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## 'A Peculiar Odor is Perceptible'

### Ludwig Becker and the Portraying of Indigenous Australians Between Artistic Realism and Racial Labelling

*Abstract:* Born near Frankfurt in September 1808, the painter and naturalist Ludwig Becker is suspected to have been one of the 1848 democrats in Mainz. He also may have had this mindset when he arrived in Tasmania in March 1851. Springing from this suspicion of revolutionary background is the thesis of Becker's compassion for the indigenous people of Australia and the notion that his portrayal of them happened with a realism and respect that imparted to the portrayed dignity and individualism. Furthermore, most scholars writing about Becker consider his portrayal of the indigenous Australians to be largely free of the cultural bias and the aura of racism of the time. However, we examine some of his portraits in the light of the 'dying race' trope, the policy of protectionism, and the Bourke and Wills expedition, the colonialist endeavour that ultimately led to Becker's death. And we reached the conclusion that Becker's images of indigenous Australians provide complex evidence of the profound effects of contemporary racism.

Let us assume that Ludwig Becker had been one of the democrats in Mainz during the revolution of 1848.<sup>1</sup> Such an idea contains an enticing perspective in the context of his images of indigenous Australians: the European view of the 'the others' was not a closed system that was shaped by colonial interests and cultural ignorance but encompasses different points of view that could also be formed by empathetic attitudes.

Consequently, Becker would have migrated to Australia for "political reasons", as his biographer Marjorie Tipping writes. He "got caught up [...] with the political ideas of 1848" and "his revolutionary activity", although "somewhat obscure" due to a lack of information, "was enough to make him persona non grata" in Germany. The deficient source material on Becker's 'revolutionary activity' during the 1848 revolution is then substituted by the characterisation of the portraits he made of indigenous Australians. They are characterised by "individual likeness" and show "real people" "portrayed [...] with dignity" as "human beings and not savages".<sup>2</sup>

- 1 At least, this is claimed by Eckhart G. Franz: Becker, Ludwig. No sources are given. But Becker himself wrote to a German friend after his arrival in Tasmania: "ich gehöre zu den Unrechten aber nicht zu den Ungerechten (lit.: "I belong to the un-right but not to the un-just") and asked him: "If you should find any note from my letters worth having printed, do not choose a public paper which serves those who sit on the right in Paul's Church" - Ludwig Becker: Letter to Johann Jakob Kaup, 4 July 1852, pp. 521 ('Unrechte'), 512 ('public paper').
- 2 Marjorie Tipping: Ludwig Becker and Eugène von Guérard, pp. 83 ('political reasons'), 86 ('political ideas', 'revolutionary activity', 'obscure', 'persona non grata'), 101 ('likeness', 'real people', 'dignity'), 107 ('human beings'). While Becker's time in 1848 is obscure, that of one of Mainz's best-known democrats, Ludwig Bamberg, is well researched. This also applies to his later life, during which he worked successfully as banker, became a national-liberal supporter of Bismarck, to whom he came into opposition, joined the 'Liberale Vereinigung' (Liberal Union) and finally the 'Deutschfreisinnige Partei' (German Free-Minded Party). This is just one of the many political careers of former '48 radicals. Another, Johannes

This kind of assessment is found more frequent. Gerhard Fischer even reinforces the impression of Becker's revolutionary background by speculating that Becker might have been similarly resistant in Germany as Georg Büchner had been. He also points out that Becker had connections in Australia with Hermann Püttmann, who was a "colleague of Marx and Engels" and a "friend" of "Heine, Gutzkow and Weerth" before his emigration. This gives Becker just as much of a resistant image as the reference that he painted "a beautiful portrait [...] of Peter Lalor, one of the leaders of the rebels" of the Eureka Stockade in Australia.<sup>3</sup>

The thesis that Becker's "showed compassion for the native people" and that he "portrayed them as flesh and blood human beings with a realism and dignity rarely, if ever, surpassed in colonial likenesses of Aborigines" has been followed up on multiple times.<sup>4</sup> Antje Kühnast further reinforces this impression by writing that "Becker depicted Aboriginal people as individuals, showed respect for their culture and emphasised that they were wrongly treated as a low 'class' of the South Pacific's original inhabitants". In the end, she concludes: "Becker's Humboldtian humanist approach did [...] enable him to see Aboriginal people as individual humans in a specific historical and social setting". However, she adds somewhat perplexedly, this "did not prevent him from acquiring and measuring Aboriginal skulls" or from using his portraits of indigenous Australians "as racial representations".

Such description – which on the one hand (somewhat tortuously) approaches Marx and on the other (directly) refers to Humboldt – makes Becker appear an unbiased observer and flows into the interpretation of his images of indigenous Australians. The sketches and portraits are seen as realistic and unbiased images and are stripped of the contemporary aura of racism. A decided exception to such an assessment is found in Susan Woodburn's discussion of "visual representations of Aboriginal people in mid-nineteenth century colonial Australia". She, too, concurs that Becker's "views of Aborigines seem to suggest a lack of racial prejudice and preoccupation" In his paintings, however, she sees "little evidence of Becker's interest in Aboriginal people as individuals". An "ethnographic intent" was inscribed in his painting and he had left no "representations that combined Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people or that showed interactions between them".<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, there are also irritations in the other accounts that run counter to Becker's positive assessment. They are, however, either ignored or lead to an aporetic assessment of his work. An example from Tipping's biographical sketch

Miguel, had even been a member of the 'Bund der Kommunisten' (Communist League) before becoming a national liberal and even Prussian finance minister.

3 Gerhard Fischer: *Von deutschen Revolutionären zu australischen Nationalisten. Zur Rolle der 48er Migranten und Kolonisatoren in Südaustralien*, p. 133 (Büchner, Püttmann etc.), 131 (Lalor); for the portraits of indigenous Australians, refer to the assessment of Tipping (p. 132).

4 Marjorie Tipping: *Becker's Portraits of Billy and Jemmy (Tilki)*, p. 1, quoted, slightly abbreviated, in Antje Kühnast: *Signs of the Savage in the Skull*, p. 108; for the following quotes, see *ibid.*, pp. 113 ('respect for their culture'), 122 ('humanist approach', 'skulls', 'representations').

5 Susan Woodburn: *Alexander Schramm (1813-64) and the visual representation of Aboriginal people in mid-nineteenth century colonial Australia*, pp. 189 ('prejudice', 'interest'), 183 ('intent'), 186 ('interactions'); see also her article in this volume.

may suffice to illustrate what is at stake. On a single page, she attempts to make Becker simultaneously an academic doctor and a political resistance fighter. To this end, she has him “probably” meet Louis Agassiz in 1846, who by then had already acquired scientific renown, left for America the same year on Humboldt’s recommendation, and shortly afterwards became a professor at Harvard. She then explains that it was “probable, though not certain” that Becker held liberal positions in 1848 and therefore had to leave Germany. In any case, “one of his closest friends in Melbourne, Hermann Püttmann, a known revolutionary and friend of Karl Marx, believed that Becker left Mainz that year to escape prosecution for seditious activities”.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to the ‘probabilities’, this argumentation strategy is primarily concerned with the ideological effect. It is intended to put Becker in the light before his arrival in Australia, so that his images of indigenous Australians appear to be free of prejudice and full of empathy. In the process, racism is tacitly made into a conservative, prejudiced system of degrading non-white others, which enlightened, emancipatory positions would have been critical of. This insinuation collapses, of course, by invoking a mentee of Humboldt and later Harvard professor. For Agassiz became the co-author in America “of one of the saddest books in the canon of nineteenth-century racial thinking”.<sup>7</sup> In his contribution to the polygenetic trash science of ‘Types of Mankind’, Agassiz clearly positioned himself on its side.<sup>8</sup>

Empiricism and realism protected as little from racism as critical philosophical or radical political attitudes. In fact, the implementation of the racial theory that scientifically legitimised modern racism was only possible at all because the critical minds of the era played a leading role in it. From a German perspective, this was evident from Immanuel Kant to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Neither thought much of the indigenous Australians. With regard to them, Kant was certain that the question “why human beings exist” at all, “might not be so easy to answer” – namely, not “if one thinks about the New Hollanders or the

6 Marjorie Tipping: *The Life and Work of Ludwig Becker*, p. 6; the here unmentioned reference to Humboldt is directly addressed in Tipping: *Ludwig Becker and Eugène von Guérard*, pp. 86 – here, Becker makes “a significant journey along the Rhine with one of Humboldt’s protégés, Louis Agassiz”.

7 Christoph Irmscher: *Louis Agassiz*, p. 239.

8 In doing so, he tried, at least superficially, to uphold scientific standards. But his conclusion, “that the laws which regulate the diversity of animals, and their distribution upon earth, apply equally to man” was reached in the face of a choice that was beyond question for him: “there are only two alternatives before us at present : – 1<sup>st</sup>. “Either mankind originated from a common stock, and all the different races with their peculiarities, in their present distribution, are to be ascribed to subsequent changes – an assumption for which there is no evidence whatever, and which leads at once to the admission that the diversity among animals is not an original one, nor their distribution determined by a general plan, established in the beginning of the Creation; – or, 2<sup>nd</sup>. We must acknowledge that the diversity among animals is a fact determined by the will of the Creator, and their geographical distribution part of the general plan which unites all organized beings into one great organic conception: whence it follows that what are called human races, down to their specialization as nations, are distinct primordial forms of the type of man” (Louis Agassiz: *Sketch of the Natural Provinces of the Animal World and their Relation to the Different Types of Man*, pp. lxxv f.).

Fuegians".<sup>9</sup> For Hegel, they played no role at all. His world history unfolded in the northern hemisphere – from east to west, culminating in Europe. Australia had not even achieved a decent geological existence: the "geographical immaturity" of "New Holland" could be seen from the fact that not all the rivers here had even made it to the sea.<sup>10</sup>

As far as the undoubtedly revolutionary-minded Karl Marx is concerned, the first volume of *Capital*, published by himself, does indeed end in Australia – but with the remark that "we are not concerned here with the condition of the colonies".<sup>11</sup> This applies all the more to their original inhabitants. Marx was familiar with some of the knowledge about 'Aborigines' at the time through his reading, but he did not comment more closely on them or their situation.<sup>12</sup> Otherwise, he would certainly have included them in his indictment of European colonial policy. The Enlightenment's concept of progress, which he perpetuated, would nevertheless not have accorded their way of life any continuing legitimacy. Finally, the most revolutionary of all the 1848-documents says of the historical role of capitalism that its leading class, "[t]he bourgeoisie" "draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilisation".<sup>13</sup>

What remains is Humboldt's rejection of a natural hierarchy of human races. It was quite ambiguous and combined such rejection with cultural differentiations that argued with 'more or less': "By asserting the unity of the human race", he wrote in 'Kosmos', "we also resist any unpleasant assumption of higher and lower human races. There are more educated, more highly educated tribes that have been ennobled by spiritual culture, but there are no nobler tribes". From this it is concluded: "All are equally destined to freedom" But the European Enlightenment thinkers and their disciples agreed that such a destiny had to be worked out. And it was the Europeans who had so far made the most intensive efforts to achieve this.

Thus, Humboldt's reflections can also be applied without hesitation to the usefulness of typological images of race: "Barbaric nations have much more of a tribal or horde physiognomy than one that would belong to this or that individual".<sup>14</sup> This casts a pale light on Becker's images of indigenous Australians. Given the social nature of contemporary racism and the consequent spread of racial thinking across all social classes and political camps, 'portrait' and 'racial image' were not contradictory. Moreover, their realism was virtually imperative. It guaranteed their further scientific usability. They therefore had to be oriented towards typification. This was reflected in their design, even if they were created with empathy for those depicted.

9 Immanuel Kant: *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, p. 250 (§ 67); cf. Wulf D. Hund: 'It must come from Europe', pp. 69-98.

