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ABORIGINAL MISSIONS AND POST-CONTACT MARITIME ARCHAEOLOGY: A SOUTH AUSTRALIAN SYNTHESIS

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Abstract

The post-contact maritime archaeological research of Aboriginal missions has hitherto been an un-developed area of study. This paper argues that research in this area is now required to investigate the ‘hidden histories’ of Indigenous peoples in relation to the lacustrine, riverine and coastal waterways of the late 19th and early 20th century Australian land and waterscape. As such this paper presents a synthesis of information on this topic including an analysis of available literature and historical sources to better understand Indigenous peoples’ activities in the post-contact maritime land and waterscape. Ultimately, it is also argued that the maritime archaeology of Aboriginal missions has the potential to contribute knowledge about cross-cultural exchange and cultural continuity. This study is timely because many maritime mission sites are deteriorating and their associated intangible heritage is in need of preservation.

Introduction

Archaeological research into the maritime activities at missions is one avenue available to researchers which can facilitate the inclusion of Indigenous peoples in the literature surrounding Indigenous post-contact maritime land and waterscapes. Such research may also contribute to decolonising this aspect of the past through converging Indigenous and maritime approaches (see Roberts et al. 2013:97).
As such, this paper reviews available literature\(^1\) relating to maritime activities at eight missions in South Australia, including Point Pearce (Burgiyana), Poonindie, Raukkan, Swan Reach, Etona, Manunka, Gerard and Killalpaninna as case studies to consider these issues (see Figure 1). These examples highlight a range of site types including abandoned vessels, extant vessels, boat building sites, fish pounds, jetties, bridges and other infrastructure, which fall within a maritime archaeology purview. These sites represent a range of activities or themes which Indigenous peoples were engaged with in the post-contact maritime land and waterscape; including boat building, water-based transportation, construction of infrastructure, fishing and the use of various fishing technologies. As such, this paper argues that post-contact maritime archaeology is an understudied part of Aboriginal mission studies and can contribute new knowledge about cross-cultural exchange and cultural continuity. It also foregrounds the urgent need to document this rapidly deteriorating tangible cultural heritage in collaboration with Indigenous communities.

In Australia, the term ‘mission’ archaeology describes government reserves and institutions, as well as religious missions (Middleton 2010:182). Whilst this paper examines South Australian examples such research would be equally applicable to Indigenous missions and reserves Australia and worldwide. Following European colonisation of South Australia in 1836, 15 major missions were established between the period 1850 and 1915, with several more being established after 1915, and many of these were located on the coast or on major river and lake systems (Jones 2009:40).

\(^1\) In South Australia, archaeological research has been published about five missions, however only Point Pearce (Jones 2009; Roberts et al. 2013; Wood and Westell 1998), Poonindie (Griffin 2000, 2010), Swan Reach (Anderson et al. 1997; Harris 1996; Hemming et al. 2000) and Killalpaninna (Birmingham 2000; Birmingham and Wilson 2010) are reviewed, as Ooldea (Brockwell et al. 1989; Colley et al. 1989) is not located near significant water sources.
As Lydon and Ash (2010:1) note, archaeologists have been slow to explore missions in Australia, however this is changing with a range of new research around the country (see papers in Ash et al. 2010). Similarly, archaeological research focused on Indigenous maritime heritage has developed slowly leading to inadequate and biased representations of coastal, riverine and lacustrine Indigenous communities’ maritime heritage (Roberts et al. 2013:78). Roberts et al. (2013:78) suggested that such a bias is most apparent when one compares Indigenous Australian research in this area to the focus of maritime archaeology of non-Indigenous maritime heritage, particularly shipwrecks. Further they argue that the progress in maritime studies towards Indigenous community engagement has not developed
at the same rate as other sub-fields of the archaeological discipline (Roberts et al. 2013). Gibbs (2004:40) has similarly noted that Indigenous-related sites have largely fallen outside the scope of Australian maritime archaeology. Pre-contact research has been conducted on Aboriginal fish traps (e.g., Dortch et al. 2006; Martin 1988; Welz 2002), inundated stone artefact scatters (Dortch 1997, 2002a, 2002b; Dortch and Godfrey 1990) and traditional Aboriginal watercraft (e.g., Bednarik 1998; Rowland 1995). As a result Gibbs (2004:41) has argued that post-contact research, or what he terms ‘cross-cultural contacts’, requires substantially more consideration as a maritime theme.

