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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

| Editorial | 1 |
| ARTICLES | |
| The View from Below: A Selected History of Contact Experiences, Patjarr, Gibson Desert, Western Australia  
*Jan Turner* | 13 |
| Finding the Signatures of Glass Beads: A Preliminary Investigation of Indigenous Artefacts from Australia and Papua New Guinea  
*Lindy Allen, Sarah Babister, Elizabeth Bonshek and Rosemary Goodall* | 48 |
| ‘Necessary Self-Defence?’: Pastoral Control and Ngarrindjeri Resistance at Waltowa Wetland, South Australia  
*Kelly Wiltshire, Mirani Litster and Grant Rigney* | 81 |
| ‘The Missionary Factor’: Frontier Interaction on Cooper Creek, South Australia, in the 1860s  
*Joc Schmiechen* | 115 |
| Koeler and the Dresdners: Contrasting Views of Five Early Germans Towards Indigenous Peoples in South Australia  
*Robert Amery* | 145 |
| Capturing Histories at Thantyi-wanparda: Comparing Early and Late Twentieth Century Ethnographies in Arabana Territory, South Australia  
*Jason Gibson and Luise Hercus* | 175 |
| 65,000 Years of Isolation in Aboriginal Australia or Continuity and External Contacts? An Assessment of the Evidence with an Emphasis on the Queensland Coast  
*Michael J. Rowland* | 211 |
KOELER AND THE DRESDNERS: CONTRASTING VIEWS OF FIVE EARLY GERMANS TOWARDS INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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Abstract

The earliest Germans to record observations of Aboriginal cultures and languages in South Australia were Hermann Koeler (late 1837–early 1838) and the Dresden missionaries Clamor Schürmann and Christian Teichelmann, who arrived in October 1838, followed in August 1840 by Samuel Klose and Eduard Meyer. This paper analyses the publications of these observers with respect to their comments on Indigenous peoples in South Australia and their associated societies, languages and cultures. Examined together, the observations of Koeler and the so-called ‘Dresden Four’ reveal a number of similarities but also some striking differences. A comparative reading of observations from different sources produced at a similar time and place offers insights into the state of German anthropology at an important point in its development. It also points to the emergence of differing paradigms whose contours would become clearer in the decades that followed.

Introduction

A strong German presence was established very early in the colony of South Australia, founded in 1836. Some of these Germans observed and described the colony’s Indigenous population. Among them were missionaries (Clamor Schürmann, Christian Teichelmann, Samuel Klose and Eduard Meyer [the so-called ‘Dresden Four’]) who sought contact with Indigenous populations with the aim of converting them to Christianity. They invested great energy and effort in becoming acquainted with them and their cultures, and leaving a record of their observations. At an almost identical time a German ship’s doctor, Hermann Koeler, set about recording his own observations of
the Indigenous people of Adelaide and surrounding districts, but in quite different circumstances and for different reasons. This paper analyses the publications and writings of these observers with respect to their comments on Indigenous peoples in South Australia and their associated societies, languages and cultures.

A careful reading of the anthropological observations of Koeler and the ‘Dresden Four’ is useful for two main reasons. Firstly, the missionaries and Koeler were making, recording and publishing their observations during a period when the discipline of anthropology was still establishing itself in Europe. By contrast with other European powers, it wasn’t until the late 19th century, following the unification of the German states in 1871, that Germany gained colonies and established its short-lived colonial empire from 1883 up until the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 following World War I. Prior to this colonial period, Germans were primarily explorers and collectors often working at the behest of other colonial powers, but somewhat critical of English and French colonialism and their treatment of Indigenous peoples. The German version of ethnology, free of colonial vested interests, is often seen as more benign and a product of the Enlightenment of the 18th century, which promoted freedom, democracy and reason (the German Enlightenment was embodied in the philosophers Herder and Kant and explorers Alexander von Humboldt and Georg and Johann Reinhold Forster). As summarised by Bunzl and Penny (2003:1):

...nineteenth-century German anthropology was neither characterized by colonial concerns, nor interested in organizing the world’s peoples according to evolutionary sequences. Instead, it was a self-consciously liberal endeavour, guided by a broadly humanistic agenda and centred on efforts to document the plurality and historical specificity of cultures.

Furthermore, they argued that the ‘liberal humanism’ of 19th century German anthropology ‘stood in marked contrast to Anglo-American or French variants’ (Bunzl and Penny 2003:1). However, while English, American and French anthropology liberalised and adopted pluralistic frameworks in the 20th century, German anthropology went in the opposite direction, culminating in complicity with Nazi interests and the holocaust

In the early to mid-19th century, anthropology (or ethnology as it was then known) lacked firm professional and institutional foundations, and as it struggled to distinguish itself from other disciplines, its theoretical and methodological underpinnings were still being debated and negotiated. Most literature on the origins of German anthropology (Evans 2007; Gingrich 2005; Penny and Bunzl 2003) focuses on the second half of the 19th century, whilst its antecedents in the early 19th century have been largely ignored, though Gingrich (2005:68-75) does provide a scant coverage relative to other periods concluding that ‘a weak and dispersed Enlightenment legacy lingered on’ (Gingrich 2005:75). An examination of the work of Koeler and the Dresdners, which they conducted and published before the middle of the century, thus opens a new window into the state of a discipline in its infancy.

Secondly, a comparative analysis of the texts produced by these men at very similar times, in response to their observations of people living in the same locations, can help to identify different strands in the development of the discipline. In a number of regards the approach to anthropological observation adopted by the medically-trained Koeler reveals some striking and even surprising similarities with that of the missionaries. Just as revealing, however, in an assessment of their writings are the differences which suggest that, even as early as the 1830s, German anthropology was moving in at least two quite different directions.