10 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel: *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, p. 100; cf. Daniel James, Franz Knappik: *Exploring the Metaphysics of Hegel's Racism*, pp. 99-126.

11 Karl Marx: *Capital*, p. 760.

12 Cf. Matthew Spriggs: *Who Taught Marx, Engels and Morgan About Australian Aborigines*, pp. 185-218.

13 Karl Marx, Frederick Engels: *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, p. 488; cf. Wulf D. Hund: *Marx and Haiti*, pp. 76-99.

14 Alexander von Humboldt: *Kosmos*, p. 385 ('race', 'freedom') and Alexander von Humboldt: *Reise in die Aequinoktial-Gegenden des neuen Kontinents*, S. 14 ('physiognomy').

Against this background, we discuss some of Becker's portraits of indigenous Australians. At that, we proceed chronologically. For Becker's stay in Launceston and Hobart, the title of the chapter '*Tasmania or Extinction*' already indicates that this will not be a one-dimensional view of images. We then turn to Becker's time in Melbourne in the chapter '*Victoria or Protection*'. Since the racist dimensions of the 'Protection of the Aborigines' policy have been thoroughly investigated by now, it should be clear that this is not going to be a contradiction-free section either. In the concluding chapter, '*Queensland or Appropriation*', a corresponding dialectic is self-evident because it deals with Becker's work as a member of the Bourke and Wills Expedition, an enterprise that was not least aimed at the further development of the continent for colonial interests.

### ***Tasmania or Extinction***

Whatever Becker's convictions when he came to Australia, he landed in Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) on 10 March 1851. Both in Launceston, where he first spent some time, as on his journey south, and finally in Hobart, he quickly and easily assimilated into colonial society. In Hobart, he was invited to stay at the Government House for several months. The Governor and his wife were delighted with his company. William Denison wrote in the late autumn of 1851: "we have got a German artist in the house. Becker, for that is his name, is a most amusing companion. He and I consort very well together, for he is a dabbler in all those sciences with which I am, to a certain extent, conversant, so that we meet upon common ground". His wife Caroline noted in her journal the positive impressions of "a Mr. Becker, a German artist, who is travelling in this country, and paying his way by taking likenesses, - miniatures, which he does very nicely indeed".<sup>15</sup>

The favourable impressions of the Governor and his wife were mutual. Before leaving Tasmania for Melbourne, he wrote: "For seven months I was the guest of the Governor of V.D.L., in whose house I received complete compensation for the friendship left at home". He also emphasizes that his hosts have been very supportive in helping him to get to know the island: "Sir William Denison was in every way helpful to me to provide me with information on the country and so on. We rode hundreds of miles together through the country and looked, painted and collected". In conclusion, he briefly characterized his artistic activity: "I painted him, Lady Denison and 8 children and much else".<sup>16</sup>

The phrase 'much else' is more telling than it seems. This is illustrated by a small sketch of the 1852 Hobart Regatta. It was a notable occasion for the colony, held annually "to commemorate the discovery of fair Tasmania", as the local newspaper proudly reported. Such an important social event was well attended: "The day was beautiful, and the ground filled with visitors from far and near".<sup>17</sup>

15 William Denison: *Varieties of Vice-Regal Life*, pp. 175 ('artist in the house'), 170 ('likenesses').

16 Ludwig Becker: Letter to Johann Jakob Kaup, 4 July 1852, p. 516.

17 'Hobart Guardian, or, True Friend of Tasmania', 7 January 1852, p. 2 ('Hobart Town Regatta').





Fig. 1 a: Hobart Town Regatta, Ludwig Becker, 1852.



Fig. 1 b: Mount Wellington and Hobart from Kangaroo Point, John Glover, 1834.



If Becker's picture is anything to go by, every stratum of the colonial society was represented (as the sloping landscape, with the canopy erected on the highest point, discreetly suggests). However, none of the last remaining indigenous Tasmanians is seen to attend. This does not necessarily mean that there were none. For they are not mentioned in Becker's letter, although he painted and named several of them.<sup>18</sup>

The ideological shallowness of the image can be easily dissected through a comparison with a topologically similar scene (Fig. 1 a+b), presented by John Glover's painting from 1834 entitled 'Mount Wellington and Hobart from Kangaroo Point'. This depicts a group of indigenous Tasmanians who still lay claim to the land, engaging in activities such as camping, dancing around a fire, lounging on the shore, or swimming. At the same time, it is symbolically made evident that this is a farewell festival – it is set in the darkness of history, whose light of progress falls onto the port of Hobart, which lies in opposite at the foot of the mountain. In contrast to Becker's realistic portrayal of the regatta, this is merely a figment of the imagination. The reality entailed the deportation of Tasmanians to Flinders Island, who were taken there incrementally in the previous years.<sup>19</sup>

The realism of both images does not negate their mendacity. Furthermore, the evident disparity between them reveals that Becker was untroubled by promoting the purportedly 'good society' of the settler colony – which warmly received him – during its celebration of 'fair Tasmania' by omitting the accompanying dark shadows of the genocidal politics against the original inhabitants.<sup>20</sup>

Becker's portraits of the 'natives' – or 'Aborigines' as they were referred to at the time – did not depict them in the context of the daily colonial life but constitute a distinct genre. It is surprising that he did not acknowledge this fact during his time in Tasmania, considering that the dire fate of the indigenous Tasmanian would have given ample reason for criticism and protest – in particular for a critical mind, newly arrived from revolutionary Germany. Shortly before his arrival, his hostess Lady Denison recorded in her journal the settlers' detrimental treatment of the "unfortunate aborigines" and their deportation to Flinders Island. Because they were miserable there, her husband was "determined on bringing them back again" and settling the few survivors in Oyster Cove near Hobart. Both felt it their duty "to make them as comfortable and as happy as we can, in

18 Such partial silence is registered by Susan Woodburn: Alexander Schramm, p. 186, also for Becker's painting 'Melbourne from across the Yarra' (1854) and 'Old Princes' Bridge and St Paul's by night' (c1857). It is also found in the picture story 'Australisches Lied'. It describes how "a German lad" emigrates to Australia. He comes to Melbourne and then to the country, where he first becomes a shepherd and later a bullock driver. After that he "travels around the country as a musician". He describes, in depth, digging for gold in Ararat, Ballarat, Bendigo, Meyer's Flat, and Tarrangower. Eventually, he unearths "a golden treasure" and marries (El Bekr [Ludwig Becker]: *Ein Australisch' Lied*, passim. Cf. Marjorie Tipping: *An Australian Song*). During this tour de force, however, he meets neither Chinese prospectors nor indigenous Australians (cf. Gerhard Fischer: *Von deutschen Revolutionären zu australischen Nationalisten*, p. 132).

19 Cf. Gregory Patrick Lehman: *Regarding the Savages*, p. 261, who concludes: "The scene, painted in 1835, is a fantasy. The only place where Tasmanian Aborigines could gather in such numbers now was on Flinders Island. And there was little cause for celebration there".

20 For the debate around the question of genocide in Tasmania, cf., with further literature references, Lom Lawson: *The Last Man*.



Fig. 2a: (*Sarah*) Dinudara  
V. D. L. — 1852  
Sarah was one of the  
names of Ta[i]renootairer,  
also called Tanganutara  
(or Tangernuterrer) and Tib

Fig. 2b: Kānjāwērkie  
1852 — V. D. Land  
Kanjawerkie is said to be Calama-  
rowenye or Warrermeer, known  
as Tippto Saib or King Tippoo to  
the colonists

Fig. 2c: Naplömata (*Henrietta*)  
V. D. Land — 1852;  
Henrietta was one of the  
names of Thielewannan or  
Purtilhewattroeyehaner,  
also called Big Mary

their own way, for the remainder of their lives. They are decreasing and dwindling away, as the dark races always seem to do before the white man".<sup>21</sup>

Becker had to be familiar with the 'dying race' trope. This was also suggested by his biographer, who highlights that he had painted "an important series of Aboriginal portraits" in Tasmania. Characterising them, she writes: "They are sympathetic, if sad, representations of those who were among the last of their race".<sup>22</sup> However, she does not address the underlying politics nor the associated ideology and completely refrains from providing an according contextualisation of Becker's images (Fig. 2 a-f).<sup>23</sup>

First of all, it must be presumed that Becker was already familiar with the contemporary race-scientific 'findings' about 'Aboriginal Australians' before he departed to Australia. This pertains to their position in the hierarchy of human races as well as for the concept that they were a dwindling race. The prior detail

21 William Denison: *Varieties of Vice-Regal Life*, pp. 66 ('unfortunate aborigines'), 68 ('dwindling away').

22 Marjorie Tipping: *Ludwig Becker and Eugène von Guérard*, p. 89.

23 Becker has given the people portrayed names that do not appear in the surviving documents of those interned at Flinders Island and Oyster Cove. The reasons for this remain unclear. However, as he has added the English names of at least three of them (in German cursive script), references to the bearers of these names can be established. We have added other possible references from the literature (with collegial thanks to David Hansen, Kristyn Harman, Cassandra Pybus, and Lyndall Ryan for their support). The additional information comes from: British Museum: *Daphne from Oyster Bay V.D.L.*; Julie Gough: *Forgotten Lives*, pp. 21-52; David Hansen: *Ludwig Becker (1808-1861)*, *Naplömata (Henrietta)*, *Dinudara (Sarah)*, *Kanjawerkie*; N.J. Brian Plomley (ed.): *Weep in Silence*; - Cassandra Pybus: [personal communication, 9 August 2023]; Gaye Sculthorpe: *Tanganutara (Sarah)*; Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre: *Mumirimina people of the Lower Jordan River Yalley*.





Fig. 2d: Onōdia  
1852 – V.D. Land



Fig. 2e: Wata Kawodia  
V.D. Land – 1852  
Becker probably meant  
Wotecowideyer,  
also known as Harriet



Fig. 2f: Woannādie (*Daphne*)  
V.D. Land; Fiel vom Baum – 1852  
Daphne was one of the names of  
Parateer, also called Cranky Bet  
or Dromedeener

could also be found in Germany and assigned the individuals frequently identified as ‘Australneger’ to the bottom rung of human progress. This is exemplified by Eberhard August Wilhelm von Zimmermann, who authored a two-volume work on Australia and Oceania. The people of Australia were presented as primitive and cultureless beings.<sup>24</sup>

That they could handle contact with civilization was not entirely dismissed. Public discourse, however, which spread not only via newspaper but also through extensive and widely read travel literature, also posited that Australians would not survive the cultural contact. The literature, which also included emigration guides, was easily accessible for Becker, who had spent some time in England before his departure.<sup>25</sup> As early as 1820, one could learn that Tasmania resembled a ‘little England’ in the best possible manner and was also an “enchanted Elysium” in an “Australian paradise”. However, it was not concealed that this paradise was not without its own fall from grace. There were references to armed conflicts, and, according to the author, “there is good reason to believe, that, whatever might have been their original disposition towards the intruders

24 Cf. Eberhard August Wilhelm von Zimmermann: *Australien in Hinsicht der Erd-, Menschen- und Produktenkunde [etc.]*: Australians are “negro-like humans” (p. 894) and have something “animal-like” (p. 895). Some of them even show “a striking approximation to the orang-utan” (p. 896). They are “raw nature people” (p. 902) and represent the “naked, raw, meagre human”, who shows “no degree of culture anywhere” (p. 903). They “lack [...] diligence and industry” (p. 919). Concerning Zimmermann, see Jon M. Mikkelsen: *E. A. W. Zimmermann*, pp. 73-81.