Areas of interest identified by Gibbs (2004:47) include Indigenous and visiting mariner interaction, Indigenous and shipwreck survivor interaction (Morse 1988), Indigenous rock art representations of maritime contact (Bigourdan and McCarthy 2007; May et al. 2009; Wesley et al. 2012), impact of maritime contact on material culture and economy, and Indigenous labour forces in colonial maritime industries, such as whaling (Gibbs 2003; Staniforth et al. 2001), sealing (Clarke 1996; James 2002; Russell 2005) and pearling (McPhee 2001). As with other post-contact Indigenous maritime sites, a more broad-based study of coastal (as well as riverine and lacustrine) missions would begin to restore the disparity between European and Indigenous maritime activities in post-contact Australian literature.

Maritime archaeology, often associated with the sea, can actually be used to explore river or lake based missions, as well as coastal missions. Westerdahl (2011:338) notes the definition of maritime is “belonging to the sea”; however, he suggests that as culture plays such a significant role when contextualising the term ‘maritime’, it could equally be applied to inland lakes. When the functional and cognitive aspects of lake or river landscapes are similar to seaboard cultures it can be deemed ‘maritime’. Rogers (2009:30, 75-76), for example, applied maritime cultural landscape concepts to inland contexts using the term “riverine cognitive landscapes”. Investigating interior rivers, lakes and transit corridors from a maritime perspective allows “more complete contextualization of watercraft found in those settings” (Rogers 2009:76). Inland communities, while not strictly maritime in the scope of living by the sea, exploited rivers and
lakes, and often they are spiritually significant places, which is why the “new narratives” of mission maritime activities in this discourse extend upstream and inland from the sea (Rogers 2009:292).

**Case Studies: A South Australian Synthesis**

Below I outline a number of examples that demonstrate the potential for maritime archaeology in relation to South Australian missions. Information canvassed in these sections has been drawn from publicly available information – largely published works, theses and historical records. These include two coastal missions, Point Pearce (Burgiyana) and Poonindie, two lacustrine missions, Raukkan and Killalpaninna, and four riverine missions, Swan Reach, Etona, Manunka and Gerard.

**Point Pearce (Burgiyana) (Yorke Peninsula)**

The Point Pearce Aboriginal Mission on Yorke Peninsula, approximately two kilometres east of the Spencer Gulf, was established in 1868 and was first overseen by a Moravian missionary (Mattingley and Hampton 1992:197). Jones (2009) archaeologically investigated fringe camps associated with Point Pearce and Wood and Westell (1998) recorded the five remaining historic buildings at the mission. In 2012 Roberts et al. (2013) undertook the project ‘(Re)locating Narrunga’, the first published archaeological study to specifically investigate maritime activities associated with an Aboriginal mission. This project attempted to relocate the scuttled ketch *Narrunga*, built by the Indigenous peoples at Point Pearce. *Narrunga*, while historically recorded as being constructed by a non-Indigenous man was, according to oral histories, built by Narungga people (Roberts et al. 2013:83-86). In addition to its construction, *Narrunga* was also used by the Indigenous peoples during the day to day running of Wardang Island as a sheep grazing enterprise (Roberts et al. 2013:83-86).

The ‘(Re)locating Narrunga’ project documented sites associated with the vessel and oral histories surrounding its life history. The project, although unsuccessful in locating *Narrunga*, resulted in many positive outcomes such as allowing community members to influence the research design and outcomes, decolonising the past by recording Narungga maritime
achievements that are downplayed in non-Indigenous records, and recording land-based remains associated with *Narrunga* (Roberts *et al.* 2013:96-97).