**Hermann Koeler and the Dresdners in South Australia**

Hermann Koeler was the first German visitor to South Australia to record his observations of Aboriginal people, their culture and language. A 24 year old ship’s doctor from Celle near Hanover, Koeler arrived in South Australia in October 1837.

Koeler was followed 12 months later by two German missionaries, 23 year old Clamor Schürmann from Osnabrück and 31 year old Christian Teichelmann from Dahme/Mark in
Brandenburg. They in turn were followed a year later by their missionary colleagues, Samuel Klose (then 37) from Löwenberg, now Lwówek Śląski in Poland, and Eduard Meyer (27) from Berlin.

Little is known of Koeler’s background, education or early employment (Amery and Mühlhäusler 2006:2). It is known that he travelled extensively between 1837 and 1848, visiting all five continents. Koeler submitted unsolicited manuscripts to Professor Carl Ritter, founder of modern German geography, and a founding member of the Gesellschaft für Erdkunde zu Berlin (Berlin Geographical Society) (Amery and Mühlhäusler 2006:2). Ritter read, and subsequently published, Koeler’s reports. However, there is no evidence that he was ever in the employ of a scientific organisation or university.

Engaged by the South Australian Company as a surgeon aboard Solway, which sailed from Hamburg via England to Australia, Koeler arrived at Kangaroo Island on 16 October 1837 crossing over to Pathawilya (Glenelg) on 21 October. Koeler’s observations are in two parts, published in 1842 and 1843 respectively. His initial intention was to spend just two months in South Australia, but his stay was prolonged due to the wreck of Solway a day or two after it left Encounter Bay for England in December 1837. Subsequently he returned to Adelaide and remained another four months in South Australia. Koeler’s writings came to light in the late 1990s and were subsequently translated and analysed (Mühlhäusler 2006).

Clamor Schürmann and Christian Teichelmann arrived at Yartapuulti (Port Adelaide) on 14 October 1838, almost one year after Koeler’s arrival. A considerable amount is known of the early life of the four Dresden missionaries and their training. Brief profiles of each appear in Rüdiger (2014:12, 14, 16, 18). Teichelmann was the son of a clothmaker from Dahme-Mark south of Berlin who initially trained as an apprentice carpenter. He travelled to Berlin in 1829 for private tuition in mathematics prior to enrolling at the Royal Institute of Building Trades. Schürmann was the son of a farmer from Schlederhausen near Osnabrück. They both undertook their early missionary training at the Jaenicke Seminary in Berlin. Teichelmann was accepted there in 1831, whilst Schürmann commenced on 23 July 1832, following in the footsteps of his older brother Johann Adam, a missionary in India. Meyer also commenced his training at the
Jaenicke Seminary on 1 July 1833, whilst Klose made his first contact with a mission society in Basel in 1829. The Jaenicke Seminary was established in 1800 to train German missionaries for the London Mission Society, Basel Mission and Dutch mission fields. Germany did not have its own Protestant overseas missions in the early 19th century. A major focus of the Jaenicke Seminary was training in languages—Hebrew, Greek, Latin, English and, at least in Schürmann’s case, some Chinese. In addition to theology and church history, they were also instructed in geography (Rüdiger 2014:12).

However, in 1836 the Anglican Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Lands ruled that missionaries working for the society must be ordained Anglicans and accept the Church of England’s 39 Articles (Lockwood 2014:11). Teichelmann and Schürmann were offered positions in India, but refused to accept the Anglican doctrine and declined the offer. This forced the hand of the Dresden mission auxiliary, who seeing their plight, decided to form the Evangelical Lutheran Mission Society of Dresden (DMS) with the Lutheran Confessions central to their beliefs. The DMS established a seminary in 1836 with Teichelmann and Schürmann among their first graduates, and on completion of their training, accepted a passage to South Australia under the patronage of George Fife Angas in order to establish a mission among the Kaurna (Aboriginal people of the Adelaide Plains) at the behest of the DMS.

All four missionaries maintained frequent communication and received their direction from the DMS for the duration of their work with the South Australian Aboriginal Kaurna, Barngarla (Eyre Peninsula) and Ramindjeri (Fleurieu Peninsula) peoples. Both Schürmann and Teichelmann recorded observations within their journals. Teichelmann, Schürmann and Meyer published descriptions (grammar, vocabulary and illustrative sentences) of Kaurna, Barngarla and Ramindjeri (Meyer 1843; Schürmann 1844; Teichelmann and Schürmann 1840), as well as brief ethnographies of their associated cultures (Teichelmann 1841; Schürmann 1846; Meyer 1846). Further observations are found within correspondence sent to and from
Dresden (see Graetz 2002). They also contributed to reports (for example, Teichelmann and Moorhouse 1841). The journals and correspondence were written in German, but the published grammars, ethnographies and reports were written in English.

An abridged translation of Schürmann’s journals was published by his great grandson, Edwin (Ted) Schurmann (1987). Klose’s correspondence was translated and published by the Friends of Lutheran Archives (Graetz 2002), while the translation of Meyer’s and Teichelmann’s correspondence awaits publication, but is available for perusal at the Lutheran Archives in Adelaide.

**Terminology**

Koeler (1842, 1843) uses a variety of labels for Aboriginal people. Most often he uses the term *wilder* ‘savage’ or *wilde ‘savages’* and often *schwarze ‘blacks’*. For Koeler, *wilder ‘savage’* is clearly the unmarked term being used.¹ He also uses *Süd-Australier ‘South Australian’*, especially when drawing comparisons with Indigenous peoples elsewhere in Australia and throughout the world. *Eingeborene ‘Aborigines’* is used much less often but is found in headings and introductory paragraphs. He also refers to the ‘Adelaide Tribe’ a number of times, and to ‘New Hollanders’ and ‘original inhabitants’ occasionally.