25 Cf. Tipping, Becker, pp. 7 f.

on their peaceful lands, they do not at present entertain very favourable sentiments towards their new neighbours".<sup>26</sup>

This is just one evidence of the circumstance that, as Anna Johnston has argued, "the dark history of colonisation and dispossession haunted the [...] travel narratives, and this was especially evident in writing about Tasmania". This also includes "a sentimental racism of mourning and memorialisation" in view of a 'dwindling race'. Baron Fields, Judge of the New South Wales Supreme Court, expresses in his book 'On the Aborigines of New Holland and Van Dieman's Land', published in London in 1825, his fear that "the Australian will never be civilized". The most humane approach towards them, he adds in verse, was to allow them to live out their wild live in peace: "As in the eye of Nature he has lived, | So in the eye of Nature let him die!"<sup>27</sup>

Since Lady Denison displayed a similar attitude, Becker acquainted himself with her here at the latest. His encounters with the Tasmanians were marked by the brutal and deadly impacts of colonialism on the indigenous population. This was accompanied by different feelings on the part of the colonial settlers, which included remorse at such merciless dominance of nature. However, even these voices were unwilling to make cultural and political compromises; they held fast to their prerogative and submission to their maxims.

At the very time Becker was staying with the Denisons, this became apparent in the governor's interactions with the inhabitants of the Furneaux Group. They (including a number of 'fullblood' indigenous women), who were considered mixed-race by the authorities, approached Denison to request recognition of their Aboriginality as well as aid along the same lines of that granted to the group that was brought from Flinders Island to Oyster Cove. This plea was flatly denied: "In his view there was only one official Aboriginal community in Van Dieman's Land - the Aboriginal station at Oyster Cove".<sup>28</sup> This also meant that the Governor was not willing to acknowledge the existence of an autonomous, self-sustained group of individuals who possessed an indigenous Tasmanian identity.

Becker may have viewed this as a conflict with his personal fate. From the start, his time in Australia was 'multicultural': he was willing to pledge his loyalty to Britain without sacrificing his German cultural identity, which he boldly expressed upon his arrival. One of his early letters from Tasmania was permeated with chauvinistic undertones. In 1851, he wrote to Johann Jakob Kaup stating that the "German [c]ould be the man of men, the lord of the world". At the same time, he asked about the current conditions in Germany and complained: "Shame! When I think of the sins of the few, who spilt the Blood of so many without remorse".<sup>29</sup>

26 Quoted in Anna Johnston: *Little England*, p. 23; for the following see *ibid.*, p. 28 ('dark history'), 25 ('sentimental racism').

27 Quoted in Russell McGregor: *Imagines Destinies. Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880-1939*. Carlton South: Melbourne University Press 1997, pp. 8 ('never civilized'), 13 ('die').

28 Lyndall Ryan: *The Aboriginal Tasmanians*, p. 224.

29 Ludwig Becker: Letter to Johann Jakob Kaup, 21 April 1851, pp. 512-516, p. 512; even after that, he did not abandon his paean to the Germans. Shortly before his departure with the Burke and Willis expedition, he composed and wrote the words to a 'march', which read: 'Fresh, whole company with joyful singing and song', we wander 'through the whole world,

It is not known whether the artist evaluated the destiny of the indigenous Tasmanians in a similar way. Even if the portraits are not compared with the later works and statements of Becker, they are therefore already in the twilight. Then, of course, it becomes apparent that they (at least as far as our present stage of knowledge is concerned) captured not only individual traits but also had a group character that allowed for lining them up.

It seems as if Becker travelled to Australia with the purpose of authoring a book on Tasmania and thereby making a name for himself. At least this is what the local newspaper, 'The Courier', reported in the context of a public dinner in honour of the Governor, during which the attendees also made a toast to the foreign guest "Mr Becker, the very talented German Naturalist and Geologist, who is at present actively employed in collecting materials in the wide field of Tasmania for a great and scientific work to be published".<sup>30</sup> It was appropriate that he gathered natural specimen as well as artefacts and devoted himself in writing and painting to recording the nature of the country, including its original inhabitants.

For images of indigenous Tasmanians, this would have meant interpreting them as racial images. Their realism would then also convey traits of the individuality of the portrayed but would be fundamentally oriented towards documenting their belonging to a type. Susan Woodburn, at least, believes this to be true. She comments on "[t]he portraits he painted in 1852 of Naplomata, Dinudara, Kanjawerkie, Woannadie, Onodia and Wata Kawodia, members of the much reduced community of indigenous Tasmanians at Oyster Cove": "While in the form of portrait miniatures and following artistic conventions, ethnographic intent is implicit in the focus on profile and in the making of groups of three of the same size and format".<sup>31</sup>

Such an assessment must, however, take into account that the profile view in portraiture has a long tradition (and was also a popular form of representation of rulers in the past). With the advent of phrenology, the facial angle, or craniology, the profile acquired a dimension that was also incorporated into the creation of racial imagery. Carl Gustav Carus, an advocate of craniology, who, like Becker, was involved in painting and nature research, was one of those who

wherever we please', and at the same time 'we live cheerful and happy' ("Frisch, ganze Kompagnie | Mit frohem Sing und Sang!"; "Durch die ganze Welt, | Wohin es und gefällt"; "Leben wir stets frei und froh!"). Germans could wander the world and seek their freedom – not least in Australia (Marsch, composed by Becker in the *Deutsches Liederbuch für Australien*, pp. 43 f.).

30 The Courier (Hobart, Tasmania), 4 October 1851, p. 3 ('Local. Dinner to His Excellency'). A letter by Becker reads, "My plan was to publish my diary in Germany, illustrated by my sketchbook". He had not yet carried out this plan because he had instead gone to Victoria to look for gold, and during this time his accommodation in Tasmania had burnt down – "and with it my large, beautiful collection of birds, skeletons, geological hand specimens etc." (Ludwig Becker: Letter to Johann Jakob Kaup, draft on undated leaves, p. 518).

31 Susan Woodburn: Alexander Schramm, p. 184; she depicts the watercolours in the order in which they were shown in the exhibition 'Colony: Australia 1770-1861' in the National Gallery of Victoria; Installation view of the exhibition 'Colony: Australia 1770-1861' at NGV Australia at Federation Square, Melbourne showing Ludwig Becker's 'Aborigines of Tasmania 1852').



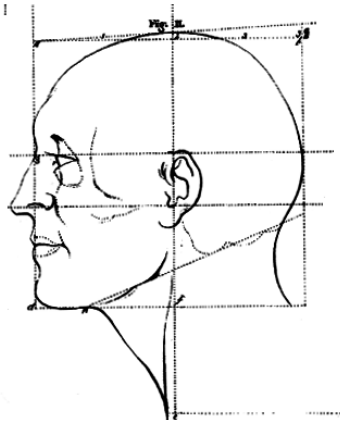


Fig. 3a: Facial angles by Petrus Camper

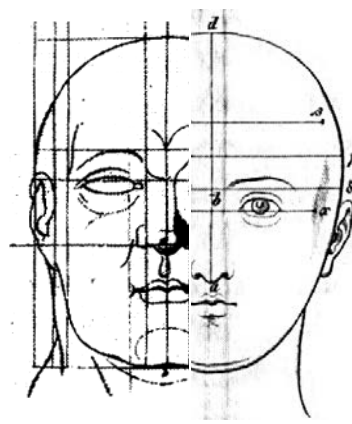


Fig. 3b: Facial angles by Camper and Carus

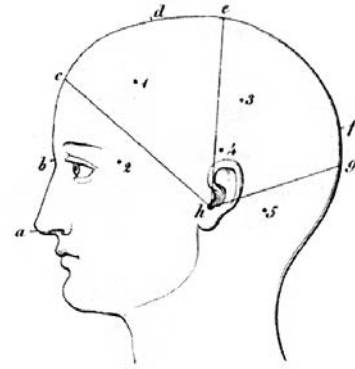


Fig. 3c: Facial angles by Carl Gustav Carus

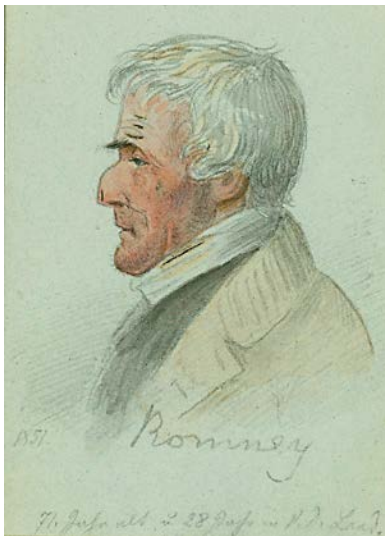


Fig. 4a: Portrait of Romney by Ludwig Becker

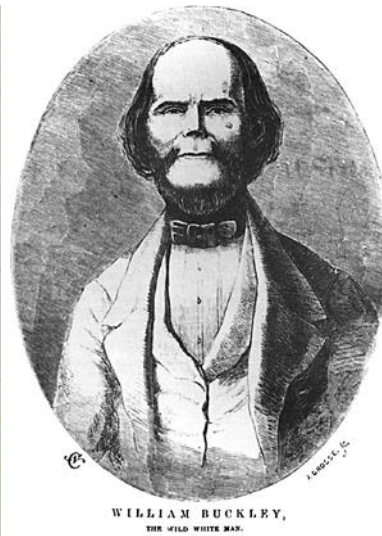


Fig. 4b: Portrait of William Buckley, based on a sketch by Ludwig Becker



Fig. 4c: Self-portrait of Ludwig Becker

disseminated corresponding instructions in pictures and writing (Fig. 3b (right half) and 3c).<sup>32</sup>

Carus was, above all, concerned with character heads. Becker was no stranger to them either. And he chose comparable views for them. In Tasmania, he painted the portrait of a certain Romney in a radical ninety-degree profile (Fig. 4a). In doing so, he likened the head with that of Wellington.<sup>33</sup> With himself he dealt in

32 Cf. Carl Gustav Carus: Grundzüge einer neuen und wissenschaftlich begründeten Cranioskopie (Schädellehre), annex.

33 Cf. State Library of Victoria: Romney. 71 Jahre alt v. 28 Jahre in V.D. Land; there also the notice: "Descriptive notes in German inscribed on mount: Ein farmer in V.D. Land, mit einem kopf gleich Wellington. [A farmer in V.D. Land with a head similar to Wellington]". It is likely that Becker has known paintings, miniatures, drawings, or caricatures that emphasised Wellington's prominent nose and white mop of hair, often times in profile. Some of these have probably existed in Hobart, where the local mountain, previously known as Table Mountain, had only recently been renamed Mount Wellington in 1832. The comparison of the head of a simple colonial settler with that of the British lord, twice prime minister, victor over Napoleon, and, at the time when Becker painted Romney, commander-in-chief of the British army was certainly a physiognomic compliment.



Fig. 5a: Woannādie



Fig. 5b: Wata Kawodia



Fig. 5c: Naplōmata



Fig. 6a: Dinudarā



Fig. 6b: Kānjāwērkie



Fig. 6c: Onōdia



Fig. 7a: Naplōmata



Fig. 7b: Kānjāwērkie



Fig. 7c: Dinudarā

a similar way. For an acquaintance in Germany, he painted his own portrait in profile in the margin of a letter (Fig. 4c). For a portrait of William Buckley attributed to him,<sup>34</sup> he opted for a direct frontal view (Fig. 4b).

Merely technically observing these images does not provide any information about their perspectival intentions, because contemporary iconography was oriented towards individual characteristics as well as typical commonalities. This can be symbolically illustrated by examining Carus' craniology combined with

34 See Geelong Gallery: William Buckley; Marjorie Tipping: Portrait of William Buckley, attributed to Ludwig Becker. The wood engraving is by Frederick Grosse, based on a drawing by Nicholas Chevalier, based on a sketch by Becker – State Library Victoria: William Buckley.

the facial angles of Petrus Camper (Fig. 3a and 3b (left half)).<sup>35</sup> In both cases, the direct frontal view and ninety-degree profiles play a decisive role but are intended to serve different purposes. In the case of Becker's 'white' portraits, these consist in emphasizing individual traits. It was not his intention to position them within a typological racial image.