**Poonindie (Eyre Peninsula)**

Poonindie, located on the Eyre Peninsula near Port Lincoln, approximately two kilometres west of the Spencer Gulf, was established by the Anglican Church and operated between 1850 and 1896 (Griffin 2010:157). Griffin (2010) analysed the use of space at Poonindie using capitalist theory. Archaeological surveys recorded structural remains and artefact scatters associated with primary buildings within the mission site itself and, alongside historical documents and photographs, a plan of the mission's spatial organisation was suggested (Griffin 2010:159). He found that capitalist ideologies of regulated labour and social hierarchy were demonstrated in the spatial organisation, for example the clock and bell used to organise work was located at the centre of the mission, atop the church (Griffin 2010:168). Also, he indicates that Indigenous residents resisted this ideology by leaving the confines of the mission and accessing space outside its control – e.g., crossing the boundary fence to maintain traditional practices (Griffin 2010:168).

Historically, fishing and boat building were maritime activities at Poonindie with access to the sea by the Tod River, which led from the bottom of a paddock close to the mission (*The South Australian Advertiser* 1858:2). Mr Hawkes, who visited in 1858, described how Indigenous peoples were fond of fishing and spent holidays undertaking such a pastime (*The South Australian Advertiser* 1858:2). On a fishing trip with Indigenous peoples from the mission, fish were cooked in the traditional way (*The South Australian Advertiser* 1858:2). Furthermore, *The Queenslander* (1880:82) describes an Indigenous man who built his own boat:

One – a half-caste – is mentioned who does nearly all the painting, glasing [sic], and carpentering of the institution, and who made a neat little boat in his spare time out of a few boards he bought in Port Lincoln.

Therefore, it is evident that maritime activities such as fishing and the use of boats in the post-contact period gave access to space outside the mission’s control.
Raukkan (Lower Lakes)

Off the Mission Station, at Point Maclay [McLeay], a cutter yacht with her sails glistening white in the sunshine, and fishing boats here and there on the water showed that life at the station was not without its pleasant side...

(The Review, 1 June, 1891 in Fenton 1977:5).

Raukkan (Point McLeay), located on the shores of Lake Alexandrina in the Lower Lakes, was established in 1859 by the ‘Aborigines’ Friends’ Association (Mattingley and Hampton 1992:183). Fish traps are generally associated with pre-contact Indigenous research, though they were used into the historic period (Ross 2009). A detailed study of Ngarrindjeri fish traps, conducted by Ross (2009), discusses some historic usage. His thesis primarily focuses on fish traps, however some mention is made of fish pounds associated with Raukkan. A fish ‘pound’ was constructed using wooden stakes in a circular pattern and, in the historic period, used to collect fish and keep them alive prior to transport to market (Ross 2009:4). George Taplin, a Raukkan missionary, describes fish pounds as used at Raukkan:

...enclosures by driving stakes close together into the bottom of the lake in a circle some twenty or twenty five feet round, and place Murray Cod which they catch therein, to preserve them alive.

(Taplin 8 November 1859 in Ross 2009:25)

On getting the fish today we discovered that there were large holes in the side of the pound and that there were very few in it. On consideration I was led to believe that someone had stolen the fish and made these holes in the pound to leave us to conclude that they had escaped through the pound being broken by the waves. This is the fourth time the blacks have suffered an extensive robbery of their pounds. It is most discouraging to them.

(Taplin 9 July 1860 in Kartinyeri 2006:5-6)

European fishers also used fish pounds made of tea-tree stakes in the Coorong until the 1930s (Ross 2009:25).

In the 1890s, Indigenous boat builders are also recorded as having supplied two government contracts for dinghies, however boat building at Raukkan did not succeed as the market was mostly provided for by grinkari (‘white’) tradesmen (Mattingley and Hampton 1992:186):
We then proceeded to the woolshed, which has been converted for the time being into a carpenter's shop, where several of the natives have been engaged building a boat. They took as their model a large dingy which was procured some years ago at Goolwa, and it must be admitted that they have turned out a most substantial bark. It is their first attempt at boat-building, and considering that they have had little or no instruction the success they have achieved reflects the greatest credit upon both their powers of design and their manual dexterity.