Whilst for Koeler, the term *wilder* is his default, he seems to set himself apart from the English colonists and their use of the term ‘black brutes’ (Koeler 1837–38:53; translated by Zweck 2006:91):

¹ Zweck’s mistranslation of Koeler’s (1843:48) ‘*wenn er die Spur eines Wildes oder eines Menschen verfolgt*’ as ‘when he is tracking a savage or a person’ (Zweck (2006:86) instead of the correct translation ‘when he is tracking a wild animal (ie game) or a person’ initially led me astray in my analysis of the use of the terms *wilder ‘savage’* and *mensch ‘person’*. This correction should be noted.
Unter den Colonisten der niedrigen Klassen herrscht überhaupt im Allgemeinen eine grosse Abneigung gegen die "black brutes," wie man sie oft nennen hört, und sie sind nur zu gern bereit, bei den geringsten Anlässen und bei Vergehen aus Unverstand oder Furcht, die man den Schwarzen nicht anrechnen kann, zur Selbsthilfe mit dem Gewehre zu schreiten.

Among the colonists of the lower classes great antipathy is generally prevalent against the ‘black brutes’ as one often hears them called; and they are only too ready to reach for their weapons in self-defence on the slightest pretext and when wrongs are committed out of ignorance or fear, for one cannot hold the blacks responsible.

Furthermore, as in the quote above, he seems to come to the defence of the Aboriginal people in their dealings with the English, reflecting German attitudes of the times which were critical of British treatment of Indigenous people in their colonial ventures at a time before Germany had colonies of its own.

The Dresden missionaries too used a variety of terms. In the introductory preface to the grammar and dictionary published in English, Teichelmann and Schürmann (1840:iv–vii) most often use ‘the Aborigines’ (six times), but also refer to ‘colored fellow-men’ (once) and ‘South Australian natives’ (once) or simply ‘natives’ (twice). ‘Aborigines’ and ‘natives’ are used elsewhere in the publication. In their English translations of Kaurna sentences, they also use ‘black men’, but that is a literal translation of the Kaurna term *pulyuna miyurna*, used by Kaurna people themselves. The Dresdners never use the term ‘blacks’ in the same way that Koeler does, and they certainly never use the term ‘savages’, though the term ‘savages’ is used at least once in correspondence from the Dresden Mission Society to Klose (20 January 1844).

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Observations of Indigenous Peoples

Koeler was an interested observer of the Aboriginal peoples he encountered in Adelaide and Encounter Bay (Fleurieu Peninsula) (Gara 2006:15) and spent considerable time interacting with people in the camps in Adelaide and nearby Glenelg (Gara 2006:20). The Dresden missionaries made and recorded observations of Aboriginal peoples in and around Adelaide, Encounter Bay and in and around Port Lincoln on the Eyre Peninsula. Both Koeler and the missionaries made observations which ranged widely from physical attributes, questions of race and intellect, culture, religion and morality, and, last but by no means least, language. While in both cases it is apparent that they sought to make comprehensive descriptions, it is also apparent that Koeler and the missionaries attached greater importance to different attributes and reached noticeably varying assessments.

Physical Description

Koeler (1842) gives a rather lengthy description (approx. 1600 words) of physical details of the Aboriginal people he encountered in the Adelaide, Port Adelaide and Holdfast Bay districts. It is sprinkled with derogatory adjectives such as ‘the relatively thin, unsightly calves’ (Zweck 2006:56), ‘the legs of the women, particularly the lower thighs, are repulsively thin and stick-like; the women’s bodies are on the whole very lean and disfigured’ (Zweck 2006:56), ‘a sack-like appearance’ (Zweck 2006:57), ‘the South Australian, together with the other New-Hollanders as a whole, is to be seen as one of the ugliest human races’ (Zweck 2006:57).

There are just a few more positive references such as Zweck (2006:54):

...some physiognomies, namely those of the children, are attractive because of their unmistakeable expression of innocence, friendliness, trust and a certain intellectual mobility, just as some of the men take on a special character through their wild boldness and proud impervious earnestness...
Even this more positive picture is immediately followed by a very negative statement (Zweck 2006:54–55):

In other and indeed the majority of cases, the ugliness of the physiognomy, accentuated by savagery, deceitful cunning and intellectual lifelessness, and even more by artifices or by the overall impression of their whole figure, is truly repellent.

In his very negative description of older women, Koeler uses what would normally be taken as very positive terms to denigrate further, as in (Zweck 2006:56):

...in old age they become a terrible sight because of their wrinkles and their mummy-like shrinking, an impression which can only be made more repellent by their good-natured, friendly grinning.

Koeler (in Zweck 2006:53) makes frequent comparisons to animals in his physical description: ‘the colour of their skin is a brownish-black (with a deceptive similarity to the facial colour of some species of ape)’ and:

...the downy hair of the children is always brown and proliferated so long and luxuriantly that the back of a 5–6 year-old boy, seen from the side and with the sun shining directly on it has—to put it bluntly—a pelt-like appearance and is reminiscent of the fur of a young donkey.

Physical appearance was not particularly important for the Dresdners, though they did record some observations, especially in the context of official reports. But these are brief by comparison with Koeler’s lengthy description, and are far less judgmental. Schürmann (in Schürmann 1987:30) notes in his diary on the day he arrives in Adelaide on 14 October 1838:
Not far from the church we saw our first natives, one man and two women, and then another group with one man, two women and a child. I spoke to them, and found the men less willing to talk than the women. They are of medium height, and the men have a high chest and strong limbs. Their hair hangs down in thick curls, and is often smeared with red ochre to keep off the heat. The women seem to wear their hair the same length (a hand’s width) as the men, but the curls and the pigment are missing. Their skin is not black as a Negro’s, but rather brown. The men can be quite handsome, but the flat nose can look unpleasing to us. To our eyes, the women are less attractive than the men, with lower foreheads and with thin flat hair covering their cheeks.