In Becker's known images of indigenous Tasmanians, there are no 'ideal' angles. Nevertheless, they apparently had a collective character and were intended to typify the group. Despite this, these depictions are still not classical racial images. This applies to the three watercolours (Fig. 5a-c) as well as to the pencil drawings (Fig. 6a-c), which are held by the National Library of Victoria, as well as to the three watercolours that had for a long time been in private possession and have only recently come to light (Fig. 7a-c).<sup>36</sup>

However, each of the three series presents the merging of two profile-oriented representations with a frontal view. Particularly, since the series character implies that they may be construed as attempts towards the creation of racial images, such a character cannot be read from the individual portraits alone. The fact that Becker was empathetic towards the individuals he portrayed does not preclude that he did so unaffected by the prejudices of contemporary racial thinking. Above all, it can be assumed that his sketches were created under the auspices of the 'dying race' trope. Their typological character, possibly connected to this, can be further tested by examining whether Becker continued to follow this hypothesis during his subsequent time in Australia.

### ***Victoria or Protection***

In his account of life at Government House in Tasmania, Becker reported that he and Denison not only "painted" but also "collected". The latter was not a new-found passion for Becker, as he had a long-standing interest in a wide range of subjects back in Germany. His chaotic pursuit of collecting led to the creation of a small personal curiosity cabinet. This occurred at a time when the previous mainly princely cabinets of curiosity had become outdated and were being transformed into systematically organized museums. The collection comprised stones from diverse geological strata, artefacts made of bronze and bone from earlier eras, aged woodcuts and copper engravings, coins dating to the Middle Ages and Roman times, inaugural printings (such as a volume of Luther's speeches), and,

35 Cf. Petrus Camper's illustrations of facial angles in Miriam Claude Meijer: *Race and Aesthetics in the Anthropology of Petrus Camper*, pp. 109, 97.

36 For the first, see the search results for "Ludwig Becker Aboriginal Tasmanians" of the State Library Victoria; concerning the latter, see David Hansen: *Ludwig Becker (1808-1861), Naplomata (Henrietta), Dinudara (Sarah), Kanjawerkie*. Cf. also David Hansen: *Art in Van Dieman's Land*, p. 138, who called Becker's works a "historically important series of fine, pathetic Aboriginal portraits". Of course, this does not alter the problems arising from the context of their creation, which are of interest to us primarily inasmuch as they have affected Becker's work and become 'visible' in it.



lastly, works of art, some of which were actually or reputedly created by Raphael, Cranach or Rembrandt.<sup>37</sup>

Correspondingly, Becker's scientific ambitions were extensive and wide-ranging. This led to a form of dilettantism that was as open-minded as undisciplined. However, even though his curiosity was boundless, it would be both naïve and legitimizing to associate this with "an elemental urge to leave home", that supposedly drew or propelled "exiles and emigrants and explorers" into remote areas.<sup>38</sup> The cosmopolitan mobility of this "species" was extrinsically determined by colonialism. As 'colonial collecting', it was the passionate pursuit of collecting anything from annexable or annexed environments. This also extended to territories previously beyond covetousness. Although Shakespeare's death mask was part of it,<sup>39</sup> Shakespeare's skull, hair, bones, or skin were not among the items collected.

It was not that the deceased bodies of people belonging to one's own ethnic group, culture, or race were forbidden. But they were subject to the principles of hagiography or the exploration of one's own history. As relics, they fell under the church's jurisdiction and were ceremoniously retrieved from their burial site (elevatio), then transported to their place of veneration (translation), featuring accounts of the miracles witnessed during the process and the deeds and martyrdoms of the deceased (hagiography), and, lastly, became the focus of public religious veneration, including pilgrimage. As fossil discoveries, they became the focus of palaeoanthropology and prehistoric anthropology. At Becker's time, these had no designated term, as they were only just being established after the discovery in the Neander Valley in 1856. However, they did not trouble themselves with the remains of recently deceased individuals.

It was different with the racial sciences. They used the remains of recently deceased people to measure their difference from the European anatomy, which had been established as the norm. They did this quite unscrupulously, as the example of Samuel George Morton shows (who died the year Becker arrived in Australia and whose writings would be edited shortly afterwards with the participation of Louis Agassiz, with whom Becker is said to have once walked the Rhine Valley). His 'mismeasurement of man'<sup>40</sup> has become synonymous with the whole of racial science.

In its gravitational field, even the most wicked distortions of the physique of purportedly primitive races invoked a supposed scientific exactitude through the actual measurement of mortal remains. By the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, these had become a veritable commodity. They were not necessarily exchanged for money but often for honour or protection. In particular, the academic

37 Cf. Marjorie Tipping: *The Life and Work of Ludwig Becker*, p. 5.

38 This is seen by Evely Juers: *Wild Things in a veritable "species of [...] dreamers who (if we're looking for a nomenclature) might be dubbed *Homo qui reliquerit Germaniam*", some of them, like "Ludwig Leichhardt, Ferdinand von Mueller, Ludwig Becker [...] even got as far as Australia".*

39 Becker believed himself to be in possession of one and made many efforts to turn it into money. It was to be sold (together with a portrait of Shakespeare on this deathbed and two documents), as he had notarized before leaving England - but not "for less than five thousand pounds sterling" (*Ludwig Becker: [Power of Attorney]*, p. 519).

40 Cf. Stephen Jay Gould: *Mismeasurement of Man*.

intelligentsia in the colonies could exchange body parts of the indigenous population for prestige (through mention in scientific journals or even the opportunity to publish in them) and support (for a son to study in England, for example). But in case of doubt, money also flowed.<sup>41</sup>

Overall, the market was governed by the normal rules of supply and demand. In Tasmania, this led to an increase in grave robbing due to the perceived extinction of the original population.<sup>42</sup> On the continent it was not much different, although the protracted frontier wars in the various colonies continued to supply bones and other human body parts. We do not yet know exactly how Becker was involved in these events. But it is certain that he was involved in the handling of human remains. As he wrote in an 1859 letter, he collected “skulls and skeletons” – and sold them.<sup>43</sup>

Moreover, he was involved in the racial scientific study of indigenous Australians. In doing so, he made a decision that shed a significant light on his understanding of the character of his portraits. He had no problems with inserting individually created works (Fig. 8 a+b) into a racial-typological context. The fact that this did *not* appear to him a contradiction reinforces the assumption that race-specific considerations were already taken into account when the portraits were created.<sup>44</sup>

Becker made extensive annotations to both portraits. In their present form, these were printed only five years after the pictures were taken, but they provide additional information not visible in the pictures themselves, implying that Becker made corresponding notes when painting the two Australians. The detailed anthropological descriptions contained in these annotations, combined with the pictures, form veritable racial profiles.<sup>45</sup>

41 For the Australian example, see Helen MacDonald: *Human Remains* and *id.*: *Possessing the Dead*; and the papers in part 2 (Histories and worldwide networks) in Cressida Fforde, C. Timothy McKeown, Honor Keeler: *The Routledge Companion to Indigenous Repatriation*.

42 The remains of the indigenous Tasmanians interned there had already been stolen from Flinders Island. The colonial elite apparently made no secret of their wishes in this regard: “According to Robinson’s journal, all visitors praised his administration of the settlement. They left as they arrived – in the evening, and in haste, with many administrative edicts, and several requests. Lady Franklin wanted a child or two, and the Governor, Lady Franklin and Captain Machonocie all wanted skulls of VDL people. These requests were certainly not bizarre by 1830s standards, and would [...] be fulfilled” (Leonie Stevens: ‘Me Write Myself’, p. 161).

43 Cf. Ludwig Becker: Letter to the Royal Society of Victoria, July 1859 and Marjorie Tipping: *Ludwig Becker and Eugène von Guérard*, p. 98.

44 Becker’s racial image has been interpreted as contradictory because it mixes individual portraits of two Aboriginal people with craniological images made from the skulls of three others. But despite the fact that Becker “described the skulls as demonstrating ‘the peculiar character of the Australian race’”, the narrative of his unprejudiced attitude is perpetuated: “Nevertheless, Becker drew no conclusions from these peculiarities regarding their racial status, mental capacities or state of civilisation” (Antje Kühnast: *Signs of the Savage in the Skull*, p. 113).

45 Ludwig Becker: *Explanatory Remarks on Plate*, p. 88) says “Portrait of Billy, a native from Port Fairy. The likeness was taken by me from life in 1854. His age was eighteen years; height five feet two inches; complexion, light chocolate-brown; flat nose; jaws, very much projecting; mouth, large; lips, sharp, edged with a reddish hue; teeth, complete and pure white; chin, small and receding; well-shaped eyes, the iris nearly black, the white of the eye has a light yellowish tint; eye-lashes, long and black; head, well formed; forehead, rising nearly perpendicular from horizontal; black and busy eye-brows; hair, jet black and full”.

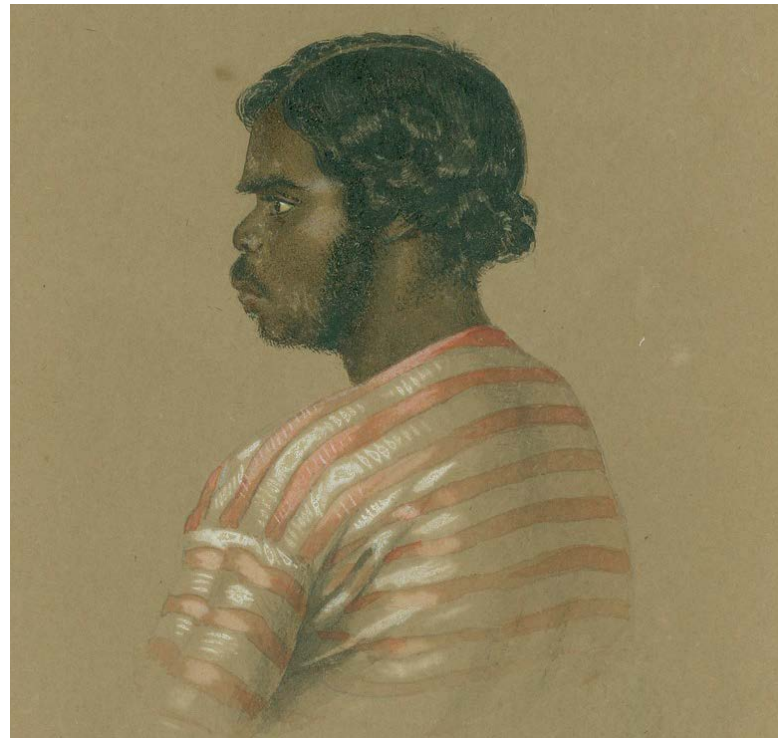
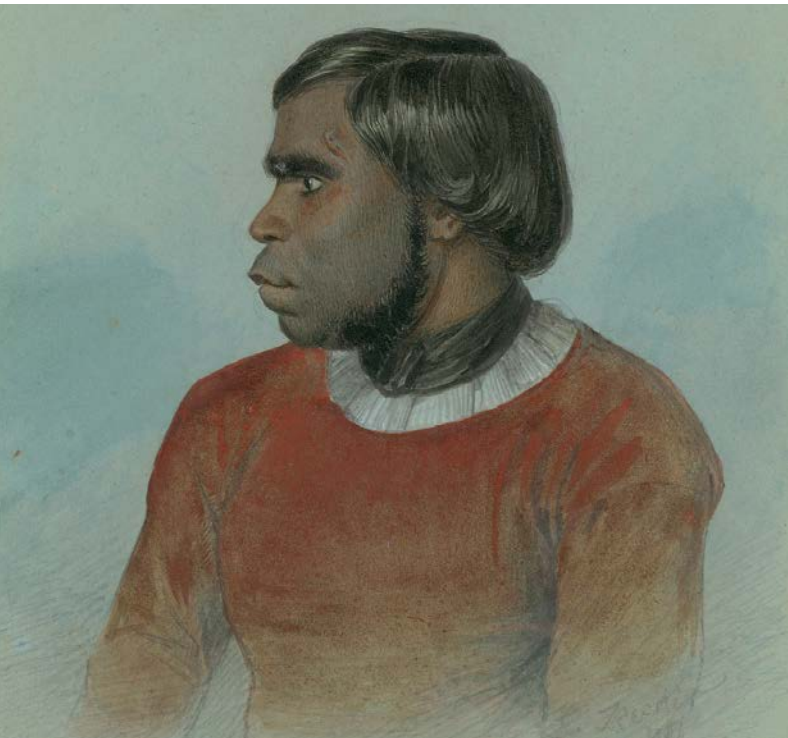


