

Peter Monteath, ed.: *Germans. Travellers, Settlers and Their Descendants in South Australia*. Kent Town: Wakefield Press, 2011, pp. xxi + 449, AUD 34.95. ISBN 978-1862549111. **Reviewed by Oliver Haag,** University of Edinburgh.

Despite the considerable geographical distance, the relationship between Australians and Germans has always been intense and, often enough, problematic. On the one hand, Germans were deemed the prototype of the migrant, industrious and more than willing to assimilate to Australian culture. On the other hand, there were times when Germans were seen as evincing disloyalty towards Australia, mistrusted as the "troublemakers" who, in the course of the two World Wars, brought nothing but pain and sorrow. Yet, for all their difference, there is a remarkable similarity between both views: Germans, like other ethnic groups, have been fully assimilated and seen as one.

The collection *Germans*, edited by Adelaide-based historian Peter Monteath, tackles this view. The 21 chapters, all based on original research, offer a great blend of innovative themes and methodological approaches to the influences which German travellers and migrants exerted on the making of South Australia. Written by scholars of different disciplinary background, including history, sociology and linguistics, the book traces the German presence in South Australia from the founding of the colony until the period of German migration after 1945. The innovative scope of themes is impressive, ranging from the Lutheran ethnography of Aboriginal people, over studies of the formation of German-South Australian identities in cookbooks, to the impact of National Socialism on South Australia. Clearly, the book is timely in offering a transnational perspective on the history of South Australia which, like the bulk of Australian history writing, is usually confined to national frames.

Of particular interest is Barbara Poniewierski's research on the National Socialist agitation in South Australia which uncovers the different stages of Nazi propaganda towards German residents as well as the reactions taken by the Australian authorities towards these agitations. This chapter clearly demonstrates the massive influence of the Third Reich beyond Europe and renders Australia less peripheral than often suggested in German historiography of National Socialism. However, despite their close publication dates, a reference to Christine Winter's and Emily Turners-Graham's landmark study, *National Socialism in Oceania* (2010), would have been an essential acknowledgment of research in this field.

The many chapters on the German interest in Aboriginal cultures are equally timely, given the increasing studies of German perception of Aboriginal cultures past and present. The chapters on the relations between Germans and Aboriginal Australians—by Peter Mühlhäusler, Christine Lockwood, Mary-Anne Gale, Janice Jally and Peter Monteath—all document the relatively humane twist in portraying Aboriginal people in German documents as opposed to British ones. There is indeed some accuracy in this observation, especially so in relation to the documentation of the Ngarrindjeri language and the "noble savage" tropes which did not employ outright degrading intentions, although from a post-colonial perspective undoubtedly racist.

Yet this observation, as is presented in the book, also lacks theoretical and methodological sharpness. For instance, Janice Jally and Peter Monteath in their chapter on Alexander Schramm's paintings of Aboriginal people state his humane depiction in contrast to the dehumanising representation in British painting:

In this attention to human detail Schramm distinguishes his work from the British depictions of Indigenous Australians at that time. His Aborigines are much more than marginal, picturesque embellishments. The image is of a collective, but one in which the figures possess distinctive identities. Schramm's art combines an obvious concern for the plight of Adelaide's Indigenous population. (157)

A grave methodological problem results from the comparison of a single German artist with British artists as such. Clearly, not all British artists or historians of the late nineteenth century portrayed Aboriginal people in a negative light—or, more precisely, in a light which from a nineteenth century perspective can be regarded as relatively devoid of prejudice (McGrath 1995: 360-4). Moreover, the contrasting of a single German artist with an entire national group of artists bears the great danger of misreading the single German portrayal as representative of German discourse at the time. Quite obviously, this would have required systematic comparison with nineteenth century German Orientalism (e.g., Marchand 2009; Lutz 2000:37-40, 46). Furthermore, even if German discourse on Indigenous people proved to be more “humane” than British narratives, these views were hardly ‘altruistic’ but need to be understood as an effort to uphold a distinct German identity which also reflected the nationalist tendency of Germans conceiving themselves as indigenous to their lands (Moses 2008:37). Given the lack of systematic analysis, there is thus a danger to generalise such seemingly benevolent and progressive racial views which, in the end, never questioned racial difference.

Another problematic aspect of this book is its strong focus on the nineteenth century. 62% of the chapters revolve around the nineteenth century, 33% are concerned with the interwar period and Nazism, whereas only a single chapter covers the period after 1945. Clearly, such an imbalance is not justified, not least because of the rapidly changing patterns of the contemporary German presence in South Australia. What seems even more problematic is the confinement of Aboriginal-related chapters to the nineteenth century section, reminiscent of the long-held practice of excluding Aboriginal people from the narrative of modern Australian History. Although perhaps not intended by the editor, the silencing of Aboriginal-German relations during the twentieth century ranks among the weakest parts of the collection.

Furthermore, the one-sided focus on South Australia would have required rigorous contextualisation, given the presence of Germans in all states and territories of Australia: was the presence of Germans in South Australia exceptional as compared to other Australian states and how did the South Australian-German experience translate into an Australian experience? Moreover, was *South Australia* important for the formation of national identities in this respect or was its regional character rather of secondary importance?

Despite both these apparent weaknesses, the book constitutes a meticulously researched source for everyone interested in the intricate relationship between Germany and (South) Australia. The clear style and absence of jargon as well as the breadth of themes render *Germans: Travellers, Settlers and Their Descendants in South Australia* a worthwhile compendium for scholars and general readers alike.

Works Cited

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