Several years later in his ethnography of the Barngarla, Schürmann is much more forthright in his judgments (both positive and negative) of physical appearance, referring to their ‘large ugly mouths’ and as being ‘disfigured’ etc. without qualification as previously in his initial descriptions of the Kaurna:

The height of the Port Lincoln Aborigines is considerably below the European standard; a tall-looking black will seldom be found to exceed the height of a middle-sized white man, and with regard to size, the comparison is still more against them, so that one may safely venture to say that the tallest and strongest of them would present but a poor figure among a regiment of grenadiers. If it were not for their thin arms and legs, deep-set eyes, large ugly mouths and flattened noses, the Port Lincoln natives might be called a well-proportioned, compact race of men. They certainly have good foreheads, fine shoulders, and particularly high chests. The male sex exhibit a great deal of unstudied natural grace in their deportment, their walk is perfectly erect and free, motions of body easy, and gestures natural under all circumstances, whether speaking, fighting or dancing; and with regard to agility, they throw the white man completely into the shade. Of the women, however, one cannot speak so favourably, their persons being generally disfigured by very thin extremities, protruding abdomen, and dependent breasts, a condition that may perhaps be sufficiently accounted for by their early marrying, inferior food, and long suckling of children, it being by no means uncommon to see a child of three or four years still enjoying its mother’s breast. Although to a passing observer the Aborigines of this district may appear all of the same stamp, yet, upon a longer acquaintance with them, considerable difference will be found to exist, not only with regard to size and make, but also in the colour of their skins; while the northern tribes, who inhabit a scrubby country, generally exhibit very dark and dry-looking skins, one often
meets among those from the south and west, with faces that might be almost called copper-coloured. Whether this be owing to the influence of climate or food I will not venture to determine; but I think I have observed that the strongest and best fed natives are always of the lightest colour.
(Schürmann 1879:209–210)

Teichelmann hardly mentions physical appearance in his journal and correspondence, except in an early letter to Dresden, when he counters the prevailing racist ideology he was exposed to in Germany:

Instead they are much more very beautifully and strongly built people and some have very good physiognomy, which we call beautiful. Of course there is no rule without an exception.
(Letter to Dresden, 8 December 1838)

More than 12 months later, however, perhaps after he had become a little jaded at his failure to win converts, he comments ‘...in my view we, here, are among a people which of all the people on earth appears to be on the lowest stage of mankind in outward bearing as well as from the aspect of morality’ (Teichelmann Diary 27 January 1840). His publication Aborigines of South Australia (Teichelmann 1841) makes no mention of physical appearance. A ‘Report on the ‘Aborigines of South Australia’ to which Teichelmann contributed was presented to the Statistical Society (Teichelmann and Moorhouse 1841). It begins with a half-page paragraph on physical appearance commencing with the words, ‘[t]he physical appearance of the South Australian natives presents little to please’ (Teichelmann and Moorhouse 1841:40), but these words could well be those of Moorhouse, who, like Koeler, was a medical doctor by training.
Klose makes no reference to physical appearance in his correspondence, except to comment on the state of cleanliness: ‘...even though they bathe often and gladly’ (29 December 1840 in Graetz 2002:14). As a postscript to his discussion on the children’s intelligence (see below), Klose comments, ‘[o]ften, as a matter of fact, their faces appear so familiar, as if I had seen them as whites in Europe’ (29 December 1840 in Graetz 2002:14). Physical appearance is of no concern to Meyer either in his ethnography of the Ramindjeri (Meyer 1846).

Views of Race and Intellect

For Koeler, Indigenous Australians occupied the lowest strata of humanity:

If one wishes to subsume them under one of the commonly accepted human races, these South Australians (whom one could call the Adelaide tribe) have to—like all the original inhabitants of the mainland of New Holland and Van Diemen’s Land—be counted among the Ethiopians. And if this entire race occupies the lowest rung of the human race in both physical and intellectual aspects, then these South Australians in turn represent the lowest of them all, and in some ways are backward even in comparison with other New Hollanders. (Zweck 2006:53)

Ritter, who read and published Koeler’s reports, did not approve of the overt racism in Koeler’s writing, adding question marks and exclamation marks in his own writing when referring to Koeler (Kremer 1981:149 in Amery and Mühlhäusler 2006:2).

Whilst Kant identified four races in 1775: 1. white; 2. Negro; 3. Hun (Mongol or Kalmuck); 4. Hindu or Hindustani, later revised in 1777 to: 1. noble blond (northern Europe); 2. copper red (America); 3. black (Senegambia); 4. olive-yellow (Asian-Indians) (Zammito 2006:42), it was Blumenbach who put forward Ethiopian as a category at one end of a spectrum with white at the other (Zammito 2006:47)—and it was those who followed Blumenbach who introduced a more rigid hierarchy, that Koeler seems to be appealing to here, in the categories Blumenbach had introduced.
By contrast to Koeler, the Dresdners were quick to point out the mental capabilities of the Aboriginal peoples with whom they worked as being on a par with Europeans. Teichelmann and Schürmann (1840:iv) argued early in their introductory preface:

...that a race of human beings possessing a language so regular in its formation and construction as that of the South Australian natives, cannot be incapable of either [Christianisation and civilisation]; and to refute premature and unjust detractions concerning the mental capabilities of the Aborigines of Australia.