Fig. 8a: Portrait of Billy by Ludwig Becker

Fig. 8b: Portrait of Tilki by Ludwig Becker

Becker, therefore, had no issue using the two portraits as part of a racial tableau that he prepared in response to corresponding questions of the ‘Committee of the Legislative Council on the Aborigines’. The committee, amongst other things, sought information on “the general stature of the people” (including “some actual measurement”), inquiring whether “there [is] any prevailing disproportion between parts of the body”? It showed particular interest in data regarding heads: “The head is so important as distinctive of race, that particular attention must be paid to it. Is it round or elongated in either direction, and what is the shape of the face – broad, oval, lozenge-shaped, or of any other marked form?” Furthermore, “sketches of several typical specimens were required”: a “profile, and also a front view should be given. In the profile particularly notice the height and angle of the forehead”. In addition, it was requested that “[t]he form of the head may be minutely and accurately described by employing the divisions and terms introduced by craniologists, and the corresponding development of moral and intellectual character should, in conjunction, be faithfully stated”. Not least, interest was directed towards skulls: “When skulls can be collected or examined, it would be desirable to give a view [...] taken by looking down upon the head from above, so as to give an idea of the counter of the forehead, and the width

On the other hand, it reads, “Portrait of Tilki, a native from near the mouth of the Darling River. When I took his likeness, in 1854, his age was twenty years. His general appearance is like the former’s, with the exception that the skin is a little darker, the hair more curly, nose shorter, mouth smaller. His height is five feet seven and a half inches. One tooth in front of jaw is missing, in consequence of a ceremony performed on reaching manhood”, Report of the Select Committee of the Legislative Council on the Aborigines; cf. Marjorie Tipping: Becker’s Portraits of Billy and Jemmy (Tilki). In: *The La Trobe Journal*, 1978, 21, pp. 1-7.



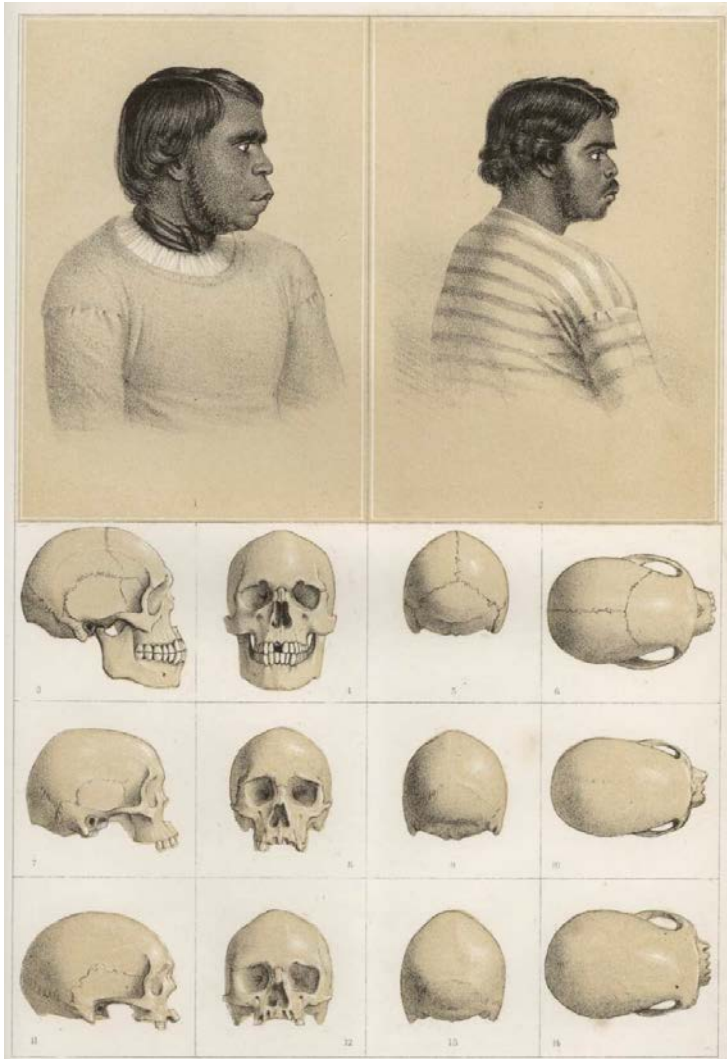


Fig. 9: Billy and Tilki as specimen, racial tableau by Ludwig Becker

of the skull across from one parietal protuberance to the other".<sup>46</sup>

Becker replied in combing the engravings of Billy and Tilki with profile and frontal views as well as the elevations of three different skulls into a race table (Fig. 9). For all five individuals, he provided details that could be used in race science. For two skulls, he furnished the facial angle. This information is at the same time superficial and revealing. For the three skulls under his examination, he wrote about the first one: "The upper jaw slants so much forwards that the facial angle is lowered to 85 degrees"; regarding the second skull, he briefly noted: "Facial angle, 85 degrees", and for the third skull there is no corresponding information.<sup>47</sup>

Becker does not specify who calculated the angle and how it was obtained. It is not likely that he relied on Camper, who reserved angles of 80 degrees or more for Europeans and of 85 degrees and more for Roman statues.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, Camper's version of the facial angle had been questioned within the scientific community for its inadequacy early on.<sup>49</sup> However, due to its ideological convenience, it was still retained

46 Report of the Select Committee of the Legislative Council on the Aborigines; Together with the Proceedings of Committee, Minutes of Evidence, and Appendices, pp. 45 f.

47 Ludwig Becker: Explanatory Remarks on Plates, p. 88.

48 Cf. Miriam Claude Meijer: Race and Aesthetics in the Anthropology of Petrus Camper, p. 108.

49 Already Johann Friedrich Blumenbach: Über die natürlichen Verschiedenheiten im Menschengeschlechte, p. 146 complained "that on the skulls of very different peoples, which one might say differ from one another as day from night, the direction of the facial line is nevertheless the same; and conversely, on several skulls of one and the same people, which on the whole agree with one another and have the same habitus, the facial line is very different". This did not prevent later researchers from using the facial angle in the anthropological measurement of indigenous Australians although the results were mixed. In 1871, Wake wrote about "the form of the Australian skull" that it has "a profile much less animal than that usually associated with the West African native" - though "[i]t should be stated that the skull of the native Australian female is very inferior in form to that of the male, approaching much more nearly to the animal type" (C. Staniland Wake: The Physical

in different versions. It promised members of the white race a superior profile. And this is exactly what Becker conveys, when he explains that the facial angle he gave was 'lowered'.<sup>50</sup>

His comments on the physical and mental condition of the indigenous Australians do not paint a different picture. When asked, "What is your opinion of their general intelligence, and of their capacity to receive literary or moral instruction?", he replied: "Not below the average intelligence of all the other uneducated masses of nations, may they belong to the black, colored, or white races of man". And to the question, "Is there [...] any perceptible peculiarity of odor?", he let the committee know, "A peculiar odor is perceptible [...]; it is very much like the well known odor observed as coming from negroes, but not quite so strong".<sup>51</sup>

This combination of classist and racist arguments was by no means uncommon. First of all, physiologically connoted statements about body odour included social arguments concerning nutrition or cosmetics.<sup>52</sup> Additionally, the word fields 'class' and 'race' intersected during this period. Furthermore, numerous members of the bourgeoisie were reluctant to associate with the lower classes – as they deemed them a sort of indigenous 'savages', who appeared more akin to 'primitive races' than with their own lifestyle. And, last but not least, their noses often struggled to smell a difference between racial and classist others.<sup>53</sup>

Characters of the Australian Aborigines, pp. 266 f.). In 1928, Hrdlička found average values for the facial angle of 68 for mainland Australians and 69 for Tasmanians (Aleš Hrdlička: *Catalogue of Human Crania in the United States National Museum Collections*, p. 88). As late as 1947, Abbie gave an average facial angle of 78 for 50 female and 50 male skulls. The individual values vary between 72 and 86 (Andrew A. Abbie: *Headform and Human Evolution*, p. 234). Given the variety of racial classifications and measurement methods, it is not surprising that one of them was one that used the angle of the face for racial classification. But Becker's values would not have fitted either. Julien-Joseph Virey: *Histoire naturelle du genre humain*, pp. 318 ff., divided the "genre humain" into "deux espèces distinctes". On the first, he wrote "un angle facial qui s'ouvre jusqu'à quatre-vingt-cinq ou quatre-vingt-dix degrés" (85-90°), the second "un angle facial ouvert de soixante-quinze à quatre-vingts degrés au plus" (75-80°). This resulted in a racial classification for the 1<sup>st</sup> 'espace': "1. race blanche, 2. race jaune, 3. race cuivreuse, 4. racine brune foncée", and the 2<sup>nd</sup> 'espace': "5. race noire, 6. race noirâtre". Virey counted the inhabitants of New Holland amongst the latter race.

50 Becker's data were noted in contemporary race literature. In Australia, James Bonwick referred to them several times– cf. James Bonwick: *The Wild White Man and the Blacks of Victoria*, pp. 30 f. and id.: *The Daily Life and Origin of the Tasmanians*, p. 128. In England, Joseph Barnard Davis (in *Thesaurus Craniorum. Catalogue of the Skulls of the Various Races of Men*. London: printed for the subscribers 1867, p. 267) referred to Becker. In Germany, Johann Christian Gustav Lucae (*Zur Morphologie der Rasse-Schädel*, p. 28) lauded the "very excellent illustrations of New Hollanders" which "our compatriot, Herr Ludwig Becker in Melbourne" delivered. In Italy, Paolo Mantegazza (*La Riforma Craniologica*, p. 129) bibliographed Becker's contribution.

51 Ludwig Becker: [Answers], pp. 39, 46, 82.

52 Cf. William Tullett: *Grease and Sweat*, pp. 307-322.

53 At the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a French perfumer is said to have suggested that different social classes should be provided with different scents: "a royal perfume for the aristocracy, a bourgeois perfume for the middle classes, but only a disinfectant for the poor" (Constance Classen, David Howes, Anthony Synnott: *Aroma*, p. 168). In the second half of the century, Henry Home, Lord Kames, the patriarch of the Scottish Enlightenment, was certain that "Africans generally could be seen and smelled" because they had a specific racial "rank smell" (Mark M. Smith: *How Race is Made*, p. 14). He may not have been aware of the linguistic conflation of class conceit and dislike. But he did rank, denigrate,





Fig. 10: Certificate for the Melbourne Exhibition of 1854



Becker's perspective on the intelligence of indigenous Australian was well within the racist spectrum of the Enlightenment. This varied from the belief that the non-white races were unlikely to survive to the hope that Europeans could educate them on the fundamental aspects of civilization. This would at least enable them to live under white guidance and civilization. Nevertheless, this would not grant them equality or social integration: their scent alone placed them outside of society.