(\textit{The South Australian Chronicle} 1894:6)

Raukkan had its own boat, \textit{Teenminnie}, used for transporting building materials amongst other things (\textit{South Australian Register} 1896:6). Expensive repairs to \textit{Teenminnie} were carried out in 1901, meaning it would be two years before it required overhauling again (\textit{The Advertiser} 1901:9). Infrastructure was constructed to service the mission boat. By 1894, a landing was located three miles from the mission (\textit{The South Australian Chronicle} 1894:6). In 1901, the jetty was in disrepair and it was hoped that either a new jetty be erected or the current one repaired and lengthened (\textit{The South Australian Chronicle} 1894:6). Based on historical photographs (Kartinyeri 2006:11), wool washing was also conducted along the jetty.

The maritime landscape at Raukkan can be seen to feature both continuing traditions, such as the use of fish pounds, as well as cross-cultural exchange, through boat building and the construction of infrastructure. Such insights reveal the potential for future research in this area.

\textbf{Swan Reach, Etona, Manunka and Gerard (River Murray)}

\textit{...and the jetty on the white strand, and the group of mission houses looked undoubtedly pretty from the water.}  
\textit{(The Review, 1 June, 1891 in Fenton 1977:5)}

Of the permanent and travelling missions along the Murray River, only Swan Reach has been examined archaeologically and published. Swan Reach was run by the United Aborigines Mission from 1925 to 1945 and has been investigated using archaeology, oral histories and historical documents. In 1994, three sites were excavated: a midden, a family \textit{wurley} and an

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\footnote{A \textit{wurley} is a temporary Aboriginal dwelling, chiefly in South Australia (Dixon \textit{et al.} 2006:197, 199).}
Indigenous mission house (Anderson et al. 1997:46). The material culture of the house contributed to understanding everyday life at the mission and prompted oral history recollections (Anderson et al. 1997:46). Six former mission residents were interviewed and discussed diet, subsistence strategies, children’s activities, work, social and cultural practices, and gender roles (Anderson et al. 1997:47). The project by Anderson et al. (1997:48) produced a narrative of daily life for an Indigenous woman at Swan Reach and stressed the importance of a mixed disciplinary framework when investigating contact sites.

A large metal hammer was located during the *wurley* excavation which was identified as a boat building implement “used by the main Aboriginal boat builder at Swan Reach in the 1940s and 1950s” (Hemming et al. 2000:345). Boats were also mentioned in an oral history:

> Agnes remembered the men crossing to the other side of the river in their boats rather than go near the *Mulyewongk* [mythical water spirit] hole.  
> (Anderson et al. 1997:47)

In addition, boats are mentioned within ethnographic accounts:

> I was up just before sunrise and saw two men winding their way to their boats in order to examine their lines. By sunrise 6 boats had set out...Later in the day we met some of the men at the main Swan Reach camp and they said that they had had splendid fishing.  
> (Tindale 1930-52:19-20 in Hemming et al. 2000:344-345)

Despite indications of the presence of boats, no archaeological evidence has been identified. Could the application of mixed methods, such as the oral history and archaeological investigations outlined above, provide further information on aspects of maritime activities at Swan Reach if attentions were focused on the study of maritime structures and artefacts?
From 1891 to 1912, the launch *Etona* followed by the paddle steamer *Etona* worked as a travelling mission on the Murray River for the Bishop’s Home Mission Society. Fenton (1977) highlights the mission’s purpose as servicing the settler populations along the river where churches were yet to be constructed. Despite this focus, some mention is made of Indigenous peoples in the area. For example, on the first voyage of the launch in 1891, an Indigenous man from the lower Murray was onboard “on purpose to see [at night] what the white man couldn’t”, and also assisted in rowing the men ashore for the service (Fenton 1977:6). *Etona* also stopped at Indigenous camps along the river and at Raukkan and Manunka.