In an early letter to Dresden, Teichelmann makes the following observation (Teichelmann, letter to Dresden, 8 December 1838):

The heathen are included in the promise to Abraham. No matter how far down the scale they stand in their external culture, they are still human beings created in the image of God and therefore have the same talents and abilities which the Gospel of Christ offers to them to understand and to take on board. They are not, as I remember reading in Germany, on a par with orangetangs\textsuperscript{3} [sic]. Instead they are much more very beautifully and strongly built people and have very good physiognomy, which we call beautiful. Of course there is no rule without an exception. However in every way this report which I read in Germany was a thoroughly untrue statement. In it the basis for distortion appears to lie in reality. Come and see what must be seen. Believe what can only be accessible through faith.

In his ethnography of the Kaurna, Teichelmann (1841:5) begins with the words:

\footnote{Despite its Malay origins, the term orang outang in 18\textsuperscript{th} and early 19\textsuperscript{th} century Germany did not refer to the orangutan great ape from South East Asia as we know it today, but rather to primates from Africa, most likely chimpanzees or bonobos (Barnard 1995:95).}
The Aborigines of South Australia have generally been represented by those who have reported of this land, as a race of beings differing little from the higher animals. If the statements are intended to apply to the mental endowments of the Aboriginal inhabitants of South Australia, they are incorrect, and most likely not resting upon personal enquiry and experience; as these will meet in them with the same gifts and talents as in Europeans; for in instructing their children the same faculties are observed as in others, so that there is comparatively no difference between a European and an Aboriginal child.

It is not clear what reports Teichelmann had read in Germany during his training between 1831 and 1838, but it is evident that he was aware of the emerging theories of scientific racism that were just beginning to take hold in Europe at that time.

Klose too, in his second letter sent from Adelaide dated 29 December 1840, within five months of his arrival remarks:

...for they are not so lacking in intelligence, as is generally believed, that they are not able to comprehend such things [Biblical stories]. Not at all! I find no difference whether I am among European children or among these, other than they are black and not clothed.

Views on Culture

Koeler says little of his own views on the culture of the South Australian Aboriginal people, though he records his observations of many cultural practices from firsthand experience. However, under his entry on korrobora ‘dance’, Koeler says, ‘[t]he dance can hardly be given any other name than Convulsa coitus pro parte virile imitatio’ (Zweck 2006:64) [Latin translation ‘an imitation of the sexual act’ (from the male perspective)].

The Dresdners regarded the Aboriginal peoples as ‘uncivilised’ and saw it as their duty to bring Christianity and civilisation to them, but readily accepted many aspects of Aboriginal culture. They were largely unconcerned by outward appearance, much to the annoyance of the English colonists. Education and the introduction of literacy were the starting point. The outward vestiges of civilisation would come later. They wished to introduce Aboriginal people to a sedentary
existence and saw animal husbandry as the first step in this process. Teichelmann (Diary, 28 November 1839) writes:

I scolded them for the laziness and indolence, urged them again to lay aside their nomadic life-style and settle like Europeans and not live like the wild animals

Klose writes of his disapproving response to Kaurna people travelling to Gawler for tattooing (cicatrisation) (Letter to Dresden, 29 August 1845, in Graetz 2002:42):

I told them that was not right, since Jehova had given them a good healthy skin, why should they now pierce it. The response was: ‘Yes, we know all that; the whites do not do it, but that is what the blacks do.’

**Religion**

Koeler is very dismissive of the possibility of any kind of religion among the Kaurna:

Among the South Australians one finds no trace of customs or ideas which point to a religious cult, unless one wished to interpret as the slightest and most rudimentary trace of a concept of a higher mysterious power the childlike sort of fear that the darkness of night induces in the savage.

(Zweck 2006:81)

Furthermore he claims that ‘neither sun nor moon, neither rainbow nor thunder or lightning seem to be able to elevate the South Australian to ideas of anything supernatural’ (Zweck 2006:82–83).

It seems that the Dresdners, like Koeler, did not recognise these beliefs as religion. Klose notes the inability of the Kaurna to grasp the notion of grace: ‘They cannot grasp it because they do not feel like sinners and do not believe in the punishment of sins’. Within two months of his arrival in Adelaide, Teichelmann writes:

...they have no concept of creator. They are not idolatrous, but rather without God so much as I have had occasion to discover...

(Letter to Dresden, 8 December 1838)
As they got to know Kaurna people better, however, the Dresdners came across the word *munaintyarlu*, which Schürmann tried to use for Jehovah (Letter, 12 June 1839 in Schurmann 1987:46–47):

*Munaintyerlo*, who of old lived on earth, but who sits now above, has made the sun, moon and stars, the earth and the visible world in general. As soon as I got this name, I substituted it for the hitherto used Jehovah, which they could scarcely pronounce…If further discoveries do not show that they combine too pagan and absurd ideas with the name *Munaintyerlo*, I mean to retain it for the name of God.

As Schürmann became better acquainted with the word, however, he abandoned any attempt to use it as a substitute for Jehovah (Letter 3 April 1840 in Schurmann 1987:91):

The *munaintyerlo* is not a Noun proper of a person, as I was then led to believe, but meant only a very ancient being, so that it can be justly said, that the Aborigines have an idea of creation, or that the universe has in very remote times been made by some being, but that they have no distinct notions of that being.

In fact, *munaintyarlu* is a time word, meaning ‘in the beginning’. Neighbouring languages, Nukunu, Adnyamathanha and Ngarrindjeri, all use a time word to encode the notion of ‘the Dreaming’. Similarly, *munaintya* ‘the beginning’ has been used in Kaurna to encode this notion (see Amery 2016:143–145).