Becker's viewpoint was similar. This was shown quite unmistakably in the certificate he created for the Melbourne Exhibition of 1854, which he did as per the regulations of European colonial iconography (Fig. 10).<sup>54</sup>

His allegory distinguishes between (inner) cultural and (outer) natural realms. The former is discernibly marked as European by the fact that it occurs in front of a Gothic window. The two upper circles of the window measure serve to establish the colonial context by depicting the two sides of the winners' medal, also designed by Becker (for which he received an award):<sup>55</sup> on the left are the figures of a digger, a pastoralist, and a farmer – with the digger, slightly bent forward, handing a gold nugget to a seated woman; on the right is the reverse of the medal, showing the Exhibition Building. None of the original inhabitants of Australia can be seen, but a ship, the maritime link to the mother country, can be observed in the background. The three colonial 'producers' then appear again in large format on the pedestals reserved for the heroes of colonialism: pastoralist (left), digger (centre), and farmer (right). They deserve the victor's wreaths, which Fama, the goddess of glory, has her hands so full of that she cannot hold her

and desocialize at the same time. The odour in question was at once inferior, repulsive, and segregating.

54 The local press had helpfully aided the art appreciation of its readers by providing the following description: "The Certificates awarded by the Commissioners of the Victorian Exhibition are at last ready for issuing. The prize for the design, was, it will be remembered, gained by M. Ludwig Becker, and it has been lithographed, we believe, in the Surveyor-General's office. The picture represents a mediæval portal, the space between the columns being filled with the written testimonial. Over the columns and inscription are three figures, emblematical of the three principal products of the colony, the centre figure being a gold digger, with spade, pick, and tin dish; and the others, a shepherd and a reaper, both characteristically dressed and equipped. The artist has ingeniously carried the allegory still further, having represented the shepherd as aged, the digger as in the prime of manhood, and the reaper as a youth; indicating thereby the relative position in point of antiquity and importance of our principal staples. At the base of those columns are two figures of aboriginal natives, in sitting posture; one being represented in his wild condition, and wrapped in his rug of opossum skins, armed with the rude spear of the Australian savage, and the boomerang lying at his feet, and the other as a bullock driver, attired in Guernsey, trousers, and high-lows, and exhibiting the effects of his contact with the civilisation of the white man. The arch is surmounted by a seated female figure, representing Fame distributing rewards in the shape of floral crowns. A tree of the Eucalyptus genus rises on the outer side of each column, and amidst the foliage are seen specimens of Australian birds and tree animals. Between the pediments of the columns is depicted a bird's-eye view of Hobson's Bay. The design is, on the whole, cleverly conceived, and the principal figures, especially those of the aborigines, are artistically and truthfully executed. The Gothic roof-work has a rather heavy appearance, and the attitude of the female figure is decidedly stiff and formal. The lithographer has performed his part with great efficiency" – 'The Argus' (Melbourne), 7 May 1855, p. 6 ('The Victorian Exhibition Certificates').

55 Cf. Marjorie Tipping: *The Life and Work of Ludwig Becker*, p. 13.

traditional trombone. But her angelic wings, strategically spread over the entire construction, enhance the scene's sanctity.

The monument's display of white triumph is complemented by a nature that already indicates its domestication through the straight lines of eucalyptus trees planted alongside the portal columns. The indigenous animals represented within are reduced to mere exotic adornments. The same can be said for the two indigenous Australians positioned at the monument's base, symbolizing colonial self-assurance.

One figure, on the right, remains in a primal state of wildness, posed as a primitive hunter, behind whom, in the grassland, two kangaroos and an emu can be seen. Meanwhile, the other figure displays a degree of civility, with a church visible in the background, enough for him to serve as a driver to aid in cattle breeding.

This does not go beyond what Friedrich Schiller had to say during his inaugural lecture at the University of Jena in the most revolutionary year 1789 about "[t]he discoveries which our European seafarers have made in distant oceans". They offered "a spectacle which is as instructive as it is entertaining". As "[t]hey show us societies arrayed around us at various levels of development, as an adult might be surrounded by children of different ages", they remind us of our own history by showing us the "embarrassing and dismal" picture of "savages", of which "[m]any have been found to be unacquainted with the most elementary skills: without iron, without the plow", without "the simplest marriage tie" and, even worse, having "no knowledge of property".<sup>56</sup>

It should be added that Becker created this hierarchical portrayal of civilization and savagery at the same time that the prototype of modern temples of World's Fair, the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park in 1851, was undergoing reconstruction in Sydenham. Its construction had been a direct model for the exhibition hall in Melbourne. For its reopening, the Crystal Palace had been significantly expanded, including a 'natural history department'. It was meant to provide an overview of the different regions of the world.

This also involves the presentation of 'savages', for which life-size plaster casts were constructed. "In the display for Australia", visitors "could see a platypus, a Tasmanian wolf, an emu, a cassowary, a group of Papuans, and two Australian men, one of whom was shown on the verge of hurling a stick".<sup>57</sup> This kind of *mise-en-scène* was destined to become the blueprint for future World's Fairs. However, there the use of artificial figures was no longer sufficient; instead, 'native villages' were enacted which were intended to provide the visitors with a direct experience in the style of Schiller.<sup>58</sup>

56 Friedrich von Schiller: *The Nature and Value of Universal History*, p. 325; Marjorie Tipping: *Ludwig Becker and Eugène von Guérard*, p. 96, mentions that Becker had been a member of two associations in Melbourne that "organized festivities in honour of the centenaries of the births of Humboldt and Schiller".

57 Sadiya Qureshi: *Peoples on Parade*, p. 195; see also Wulf D. Hund: *Advertising White Supremacy*, esp. pp. 52 ff.

58 It should be noted that Australian ideology faced particular problems in this context. The 'exploration' and appropriation of indigenous land was far from complete. The characterization of indigenous Australians as a 'dying race' therefore had a nefarious value that

Becker's colonial tale anticipates this development. In it, Humboldtian spirit and his 1848 ethos are merged unproblematically with the contemporary racist world view, which, at best, accepted 'savages' as passive onlookers in a process of progress in which they were only then granted a subordinate role, if they were willing and capable of submitting and adapting to the process of civilization defined by the whites. The two images he showcased at the Melbourne Exhibition were part of his colonial exhibition designs. Fittingly, he also presented the neck ribbon of a "chief of the Murray tribe", a "collection of Australian insects", and "specimens of Australian algae and fish".<sup>59</sup>

Shortly before setting off on the expedition with Burke and Wills to North-East Australia, Dr Becker expressed his understanding of colonial science by designing a seal for the Royal Society of Victoria.<sup>60</sup> Its 'proceedings' recorded the seal's iconography in a way that requires no further analysis: "An exquisite plaster model of a seal for the Society, designed by Dr Becker [...] was laid on the table [...]. It [...] represents Art and Science advancing to the invitation of Australia (in the person of a nearly nude aboriginal), followed by Philosophy, and distributing light and civilization through the known, and, it is to be hoped, unknown parts of this Continent".<sup>61</sup>

could be used to legitimise colonial occupancy (see Patrick Brantlinger; *Dark Vanishings*). Tasmania was a veritable model for this, as the 'pure-blooded' 'full-blooded Aborigines' were considered extinct (and their land accordingly without natural heirs). The exhibition of William Lanne and Truganini as the 'last Tasmanians' therefore became an integral part of the exhibition business. At the Melbourne International Exhibition of 1880, the Tasmanian court "presented remnants of their 'extinct' Aboriginal population, photographs and a plaster cast of William Lanne and photographs of Truganini". The Centennial International Exhibition in Melbourne in 1888 did not just celebrate one hundred years of 'White Australia'. It did not stop at the photographs of Lanne and Truganini. It also featured, as the local press reported, "a 'most interesting relic of the lost Tasmanian race', a plaster cast of Truganini's head with the 'addition of the real eyebrows' retained when casts were taken for the Hobart museum". Melbourne went one step further for the Australian Manufacturers Exhibition 1904. In the local museum "the 'clean[ed] and mount[ed] skeleton' of 'Truganini was placed in exhibition in a specially erected glass case in the Tasmanian room' [...] which also exhibited photographs of her death mask, her waddy and some of her former belongings" (Stefanie Affeldt: *Consuming Whiteness*, pp. 436 ff.).

- 59 Marjorie Tipping: *The Life and Work of Ludwig Becker*, p. 13. The author may have made a mistake here (she writes that Becker showed "a pencil drawing of an Aboriginal, and two other portraits of Aborigines") - or the catalogue contains a typo, for there is the following entry: "Becker, Ludwig, Melbourne, Artist. - 1. Specimens of Australian Algæ and Fish, designed to furnish new designs for paper-hangings, &c.: 2. Part of a necklace made of native seeds, worn by a Chief of the Murry tribe: 3. Pencil drawing by an Aborigine: 4. Australian Insects: 5. Sketches of Melbourne and Bendigo: 6. Two Portraits of Aborigines" (*Official Catalogue of the Melbourne Exhibition, 1854, in Connection with the Paris Exhibition, 1855*, p. 29). Consequently, Becker's exhibits would have included a pencil drawing by an Aboriginal artist. As all these objects were in the fine arts section, they were probably paintings and drawings (apart from the necklace fragment). This would have placed two indigenous objects in the art section of the exhibition. Neither the drawing nor Becker's cultural assessment of it seems to have survived. (cf. Susan Lowish: *Rethinking Australia's Art History*, p. 159).
- 60 Becker was a member of this institute. In the literature, the following remark can be found: "Ludwig Becker emerged as one of the Institute's most versatile members. He maintained a world-wide correspondence, writing to Louis Agassiz in U.S. A. and John Gould in Britain with his queries and findings" (Michael E. Hoare: *Science and Scientific Associations in Eastern Australia*, p. 205).
- 61 *Transactions of the Royal Society of Victoria*, p. XIV (Ordinary Meeting August 6<sup>th</sup>, 1860).



### ***Queensland or Appropriation***

The leaders of the Enlightenment, like their students, were of course aware of the dialectic of progress. They also deplored the alienation it imposed on those who drove it. At the same time, however, they were certain that there could be no progress without alienation. The 'savages' who had seemingly always rejected it were considered lazy – and therefore useless. No one expressed this more clearly than Immanuel Kant. For him, this conviction was combined with a fear, expressed not without melancholy, that all races except the white might perish.<sup>62</sup> As for many of the enlightened commentators on colonialism, this was linked to a critique of the violence against the 'natives'. Becker, too, was aware of the destructive impact of colonialism on Australia's nature and its indigenous people. Yet his ideas remained racistly characterized.

This was illustrated in words and pictures during Becker's stay (Fig. 11). The image displays how the gold miners of Bendigo overcame nature by destroying a previous scare grove of eucalyptus trees. A glimpse of what's left of the grove can be seen in the background on the left. Charred stumps of some of the trees that were destroyed by means of slash-and-burn remain; their shapes were intriguing enough for the miners to give them names such as bishop, monk, lubra, and philosopher.

This includes a description that also comes from Becker: "Grass does not grow upon a miner's path', is a German proverb, very applicable to the diggings. Here flourished once the noble forest. Children of nature here found shelter and a home. Then came the peaceful shepherds with their flocks creeping slowly through it. 'Eureka!' Suddenly there comes from the south a storm of human beings – the peace of untold centuries is broken – the very frame of earth is bared for hidden treasure – the ancient trees are felled for the service of invaders, [...] sometimes yet a charred and sapless trunk is found still standing upright, like a shade of Hades".

