1883; esp.: 73.

18 Hattendorf, John B., “Ubi Sumus? Twenty Five Years Later,” *Northern Mariner* 27, no. 1 (2017): 1–14 referring to Hattendorf, John B., ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Maritime History: Online Edition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007; Rodger, Nicholas A., and Christian Buchet, eds., *The Sea in History: The Modern World*, 4 vols., *The Sea in History. La Mer dans L’Histoire* 4. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2017.

19 “More recently, maritime historians have also drawn on the histories of technology and science, as well as the history of the ‘immaterial’ (i.e., the fears, expectations and codes of inclusion and exclusion of maritime communities and groups). [...] Issues related to social, religious and cultural studies have emerged recently as important topics in maritime history. Their inclusion reveals an understanding of the centrality of human agents to

Hence, the new maritime history, with its attention on social and cultural questions, serves as a perfect bridge to the perspective advocated by global history.²⁰ In that sense, my work can be placed within this field as it concentrates on complex connections and long-distance movements across continents. Globalization is seen not simply as a straightforward movement of universalization, but, especially in migratory situations, as a process involving the juggling of constant and seemingly contradictory tensions of access and control, rights and duties, inclusion and exclusion.²¹

As will be shown throughout the book, these complexities are concentrated on the ship. Until well into the 19th century, the sailing vessel was the carrier of money, fame, people, and goods of the seaborne empire – and it was the temporary home to millions of immigrants to Australia as well. The advent of the steamship in the second half of the 19th century symbolized progress, power and prestige, and allowed both aspects (carriage and temporary home) to be improved and to profit from each other's experience.²² Beyond these representative potential and technological efforts, it is the analytical value of the (emigrant) ship which is high for the historian. Known as the “wooden world” since the 18th century and rendered as “heterotopia par excellence” in the 20th century,²³ it can be taken as a stage for human transitory interaction in a globalized and globalizing world.

maritime dynamics.” (Polónia, Amélia, “Maritime History: A Gateway to Global History,” in *Maritime History as Global History*, ed. Maria Fusaro and Amélia Polónia. Research in Maritime History 43. St. John's: International Maritime Economic History Association; Liverpool University Press, 2010: 1–20:2.)

20 Cusack, Tricia, ed., *Framing the Ocean, 1700 to the Present: Envisaging the Sea as Social Space*. Farnham Surrey, Burlington: Ashgate, 2014 and Fusaro, Maria, “Maritime History as Global History? The Methodological Challenges and a Future Research Agenda,” in *Maritime History as Global History*, ed. Maria Fusaro and Amélia Polónia. Research in Maritime History 43. St. John's: International Maritime Economic History Association; Liverpool University Press, 2010: 267–282.

21 McKeown, “Global Migration, 1846–1940”: 3–6.

22 Mendonça, Sandro, “The ‘Sailing Ship Effect’: Reassessing History as a Source of Insight on Technical Change,” *Research Policy* 42, no. 10 (2013): 1724–1738. doi:10.1016/j.respol.2012.12.009.

23 Ward, Edward, *The Wooden World Dissected: In the Character of a Ship of War: As also the Characters of all the Officers, from the Captain to the Common Sailor. A New Edition*. London, 1795 and Foucault, Michel, and Jay Miskowic, “Of Other Spaces,” *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 22–27. doi:10.2307/464648: 27.