The Dresdners, first Schürmann and then Teichelmann, were taken into the confidence of the Kaurna, and told men’s secrets on the promise that they would not divulge this information to others, specifically women and children. Teichelmann knew of the significance of the sun, moon and other heavenly bodies to the Kaurna (Teichelmann 1841:9). Religious beliefs were the subject of many arguments between the Aboriginal people and the Dresden missionaries, Teichelmann graphically reports many such arguments in his diary and in his correspondence to Dresden. They had little to no success (no converts), but eagerly looked to every little sign that their preaching was having some impact.
Morality

Koeler seems to have nothing to say about morality. He reports instances of violence against women by their husbands, ‘...but it is not rare for her husband to break this staff in two on her head, in annoyance and anger, but without causing any further damage other than screaming and crying’, polygamy, the ‘stealing’ of a child by Captain Jack and the attempt by the man from whom the girl was ‘stolen’ to kill the girl, but he does not take issue with such practices. He merely describes the events that he observes (Zweck 2006:87-89).

The Dresdners had particularly strong views on questions of morality. In line with their Lutheran beliefs, they saw all humankind (themselves included) as fallen and bedevilled by original sin. As Lockwood (2014:38) observes:

Lutheran theology…teaches that human nature was corrupted by rebelling against God in the fall into sin...Before God there is no difference between the ‘primitive savage’ and the most refined European or committed Christian. All are equally fallen and dependent on the grace and mercy of God.

On the very day Schürmann arrived in Adelaide and likely on his first meeting with Kaurna people, he took issue with polygamy as follows:

I asked one where his wife was and, after he had pointed her out, I asked him how many wives he had. He showed two fingers, and I shook my head and showed one finger, whereupon he gave a hearty laugh and indicated that others had three or four wives.  
(Schurmann 1987:31)

In a letter from 27 January 1840, Teichelmann writes:

In my view we, here, are among a people which of all people on earth appears to be on the lowest stage of mankind in outward bearing as well as from the aspect of morality, which also among all the heathen peoples requires a special targeting of God's grace on whose appearance we must wait and hope with patience and faith.
Further, Teichelmann (1841:5), having just praised the intellect of the Kaurna people, remarks:

…but regarding their moral state, they are, in many instances, almost upon a lower scale than the beasts, doing and performing considerately, what beasts will instinctively do…

Despite Lockwood’s proposition above that in Lutheran theology all are equally fallen, Teichelmann does seem to have bought into the notion that some peoples have fallen further than others. He records his frequent arguments with Kaurna people over the immorality of the promise system, polygamy, fornication, adultery, wife lending, prostitution etc. In doing so he is very critical of the destructive influence that predatory English colonists were having on the Kaurna people.

**Views on Language**

Koeler took a keen interest in the Kaurna language, recording a wordlist of about 140 words, 34% of which are body parts and 29% verbs (see Amery and Mühlhäusler [2006] for a full analysis). This wordlist is an independent and valuable primary source on the Kaurna language, but it is just a wordlist.

Koeler (see Zweck 2006:57) makes the claim that ‘...the language of such a lowly-ranked people cannot be other than limited and undeveloped’. He goes on to describe various ‘deficiencies’ in the language, such as an absence of different forms of the verb (for example tense, aspect) and the inability to differentiate between ‘I am going to Adelaide’ and ‘I am coming from Adelaide’ etc. Koeler, however, failed to recognise that he was listening to and documenting a Pidgin Kaurna, not the true Kaurna language. Furthermore, he commented on the sound of the language in typically negative terms (Zweck 2006:59–60):
Although the language itself is not lacking in euphony (except for a certain monotony because of the constant sameness of accent), it tends to lose a lot of this because of the peculiar singing, almost weeping and whining sounding way in which it is spoken...and the voice, which is anyway shrill and rough as in all tribes of savage peoples, is forced up into higher tones; a characteristic which makes an unpleasant impression because of the howling, pathetic shrieking which it produces.

The Dresden missionaries had the utmost respect for the languages that they learnt and documented. For them, as Lutheran missionaries, conversion and salvation was to be achieved by conveying the word of God in the people’s own language. Their objective was first to understand, document and analyse the language to enable translation of Biblical texts, hymns and liturgy into Kaurna. As a result, they gained a much deeper and more comprehensive understanding of Kaurna than any other observers (Amery 2016:86–88). By contrast with Koeler, Teichelmann and Schürmann did document the true Kaurna language, whilst others recorded a Pidgin Kaurna. Teichelmann was fully aware of the existence of Pidgin Kaurna. Six months after their arrival in South Australia, and following the execution of two Aboriginal men, he writes:

...they want to keep the Europeans in ignorance of their language and speak in broken English to the Europeans just as the Europeans speak brokenly in their language... (Teichelmann, 21 April 1839)

Within just a few months, Schürmann and Teichelmann knew far more of the Kaurna language than any other colonists, some of whom (e.g., William Williams and William Wyatt) had been in the colony for several years and had been in frequent contact with the Kaurna. They published a sketch grammar, vocabulary of about 2000 words and a collection of 200 or so Kaurna sentences translated into English in just 18 months (Teichelmann and Schürmann 1840). Teichelmann continued his documentation with more detailed glosses, derived forms and rich example sentences as he progressed deeper into the language (see Teichelmann 1857, 1858).
The Dresdners quickly recognised that the Kaurna people were able to express their thoughts about anything and everything, including introduced items. Klose remarked:

We are not yet capable of creating or forming new words as we do not have sufficient command of the language, but it could well be possible, because they will give any and everything a name even though they may have never seen it in their lives before.