Members of this, it continues, "race of giants, long since passed away", are the 'Notabilities of Bendigo', whose grotesque figures are only briefly interrupted by an indigenous woman, running across the foreground with a child on her back. She serves as a pictorial explanation for the name of the tree stump on her right, as its shape imitates hers. Therefore, she does not require specific mention but is depicted amidst the surrounding aura of death, although she is alive and moving, unlike the tree stumps.

Indeed, indigenous women and men were adversely affected by the dispossession of their land by gold prospectors. However, they did not succumb entirely to this attack, nor did they just watch idly as others prospered. They rather "demonstrated a great degree of agency, exhibited entrepreneurial spirit and eagerness to participate in gold-mining [...] and, at times, figured significantly in the gold epoch".<sup>63</sup> Becker, who spent a considerable time in the goldfields, apparently paid

62 Cf. Wulf D Hund: 'It must come from Europe', pp. 69-98.

63 Fred Cahir: *Black Gold. Aboriginal People on the Goldfields of Victoria*, p. 1.



THE BISHOP OF BENDIGO.

MONK

&amp;

LUBRA.

THE PHILOSOPHER OF GOLDEN GULLY.

## NOTABILITIES OF BENDIGO.

"Grass does not grow upon a miner's path," is a German proverb, very applicable to the Diggings. Here flourished once the noble forest. Children of nature here found shelter and a home. Then came the peaceful shepherds with their flocks creeping slowly through it. "Eureka!" Suddenly there comes from the south a storm of human beings—the peace of untold centuries is broken—the very frame of earth is bared for hidden treasure—the ancient trees are felled for the service of invaders, the saplings become supports of dwellings; sometimes yet a charred and sapless trunk is found still standing upright, like a shade of Hades, and the fancy of the miners clothe it in romance, as it seems to look down upon the busy, never-ceasing strife beneath, as one of a race of giants, long since passed away.—LUDWIG BECKER. [The view here depicted is taken from a point near New Chum Gully, Bendigo, looking north, towards Golden and Sheep's Head Gullies, in which the grotesque old stumps here grouped in the foreground were situated in 1853.—L. B.]

Fig. 11: Notabilities of Bendigo by Ludwig Becker

no attention to this. His writing reflects this regard, which does not consider indigenous Australians as owners of the destroyed forests but as their 'children'.

Furthermore, the artist, driven by intellectual curiosity, relays a blatant untruth in the caption of his artwork. His painting, created in 1853, depicts a scene from Victoria, which had only recently become an autonomous colony. During that period, over six million sheep roamed the area,<sup>64</sup> having been introduced by squatters only fifteen years prior.

During this period, there were frequent massacres of the native population who opposed the appropriation of their land. Rarely did they have the opportunity to achieve short-lived victories, as was the case in 1840 when a group exceeding 200 men, pillaged roughly 30 rifles from shelters belonging to shepherds.<sup>65</sup> But numerous individuals were affected by the brutality of 'frontier wars'.<sup>66</sup>

64 Henry H. Hayter: Victorian Year-Book 1893, p. 244.

65 Cf. Chris Coulthard-Clark: The Encyclopedia of Australia's Battles, p. 16 (s. v. Heidelberg).

66 Cf. the overview on the website 'Colonial Frontier Massacres in Australia, 1788-1930'; see also the chapter 'Dangerous frontiers' in Richard Broome: Aboriginal Victorians, pp. 69-93.



The conflicts arose because of Becker's description of 'peaceful shepherds with their flocks'.<sup>67</sup> They were not composed of blameless individuals but rather originated from the history of 'primitive accumulation'<sup>68</sup> that had occurred many centuries earlier in mainland England. During this time, persuasive grievances were expressed about "your shepe, that were wont to be so myke and tame, and so smal eaters, now, as I heare saie, be become so greate deuowerers and so wylde, that they eate vp and swallow down the very men them selves".<sup>69</sup> The sheep, previously known for their gentle and friendly nature, have developed an aggressive appetite and have even been known to consume humans. In England, this shift of behaviour had caused a displacement of the rural population, leading to a mass of disenfranchised, impoverished individuals who were deported to the colonies for minor offences. Additionally, in Australia, the sheep played a role in the colonial land acquisition, contributing to the policy of indigenous extermination, and affecting native wildlife and water resources.<sup>70</sup>

This policy was ongoing when Becker embarked on the expedition to the north of the country with Bourke and Wills. Despite his awareness, that previous European incursions into Australia had inflicted severe harm on its indigenous communities, and that symbolically, 'grass does not grow upon a colonist's path', he still proceeded. Indeed, from the outset, he recognized that violent encounters with indigenous Australians could occur. In advance of the expedition, he drafted a letter outlining his criteria for the ideal expedition leader. These specifications detailed that the individual "[m]ust have been a soldier to be able to maintain discipline and, if necessary, put up vigorous resistance to attacks by natives. A good shot".<sup>71</sup>

If colonial magic could replace violence, he would take it with a sense of humour. After the expedition had arrived "at Dr Rowe's station on the foot of the Terricks",<sup>72</sup> he noted: "The Bendigo Creek, on whose banks the station is

67 It is therefore astonishing that Becker's "drawing of the Bendigo goldfields", even in a work dedicated to the 'decolonization', is without question attested to "demonstrate his ability to listen Aboriginal people and the land" (Petra Jeffries: *Becoming 'Brave and Gallant'*, p. 159).

68 Cf. Michael Perelman: *The Invention of Capitalism*.

69 Thomas More's 'Utopia'. The original Latin version was published in 1516; it was quickly followed by several editions, and it was not until 1551 that, eventually, 'A fruteful / and pleasaunt worke of the beste state of a publyque weale, and of the newe yle called Vtopia: written in Latine by Syr Thomas More knyght, and translated into Englyshe by Ralphe Robynson CITIZEIN and Goldsmythe of London' was published - quoted here after *The Utopia of Sir Thomas More*, p. 51.

70 These events have therefore found their way into the comparative history of genocidal politics - cf. Ben Kiernan: *Blood and Soil*, pp. 249-309.

71 Ludwig Becker: Letter to Ferdinand von Mueller, 9 March 1860.

72 John Pearson Rowe, who owned the station, was by all accounts a colonial jack of all trades. He was born in Aintree, Lancashire on 25 January 1813. He was educated at Stonyhurst, a Jesuit college, and then apprenticed as a surgeon/apothecary at the Liverpool Infirmary. He then sailed as a ship's surgeon to Hobart in Tasmania. There he became an assistant to Dr William Crowther in his public dispensary and practice. Business must have been good, even if Rowe could not invest to the same extent as Crowther, who owned sawmills and whaling ships. But at least his income was enough to buy land in Hobart and pastoral land in the Brighton area. In 1835 he married Mary Ann Lowe, whose parents had been transported as convicts. They were to have 13 children. About ten years later he sold his property in Hobart and moved to Victoria as a squatter. There he acquired large tracts of land and changed his property several times. All the while he continued his scientific pursuits. He was a member of the Melbourne University Council and was also on the committee



built, is [...] a yellow coloured, floating mud, the effect of the washings at Bendigo. Dr Rowe dammed the water and by this process is enabled to support a greater number of sheep during the hot seasons". Subsequently, he reported on "4 natives" who had arrived at the station and were afraid of the camels that were part of the expedition: "Although no strangers at Dr Rowe's station, and notwithstanding our assurance that the camels were only harmless 'big sheep', they turned their back towards them and squatted soon round a far off camp fire of their own". Lastly, he remarked: "If this first interview between natives and camels might be used as a criterion when coming in contact with the blacks in the course of our future journeys, then, surely, we might spare the gunpowder as long as the mesmeric power of our [...] camels] remain with them".<sup>73</sup>

Becker captured this magical effect in a picture about ten days later (Fig. 12a) and noted: "The natives did not deem it prudent to remain so close to us and notwithstanding our assuring them that they had nothing to fear, they removed their children and chattels a hundred yards away and, contrary to their custom, here they lay silent and concealed during the calm night, not even attracted by the produce of our cooks skill. I made a sketch of the native camp and the scenery around it, as shown in drawing".

While initially the presence of the camel promised a peaceful distance, during the expedition an armed altercation occurred between the supply party and locals at a camp on the Bulloo River. Becker was present at the time, although he was already in a state of dying. The report by William Wright, who led this particular part of the expedition, states: "Mr Becker, during the affray, lay in a tent pitched close to the stockade, but was perfectly unconscious".<sup>74</sup> Hermann Beckler, a German physician and naturalist who had emigrated to Australia and joined the expedition there, maintained: "He had taken no notice whatever of

that established the university's medical school in 1862. He also gained some notoriety for allegedly shooting at young Ned Kelly (without hitting him) at his Mount Battery Station estate near Mansfield in early 1870. He died on 16 May 1878 after falling from his horse at his 'Seven Creeks' estate in Euroa. Of course, someone like him had to be anchored in the colonial memory. This was done in a lasting way by naming Rochester. The town came into being after he took control of the 100,000-hectare Restdown Station on the Campaspe River in 1846 and started a pastoral business. Here he ran up to 50,000 sheep. To profit at least indirectly from the Victorian gold rush, he had a hotel built in 1853/54 to provide a resting place for Cobb & Co's wagons and the prospectors they carried, as well as for the many drovers and prospectors passing through. A small settlement grew up around it and became known as Rowe's Camp, then Rowechester and finally Rochester. By the time Becker visited his station, Rowe had moved on, to the north, at the foot of the Terricks. He was one of the honorary correspondents of the Central Board, appointed to look after the interests of the Aborigines. (The information above about Rowe comes from generally accessible internet sources and is therefore often not backed up by scientific standards. However, it seems worth doing some research. William Crowther's work, on the other hand, is extensively documented. This includes not only his intensive participation in the colonial political economy, but also in the associated "political economy of bone collecting", which was linked to the desecration of the human remains of indigenous Australians - Helen MacDonald: *Human Remains*, p. 108 and *passim*; see also *id.*: *Possessing the Dead*).

73 Ludwig Becker: *First Report (from the Burke and Wills Expedition)*, 31 August 1860; for the following quote, see *Ludwig Becker: First Report (from the Burke and Wills Expedition)*, 12 September 1860.

74 William Wright: *Despatch to the Secretary of the Victorian Exploring Expedition*, 20 June 1861 and Hermann Beckler, quoted from Marjorie Tipping: *Becker*, p. 28.



Fig. 12a: Near our camp at Spewah, Sep. 12. 60 by Ludwig Becker



Fig. 12b: Bulla, William Oswald Hodgkinson



all our last encounters with the blacks. [...] I told him about the events with the natives. He seemed to have no idea what I was talking about”.

The confrontation was later captured in a painting by William Oswald Hodgkinson (Fig. 12b).<sup>75</sup> What he portrayed as a legitimate defence against hostile warriors had a lengthier background. For several days, the members of the expedition had received numerous emphatic pleas to withdraw. Beckler recorded the actions of the ‘natives’ thusly: “It was clear that they had not the slightest wish to leave the soil which they with all justice called their own”.

Both sketches, by Becker and by Hodgkinson, are similarly mendacious and cynical. In one scenario, the camel is depicted as a fetish, used to intimidate the ‘natives’. When they choose to defend their country, they are portrayed as ‘savages’, necessitating the use of sharp weapons in self-defence. While those involved certainly have experienced a sense of injustice, or at least remorse, they did not doubt the justification of their civilizing mission. Whether their victims retreated or fought back, in both cases they were regarded as unteachable and responsible for the consequences. The only choices were to comply or perish due to their own – allegedly racial – obstinacy, as depicted in Becker’s *Gloriole* for the Melbourne Exhibition.



Fig. 13a: Women in Mourning  
by Ludwig Becker

Fig. 13b: Watpipa the “Old Man”  
by Ludwig Becker

The portrait sketches created by Becker during the expedition exhibit the same spirit. Notably, the sketches feature racial imagery. Two examples are particularly illuminating; in one, Becker combined the faces of two mourning women into a typifying image (Fig. 13 a), and in another, he drew the purportedly typical profile of an old man (Fig. 13 b).