The mission at Manunka, on the Murray River, ran from 1901 to 1911, prior to the establishment of Swan Reach, and was managed by the Matthews Family (Hemming et al. 2000:338). *The Advertiser* (1912:18) describes when the schoolhouse was constructed at Manunka Mission, “the farmer’s children were sent to the school (being conveyed by the natives both ways across the river) and instructed with the native children”. Boats were evidently a part of daily life at Manunka; in 1909 prizes were promised to Indigenous peoples for best house, room, boat and garden at Christmas (*The Register* 1909:3).

Following the closure of Swan Reach, a mission at Gerard was established by the United Aborigines Mission in the upper Murray River (Hemming et al. 2000:339). According to historical photographs, Indigenous peoples at Gerard used boats to go fishing (Mattingley and Hampton 1992:224). As such, further investigation of this history and related archaeology in collaboration with the Aboriginal community could provide new insights.

In summary, the maritime land and riverscapes of the missions on the Murray River, including the travelling mission *Etona* and the permanent missions Swan Reach, Manunka and Gerard, reveal many maritime activities including boat building, fishing and working on vessels. Thus, it is likely that there are archaeological remains of these activities which could allow new perspectives of the past to be investigated, understood and highlighted.
Killalpaninna Mission was located in the Lake Eyre – lower Cooper Creek area in far north South Australia, close to the major crossing over Cooper Creek and alongside Lake Killalpaninna (Birmingham 2000:361). It was operated by Lutheran missionaries from 1867 to 1914 (Birmingham and Wilson 2010:27). From 1994 to 1997 an archaeological survey involved non-disturbance recording of all surface features in order to understand cross-cultural adaption (Birmingham and Wilson 2010:35). Birmingham and Wilson (2010:35-37) found Indigenous peoples at Killalpaninna engaged with the mission on different levels resulting in a hybrid culture, for example an uptake of European rations, adaptations of other European material culture, and continuing use of grindstones. Evidence of fishing was located, including two fish hooks thought to be associated with employed stockmen as they were found in association with other items such as harnesses, belt buckles and buttons (Birmingham and Wilson 2010:31).

Boating, swimming and fishing were favourite pursuits for Indigenous children and missionary children alike, with some accounts of fishing from small wooden boats (Stevens 1994:156). Indigenous peoples constructed a wooden fishing platform (paroowolpa) at the edge of Lake Killalpaninna, where Indigenous and German children would fish using grass fishing lines (Stevens 1994:156). Detailed information is provided about boats used at the mission, including a galvanised-iron boat made by Mr Alwin Fischer for Killalpaninna in The Advertiser (1898:10):

Being 18 ft. long, and of good width, it is capable of carrying 12 to 15 persons, together with about 2 tons of stores. It is provided with sails as well as centre-board, and is intended to carry the traffic across the Lake Kopperamanna, which, through the floods from Queensland, has been filled to a width of 10 miles. As the heat and the white ants have destroyed the wooden boats used formerly the mission people have entrusted Mr. Fischer with the order for this iron boat and the exhibit proves that he has succeeded very well both in shape and strength of the boat.
A flat-bottomed boat was used around the station when Lake Killalpaninna flooded (Stevens 1994:134); flooding events wreaked havoc at Killalpaninna, resulting in work for Indigenous peoples, both in ferrying goods and constructing bridges. Mattingley and Hampton (1992:119) describe the ferry on Cooper Creek, used to transport passengers and goods to and from Queensland, and run by men from Killalpaninna Mission. The Superintendent related an incident when the river flooded:

This kept our overseer (Vogelsang) and some seventy of his black boys busy for nearly six months. As all the traffic to Queensland goes through our run and the Cooper for 10 miles width covered the track, punting had to be resorted to for landing all goods and mails on the other side.

(Protector of Aborigines, Report, 1907 in Mattingley and Hampton 1992:119)

During the 1903-1904 flooding, Hermann Vogelsang and a drover, along with Indigenous assistants, built a bridge above the waterline for sheep to cross (Stevens 1994:136). Although, in The West Australian (1949:21), a very similar story of a bridge being built during the 1906 flooding made no reference to Indigenous peoples. This story again highlights the necessity for more research in this area so that Indigenous achievements can be further privileged in the written record thereby contributing to the process of decolonisation (see Roberts et al. 2013:96-97).