(Klose Letter, 29 December 1840 in Graetz 2002:14)

Teichelmann was searching for abstract concepts in the Kaurna language. He wrote:

In the discussion with us there arose what was self-evident. His Excellency [Gov. George Grey] to speak about the natives. He expressed his favourite idea, to speak to the natives only in English. Br. Meyer agreed and said to my no small amazement that the language is so lacking in abstract concepts that it would be more advisable to use the English language even in religious instruction because one could never express anything in their language. In order not to start an argument I simply said that our Adelaide language had enough abstract concepts for them to be instructed in christendom; that in no way was I opposed to teaching the children in the English language in everything except religion...Br. Meyer's reasoning goes like this: because I have not the necessary abstract concepts ergo they are not in the language ergo it is better to give up using the language altogether. Later I gave him a host of important expressions for the teaching of the reconciliation in our dialect and outlined on them how the natives apply them...

(Teichelmann Diary, 30 December 1844)

Collectively the Dresdners documented and preserved three Indigenous languages (Kaurna, Barngarla and Ramindjeri), providing an enduring legacy that has enabled language revival movements that have gained local, national and international reputation. Without their record, little would be possible today in Kaurna and Barngarla and the revival effort in Ngarrindjeri would be very much diminished.
Discussion

An examination of the writings of Hermann Koeler and the Dresden missionaries reveals similarities and differences in the observations they made of Indigenous peoples in South Australia in the late 1830s and early 1840s.

They approached their work with very different interests. Koeler was a sojourner, interested in Aboriginal people, their physicality, their illnesses, their language and their cultural practices and recorded his interactions and firsthand observations in some detail. Koeler seeks to present himself as a dispassionate observer much of the time. The Dresdners, on the other hand, were here to stay, on a specific mission to Christianise and ‘civilise’ Aboriginal peoples. They wished to set up a mission some distance from European settlement where Aboriginal people would continue to speak their own language and continue their own way of life on their own terms, but at the same time come to know the will of God. This would then result in the abandonment of many sinful or immoral cultural practices, but others would be allowed to continue. For instance, they did not immediately insist that Aboriginal people wear clothes, but hoped that once they knew and understood the word of God, they would become aware of their nakedness and aware of their sin and change their cultural practices accordingly.

It is clear that Koeler and the Dresdners were all exposed to and informed by ideologies of race that placed Aboriginal people on the very bottom rung of humanity, or even lower. We observed previously that Koeler (1842:43) writes of the ‘angenommenen Menschen-Racen’ or ‘commonly accepted races’ and places Aboriginal people at the bottom of the ‘Ethiopians’ (Zweck 2006:53 translation of Koeler 1842:43). However, the Dresdners totally rejected this notion in relation to intellect and the ability of Aboriginal people to learn and become ‘civilised’. In a letter to Dresden, Teichelmann (Letter to Dresden, 21 April 1839) wrote:
There [in Europe] they were portrayed as a race of people who were totally akin to the great apes. Here we saw that the people were formed like all people. In those reports we read that they had the least capability of being taught of all people on earth and were on the lowest rungs for the education of the spirit. Here, however, their natural liveliness and their motivation were revealed and that they must be endowed with the same talents and ability as any other nation on earth. Later experiences have only confirmed this, but have widened the first impression that in every regard they are a capable nation for upbringing and education.

While the Dresdners were more positive than Koeler in the description of physical appearance, they too found certain physical features ugly, while Koeler for his part was able to recognise the physical prowess and visual acuity of Aboriginal people within his negative schema. Moreover, when it came to assessing belief systems, the Dresdners were more inclined than Koeler to express their disapproval of Indigenous beliefs and their perceived lack of morality.

All were able to form close relationships with Aboriginal people and gain their confidence. Despite the apparent pejorative or distant tone in much of Koeler’s writings, he does appear to have made close friendships with Aboriginal people, especially of a boy named Williammi (Zweck 2006:91–92), and gained the confidence of others. He was invited to accompany Kaurna people into the hills where they met with a more numerous group who had never seen white people before. He participated in a panpapanpalya meeting ceremony.

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3 Koeler was exposed to the notion of ‘noble savage’, referring somewhat dismissively to the ‘savage à la Rousseau’ (in Zweck 2006:99), pointing out that they too were subject to illness and frailty.
Key differences lie in the Dresdners’ view of intellect and the ability of Aboriginal people to learn and become civilised, which underpinned their mission. Koeler sees Aboriginal people as being incapable of learning and being ‘civilised’. His views of intellect and impoverished language were confirmed by his observations of Pidgin Kaurna, whereas the Dresdners’ views were reinforced by the regular and complex structures they found within the Kaurna, Barngarla and Ramindjeri languages.

The final page of Koeler’s writings is difficult to process and seems to present a number of contradictory positions. Despite believing that Aboriginal people were subhuman, were of inferior intellect and mental capacity, he recognised a superior acuity of vision, extraordinary agility and dexterity. He also sees an equality of humanity in some respects, despite the outward differences:

...the spirit, with all its inclinations and passions, all its poetry and efforts, is the same in the educated person, who makes his own ego the subject of his studies, as in the most primitive natural man who views his surroundings with purely material eyes alone and is hardly aware of more than the lowest rung of social interaction...which knows no other goal than the maintenance of his species...But only the heart, in its moral and in its passionate instincts, beats to the same measure across the whole human race...
(Zweck 2006:100)

Koeler believed that different races had different possibilities for development and civilisation. Aboriginal people might develop so far in accordance with their position on the lowest rung of humanity. However, Aboriginal people were doomed to extinction and would die out before they reach their potential:

It [the lessons of history] also teaches, in constant change, that there is a 'So far and no further!' for each race, and introduces each one to us at its height: but how different this is in each case! The South Australian will have disappeared before he has had an opportunity to reach his height, and history will recall him as a people which did not outlive its childhood.
(Zweck 2006:100)
Conclusions

The anthropological observations examined here are illustrative of a phase of German engagement with the world outside Europe which preceded German colonisation by several decades. One is of a ship’s doctor employed in the service of German emigration, while the other is of German missionary activity. In both instances, the individuals concerned devoted themselves to the task of describing and understanding the non-European peoples they encountered, but they came to this task with varying backgrounds, motivations and approaches.