75 See National Library of Australia: Bulla, Queensland, 1861 by W. O. Hodgkinson.



Regarding the mourning women, he wrote: "faces were painted in such a manner as to give the head the appearance of a skull when seen from the distance: round the eyes was drawn with white paint, a circle, an inch broad, and the hair of on[e] woman tied up closely and covered with a piece of cloth, while the other lubra had her hair painted or rather smeared over with the same white color".<sup>76</sup> Evidently, he was not concerned with depicting distinct grieving individuals but with portraying culturally common behaviour. Consequently, he did not depict this in individual sketches, instead opting for a tableau structure reminiscent of contemporary racial imagery. It is apparent that he had no issue combining a frontal view of one person with another's profile.

Regarding the old man, he explicitly wrote: "I made a profile-drawing of the head of this man who seemed to me to be a fair specimen of an old but still hardy aboriginal of this district"<sup>77</sup> This profile, too, was obviously created with empathy; but its creation took place in a colonial environment that promoted racism, as Bronwen Douglas has succinctly summarised: "As foreign bodies in European representations, comparisons, classifications, and collections, indigenous Oceanian people were usually objectified and measured as specimens. Ultimately encompassed by colonial empires, indigenous bodies became colonial subjects and were often alienated from their own places - rendered foreign - especially in settler colonies".<sup>78</sup> Becker's artwork was not only embedded in the surrounding culture; but he also held the same belief in regarding the indigenous people as 'specimen' of 'another race'.

This also applies to his most renowned portrait. It has been asserted that "Becker's drawing of the 'brave and gallant' guide, Dick, is one of the most beautiful portraits of Aboriginal people made in the nineteenth century".<sup>79</sup> Such an assessment highlights the tension, in which the painting is placed due to its context. Becker's portrait dates from the 21 December 1860. This was a mere two days after Dick had returned to the campsite to seek assistance for two exhausted expedition members. He had to leave behind Myles Lyons and Alexander Macpherson due to their inability to continue. Hermann Beckler observed his arrival and wrote that his "face was sunken, his tottering legs could hardly carry him, his feet were raw, his voice hoarse and whispering. He was the shadow of a man. He laid himself at my feet and looked at me wistfully and soulfully".<sup>80</sup> Becker, himself, wrote on 25 December "that brave and gallant native guide Dick was still unable to walk".<sup>81</sup>

Becker depicted him in this scenario (Fig. 14). The inscription identifies him as "Dick, the brave and gallant native guide". The fatigue is as evident as the signs of his compelled trek on the soles of his feet. Without doubt, this portrayal was

76 Ludwig Becker: Third report, Thursday, Sept. 20, 1860. In Marjorie Tipping: Becker, p. 198.

77 Ludwig Becker: Fourth Report, Monday, Sept. 24, 1869. In Marjorie Tipping: Becker, p. 199.

78 Bronwen Douglas: *Foreign Bodies in Oceania*, p. 13.

79 Andrew Sayers: *Australian Art*, p. 50.

80 Hermann Beckler, quoted from David Dodd: *The Aboriginal Contribution to the Expedition, Observed Through Germanic Eyes*, p. 93.

81 Ludwig Becker: To the honorary secretary Royal Society, 25 December 1860. In: Marjorie Tipping: Becker, p. 191; Becker added: "Mr. Wright thinks him worth the consideration of the Exploration Committee".



Fig. 14: Portrait of Dick, the brave and gallant native guide

created with empathy. This, however, is exclusively reserved for his selfless act of rescuing the two expedition members. It is not for the individual himself. Becker neither attempts to find out about Dick's past nor inquire his native name. Even under this circumstance, so not without empathy, he gazed at him also with the inquiring gaze of a race scholar.

This was emphatically underlined when Becker, in mid-January 1861, sketched the trek Lyons and Macpherson had taken together with Dick and which Dick, nearing complete exhaustion, had taken by himself to seek aid. With the aid of another indigenous guide, Peter, the two were eventually rescued, and Becker utilized their information as an orientation.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, he labelled his sketch. This was conducted in such an extensive 'explorer mode' that Dick, who had accompanied, guided, and eventually rescued the two whites, was not mentioned at all.<sup>83</sup> Becker's portrait, painted only few weeks before, was no indication that considered Dick a full-fledged participant in the expedition. It was a colonial

82 Cf. David Gary Phoenix: 'More Like a Picnic Party', p. 229-231.

83 Becker's map sketch is published in Marjorie Tipping: Becker, p. 119; on page 118, the entries on the map are shown. In the "Remarks", it reads, "Lyons & M'Pherson traveled at the average rate of about 21 miles a day for 9 days & a half [...]. The 2 men crossed likely Gregory's track". Dick has been written out and subtracted from this story.

enterprise of exploration and research into a largely unknown part of Australia, and its indigenous inhabitants were by no means active participants in this process but instead subjects of study. This was applicable even to the 'native guides' whose assistance was utilized intensively.

This concludes our analysis – at least with regards to Becker. He passed away on 29 April 1861 in the Balloo River camp. As far as the portrayed Dick is concerned; however, benevolent racism found a continuation. Already by the end of 1860, John Macadam, the secretary of the Exploration Committee, wrote to Wright: "The medal for Dick, the aboriginal guide, bearing a suitable inscription, is forwarded with this despatch, and the committee leave in your hands the bestowal of such additional reward as you may deem proper – not exceeding five guineas (say 5 pounds 5 shillings)".<sup>84</sup> At this point, the frugal secretary had already hit the jackpot in the business of colonial collecting, naming, and exploiting. Although it only brought him cultural capital, it ensured him worldwide recognition. In his honour, Ferdinand von Mueller named a genus of Australian Proteaceae 'macadamia' in 1857. The Europeans refrained from paying a similar tribute to indigenous Australians – just as they did not resort to the longstanding names that had been given to the native flora and fauna.

The award proposed for Dick indeed took place and was presented by Henry Barkly, the British Governor of Victoria himself. He held this position almost as a profession: prior to his appointment in Victoria, Barkly had served as Governor of British Guiana and Governor of Jamaica (and was to become Governor of Mauritius and subsequently Governor of the Cape Colony after his tenure in Australia). Barkly presented the brass plate that bore the inscription "Presented to Dick by the Exploration Expedition for assisting Trooper Lyons and Saddler McPherson, December, 1860". Still no one had deemed it necessary to inquire about the indigenous name of the recipient. And the monetary gift was not given to him without admonishment: "His Excellency on handing the dingy hero the five sovereigns expressed a hope that he would not spend it in drink, as too many of his race were prone to do".<sup>85</sup> The concerned governor knew to handle money carefully. After all, he was the heir to a large fortune. His father, a plantation owner, had exploited slaves; and after the abolition of slavery, he had been awarded a compensation for his 4.440 slaves of £132.000. Barkly inherited the plantations as well as the compensation claims.<sup>86</sup> Today, his likeness hangs in the

84 Quoted from William Wills: *Successful Exploration Through the Interior of Australia, From Melbourne to the Gulf of Carpentaria*.

85 Quoted from *Bendigo Advertiser*, 26 September 1861, p. 3 ('Presentation to Dick, the Aborigine'). It should be mentioned that in the same issue of the newspaper, immediately before this news, another stated: "The Half-castes. – In a recent issue the attention of the public was directed to the number of half-caste children, boys and girls, in these districts, with the object of enlisting some amount of sympathy for the children of the Australian wilderness. We constantly see parties in these colonies directing their philanthropic minds to the savages of the Fiji' Islands, while the offspring of the white men on the outskirts of Australian colonisation are allowed to grow up wild, and no effort made to reclaim them. The blacks themselves are fast dying away".

86 We have taken this information about Sir Henry Barkly from Wikipedia; of course, this cannot remain as it is. However, we would like to emphasize that our thoughts are intended as suggestions for further research. Please help yourselves. Ludwig Becker is suitable for this in several respects. First, his biography is incomplete. This is especially true of the part



National Portrait Gallery in Canberra. The portrait of Dick is stored by the State Library of Victoria.

## References

All links have been verified 6 January 2024.

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of his biography that takes place in Europe. Secondly, his wide-ranging interests and the contacts they engendered can provide an insight into the academic world of the time and the interconnectedness of its metropolitan centres with the colonial periphery. Finally, Becker's images of indigenous Australians provide complex evidence of the profound effects of contemporary racism. Yet the literature on Becker is as patchy as his biography. This is also true of Marjorie Tipping's meritorious and informative contributions. Her wealth of material is not matched by an equivalent critical analysis. In particular, her work lacks an analytical perspective on racism. Nevertheless, it has often been followed up, perpetuating the thesis of a link between German '48 sentiments and sympathetic attitudes towards indigenous Australians. This is untrue for two reasons. First, racism was not and is not a mere ideological concoction of humiliating discrimination. And second, a close reading of Becker's work shows that he must have shared essential basic patterns of the contemporary racist worldview. This does not preclude a "sympathetic attitude [...] towards the Aboriginal people he encountered and depicted". But it does not follow at all from this that he would have viewed the conditions "from the position of an outsider" (Kerry Heckenberg: '... bringing facts into some connection with each other ...', pp. 80 and 77). The contextualization of Becker's artistic work shows that he anchored it in colonial conditions, including the marginalization of indigenous ways of life.

- Fig. 3 b: Petrus Camper, 1791 (reprinted in Miriam Claude Meijer: *Race and Aesthetics in the Anthropology of Petrus Camper*, p. 97); Carl Gustav Carus: *Grundzüge einer neuen und wissenschaftlich begründeten Cranioscopie (Schädellehre)*.
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- Fig. 5 a-c: Ludwig Becker: *Aborigines of Tasmania*, 1852, [www.handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/4143441](http://www.handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/4143441), courtesy of the State Library Victoria.
- Fig. 6 a-c: Ludwig Becker: *Aborigines of Tasmania*, 1852, [www.handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/183900](http://www.handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/183900), courtesy of the State Library Victoria.
- Fig. 7 a-c: David Hansen: *Ludwig Becker (1808-1861), Naplomata (Henrietta), Dinudara (Sarah), Kanjawerkie*. In: *Important Australian and International Art. Auction in Melbourne, 17 May 2011 (catalogue)*.
- Fig. 8 a: Ludwig Becker, Billy, reproduced in Marjorie Tipping: *Becker's Portraits of Billy and Jemmy (Tilki)*, p. 5.
- Fig. 8 b: Ludwig Becker, Tilki, reproduced in Marjorie Tipping: *Becker's Portraits of Billy and Jemmy (Tilki)*, p. 3.
- Fig. 9 Becker's race table - Report of the Select Committee of the Legislative Council on the Aborigines: together with the proceedings of Committee, minutes of evidence, and appendices, p. 96.
- Fig. 10: Certificate for the Melbourne Exhibition of 1854, Ludwig Becker, [www.collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/items/246965](http://www.collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/items/246965).
- Fig. 11: *Notabilities of Bendigo*, Ludwig Becker, 1857, [www.victoriancollections.net.au/stories/mapping-great-change](http://www.victoriancollections.net.au/stories/mapping-great-change) - Drawing - Ludwig Becker, 'The Notabilities of Bendigo, from the Newsletter of Australasia, No. XV, 1857', 1857, Courtesy of State Library Victoria.
- Fig. 12 a: *Near our camp at Spewah, Sep. 12. 60*, Becker, Ludwig, Sept. 12, 1860. [www.viewer.slv.vic.gov.au/?entity=IE7215405&mode=browse](http://www.viewer.slv.vic.gov.au/?entity=IE7215405&mode=browse), Courtesy of State Library Victoria.
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