Killalpaninna Mission reveals a wide array of maritime activities within the lake and riverscape, including recreational boating and fishing, constructing infrastructure such as platforms and bridges, and working on boats on a daily basis for transport, particularly duringflooding season. As such, this region may prove a fruitful ground for maritime archaeological investigations if conducted in collaboration with the Aboriginal community.

Discussion

Maritime activities at missions reveal cross-cultural exchange – e.g., through the exchange of fishing and boat building technologies and knowledge. The European use of fish pounds in the Coorong is an example of cross-cultural exchange where settlers replicated Indigenous traditional knowledge. Other
examples of Indigenous maritime knowledge being utilised by Europeans could include fishing places. On the other hand, Indigenous peoples, for example at Poonindie and Point Pearce who, according to ethnographic accounts, did not use watercraft to any identifiable significant degree (e.g., Fletcher and Gapps 2012), also used European maritime knowledge, such as boat building. Future research could relate to the tools used in this construction: traditional, modified European or European tools. Fishing related technologies could also reveal aspects of hybridity or modification to European materials.

Missions are also a location that can demonstrate cultural continuity of maritime activities, for example through the use of traditional knowledge, traditional fishing technologies and accessing traditional spaces. In what way did the traditional knowledge of waterscapes, particularly the environmental knowledge of the landscape such as flooding and tides, continue into working on non-Indigenous vessels? Similarly, while European style fish hooks were adopted, other fishing related material culture, such as fishing lines, could have continued to be made using traditional knowledge and practices. Cultural continuity can also be perceived through ideas of accessing space within the non-missionised land/seascape. If maritime activities, such as boat-based fishing occurring at Poonindie, were examined and given the possibilities of space accessible by boat, would Indigenous participation be viewed as another act of resisting the dominant mission ideology? This was the case at Ramahyuck Mission Station and Lake Tyers Mission Station (Gippsland, Victoria), as Attwood (1989:65) suggests the missionary goal of enclosing and domesticating the mission landscape was unsuccessful due to its location on the edge of another spatial landscape, rivers and seas: waterscapes. Indeed, as demonstrated at Ramahyuck, fishing was a way for Aboriginal women to escape the order of the mission to a space that reflected traditional practices (Attwood 1989:67).

This South Australian synthesis reveals the urgency to record the land and waterscapes of Aboriginal missions, both with regards to tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Tangible cultural heritage in this regard includes infrastructure as well as vessels. Labour was used both on-board vessels and also when constructing infrastructure and, based on archaeological evidence at Point Pearce, infrastructure such as
jetties are falling into disrepair given the time that has elapsed since their more frequent use (Roberts et al. 2013:97). It is therefore imperative that maritime archaeological sites with Indigenous significance and associated stories are recorded in the near future. With similar urgency, the intangible aspects of these land/waterscapes, solely accessible through oral histories, must be recorded while these events are within living memory.

Conclusions

Indigenous peoples’ involvement in maritime activities in South Australia, using missions as an example, have been expressed through available literature and historical sources. The examples drawn on here recognised or acknowledged Indigenous peoples in some way; however, often they are not recognised for their participation and contribution in numerous maritime related activities – as the silencing in historical sources of Indigenous participation, in the construction of Narrunga at Point Pearce or the construction of the 1906 bridge at Killalpaninna, reveals. As such, Indigenous peoples are frequently left out of the national colonial narrative. These approaches could be applied to any mission in Australia, or internationally, situated on significant waterways. Historical documents and oral histories reveal this data, it is now the responsibility of archaeologists and researchers to foreground it. The archaeological recording of maritime material culture, vessels and infrastructure, can play a role in highlighting the ‘hidden histories’ (see Gill et al. 2005) of Indigenous peoples and foreground their achievements in the literature surrounding lacustrine, riverine and coastal waterways of the late 19th and early 20th century Australian land and waterscape.

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