Koeler and the Dresden missionaries shared an interest in studying what in German had been labelled a *Naturvolk*, a people of nature. The term can be traced back to the 18th century and to Gottfried Herder, who coined the term. Working and writing in the 1830s and 1840s, Koeler and the Dresden missionaries can be situated in a German intellectual tradition which reaches from Herder in the 18th century to the Humboldts in their own time. All are devoted to the detailed observation and recording of the lives of a *Naturvolk* across a range of categories, from physical and intellectual attributes through to language, morality and religion. All are concerned to establish as comprehensive a record as their capacity to observe and to collect relevant data allow. Their approach is primarily inductive, that is, dedicated to the collection of information with the goal of establishing a detailed record of a particular people.

At the same time it is evident from a close reading of the written outcomes of their anthropological observations that within the tradition in which they operated there were significant variations at play. The medically-trained Koeler placed particular emphasis on physical description and as a consequence was more inclined than the missionaries to posit the existence of essential and therefore unbridgeable differences between Indigenous peoples and Europeans. The Dresden missionaries were willing to question what they had read on the basis of what they observed, whilst Koeler seems to have been unable to move beyond his preconceptions.

While the missionaries did not avoid physical descriptions, their most concerted efforts in their observations of Indigenous peoples were with language. This had been a central component of their training, and it was also entirely
consistent with the tradition of anthropological inquiry in Germany dating back at least as far as Herder. However, the intensity of the missionaries’ efforts in this regard indicate a key point of difference with Koeler. While Koeler himself described Indigenous languages and indeed collected vocabulary, he was not as concerned as the missionaries were to gather linguistic knowledge for the purpose of gaining an understanding of the mental world of the people he observed. For the missionaries, a necessary precondition for the performance of their task of converting Indigenous people to Christianity was to understand their existing beliefs. They believed that knowledge of language and of abstract concepts would enable them to grasp the belief system of Indigenous peoples, with the ultimate goal of changing it. Indigenous languages were key to their mission with their emphasis on the inner world, the intellect, rather than the outward vestiges of civilisation. Unfortunately for Koeler, he had unwittingly collected elements of a Pidgin Kaurna which only served to reinforce his preconceptions of Aboriginal people belonging to a primitive race.

While Koeler and the Dresdners accepted the notion that a common humanity united all peoples, in Koeler’s case there is a more pronounced sense that the variety of peoples could be interpreted hierarchically. In his estimate the Indigenous Australians he observed represented a lower form of humanity, with inevitable consequences for their future, as he foresaw their ultimate extinction with prolonged exposure to the superior civilisation of the Europeans. The Dresdners, in contrast, assumed the survival of Indigenous peoples, albeit having taken the step of embracing Christianity.

Both Koeler and the Dresdners were trained in an era when theories of scientific racial categorisation were first formulated. The first ethnographic museums were established from 1836 onwards (Vermeulen 1995:41) followed shortly after by the appearance of ethnological societies. Vermeulen (1995:55) claimed that ‘the foundation of the ethnological societies in the years 1839–43 implied a shift away from a geographical, historical and linguistic type of ethnography, towards a physical and racial type of ethnology’. But it is evident
from the writings of both Koeler and the Dresdners that this physical and racially based ethnology already had currency some years earlier as they had read reports that put forward hierarchical notions of race prior to 1837–38 before they left Germany.

Koeler and the Dresdners are practitioners of anthropology at an early stage of the discipline’s development. Although popular interest was expanding, it was some time before German anthropology established firmer institutional footings, leading ultimately to the establishment of a university chair of anthropology (Veit 2015:82). It is no coincidence that Koeler’s observations in the 1840s were published in a journal of geography, at that time a discipline closely related to the emerging discipline of anthropology.

While it is possible to find much common ground in the works of Koeler and the Dresdners, the distinctions identified above point to some fundamental differences. Koeler’s more objective, empirical approach, with its heavier emphasis on physical appearance, anticipates the later growth in importance in Germany of physical anthropology, largely under the guidance of Rudolf Virchow, the dominant figure in the discipline until his death in 1902 (Massin 1998:96–106). It also heralds what Andrew Zimmerman (2001) has characterised as a turn to antihumanism in German anthropology, that is, an abandonment of the humanist project of achieving intersubjective human understanding in favour of an objective, empirical approach to the study of the ‘other’.

Moreover, while the physical anthropology of Virchow and others in Germany was typically liberal and Herderian in positing a humanity which was common to all variations of human physical and cultural identity, Koeler’s racism foreshadows a development in German anthropology which became pronounced decades later. Unlike the missionaries, Koeler was inclined to essentialise difference and to accept racial theories which ranked humanity, placing the Indigenous people at the very lowest rung or even subhuman. In the view of Benoit Massin (1998:80), this kind of racialised thinking came to dominate the discipline in Germany in the 1890s and beyond. The approach Hermann Koeler took to the study of Indigenous peoples in South Australia in the 1830s and 1840s suggest that this shift was a long time in the making.
As for the Dresdners, they were ultimately frustrated in their mission—restricted by government policy, lacking support and overtaken by events, confronted with a rapidly plummeting population and subsequent dispersal. Their efforts totally ceased within 15 years without securing a single convert, but their legacy lives on today in the form of three vibrant language revival movements (Amery 2004).

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