

# **MUSLIMS IN AUSTRALIA: A Brief History (Excerpts)**

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From: <http://www.icv.org.au/history4.shtml>

The Islamic Council of Victoria website

## ISLAM IN OUR NEAR NORTH

Many Australians are accustomed to thinking of the continent as being isolated for thousands of years, cut-off from the great currents flowing throughout world civilisation. A sense of this separation from 'out there' is given in "The Tyranny of Distance" by Blainey who writes "In the eighteenth century the world was becoming one world but Australia was still a world of its own. It was untouched by Europe's customs and commerce. It was more isolated than the Himalayas or the heart of Siberia." [1] The cast of mind which is reflected in this statement, from one of Australia's most distinguished modern historians, understands 'the world' and 'Europe's customs and commerce' as somehow inextricably linked.

Manning Clark writes of isolation, the absence of civilisation, until the last quarter of the eighteenth century, attributing this partly to "the internal history of those Hindu, Chinese and Muslim civilisations which colonized and traded in the archipelago of southeast Asia." [2] While not linking Europe with civilisation, Australia still stands separate and alone.

There is no doubt that just to our north, around southeast Asia and through the straits between the islands of the Indonesian archipelago, there was a great deal of coming and going by representatives of all world civilisations. Representatives of the Confucian, Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic and latterly, Western Christian civilisations, visited, struck root and occasionally, evolved into something else. Some left or were cast out.

There was substantial trade between Arabia and China from the Tang Dynasty (608-907 CE) and that trade was plied around the seas to Australia's near north. The history of Islam in the region commences with

the maternal uncle of Muhammad, Abu Waqqas, who went on the migration to Ethiopia during the persecution but did not return to Arabia with the other refugees. He went on a trading voyage with three other Sahaba (Companions of the Prophet), from Ethiopia to Guangzhou in about 616 CE. He then returned to Arabia. Chinese Muslim annals record that after 21 years he returned to Guangzhou bringing the Qur'an with him. [3] He founded the Mosque of Remembrance, near the Kwang Ta (the Smooth Minaret) built by the Arabs as a lighthouse. His tomb is in the Muslim cemetery in Guangzhou.

The precise date of Islam's arrival in insular southeast Asia cannot be readily established. Some historians argue "that by the beginning of the ninth century Arab merchants and sailors, (and other Muslims) had begun to dominate the Nanhai or Southeast Asian Trade." [4] There was already a colony of foreign Muslims on the west coast of Sumatra by 674 CE and other Muslim settlements began to appear after 878 CE. [5] Islam steadily spread, Islamisation of societies occurred and according to even hostile commentators, Islam "was a factor in the life of the islands by the end of the twelfth century." [6] There are indications that Arab explorations off northern Australia did take place. The map of the Sea of Java of Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi 820 CE shows Cape Yorke Peninsula, a "V" shaped Gulf of Carpentaria and a curved Arnhem Land [7]. A later map, that of Abu Isak Al-Farisi Istakhari 934 CE, also includes an outline of the northern coast of Australia. [8]

Islam was well established by the time Ibn Battuta visited Sumatra in about 1350 where he found Sultan al-Malik az-Zahir "a most illustrious and open-handed ruler, and a lover of theologians." [9] Marco Polo had found the Kingdom of Sumatra inhabited by idolaters a few years before in 1292 CE, but the inhabitants of the Kingdom of Perlak on the same island had changed from idolaters to Muslims "owing to contact with Saracen merchants who continually resort here in ships". [10]

Other famous travellers also left their accounts. Chinese Muslims, Admiral Zheng He and his lieutenant Ma Huan (Muhammad Hasan), in the service of Yung Lo third Emperor of the Ming Dynasty, became famous as navigators and explorers between 1405 and 1433. The chronicler Fei Xin accompanied many of these voyages and it is from his

records that we know "the treasure fleet reached Timor, which is just 400 miles north of Darwin". [11] The discovery of an image of the god Shou Lao in Darwin in 1879, wedged in the roots of a banyan tree over a metre underground, points to a very early Chinese contact with Australia, [12] but it is not known whether it was Zheng-He or some other Ming sailor.

The palace revolution which caused the permanent cessation of Chinese voyages of exploration opened the way for other seekers of new worlds in our near north. According to Clark: "In the 1430s it looked as though this inheritor of the Chinese would be the Muslim merchants from Persia and the Gujerati Province of India." [13] Islam steadily spread throughout the Indonesian archipelago, extending across the whole of Java by the eleventh century, into the Moluccas in the early sixteenth century and into Macassar via the Royal Courts of Gowa and Tallo' in the first decade of the seventeenth century.

As it was pushing onwards into West Papua and beyond, Islam met its nemesis. Clark claims, "the coming of the European ended the spread of Islam, for when Torres first sailed through the strait which still bears his name, he met Moors in west New Guinea. That was in 1607. This marked the limits of the Muslim expansion and knowledge of the area." [14] Torres came from the east across the Pacific, for the Americas and beyond had been given to Spain by the Pope, Africa and India and beyond to the Portuguese.

The Portuguese Christians, who came via the Cape of Good Hope and India, were clear about their objectives. They well knew of the significance of Islam in the region. Albuquerque, in 1511 the conqueror of Muslim Malacca, the main centre for the dissemination of Islam in southeast Asia, had some time before devised "a scheme to divert the Nile to the Red Sea to make the lands of the Grand Turk sterile, and then to capture Mecca and carry away the bones of Mohammed so that, as he put it, these being reduced publicly to ashes, the votaries of so foul a sect might be confounded." [15] By winning a monopoly of the Indonesian spice trade these Crusaders hoped to fatally wound Islam.

Although the aggressive Portuguese presence hindered the process of Islamisation in the Moluccas and Timor, Islam remained dominant

throughout the archipelago. It was Muslim Macassans and Buginese who established links with Australia.

### **The Fleet of Prahus**

There are suggestions of trading camps on the northern coasts dating back several centuries. Macknight reports (and rejects) evidence that some fireplaces date back 800 years [16] and Levathes suggests a relationship between the light-skinned Bajunis of Kenya's offshore islands and the "Baijini" of northern Australian legend, possibly linking the early Chinese explorations of both areas. [17] However, as Islam did not come to Macassar until the early 1600s and unless these Baijini were like Zheng-He, also Muslim, they are not part of this history. Certainly Alexander Dalrymple, an English seafarer in the 1760s related "The Bugguese describe New Holland to yield gold, and the natives, who are Mahometans, to be well inclined to commerce." [18] Macknight attributes this religious designation to the fact that circumcision was practiced amongst the northern tribes, not to their ideology. [19]

There were annual voyages of prahus from Macassar in southern Sulawesi to the coasts of Marege, the area of coastline east of Darwin to the coasts of the Gulf of Carpentaria and to Kai Djawa the coastline from Darwin westwards. When they began is not yet established. [20] Macknight argues that the southeast Asian trepang trade did not commence before the late seventeenth century so that this annual traffic between Marege and Macassar could not be earlier than about 1650. There is a Dutch reference from 1654 which mentions tortoise shell and wax amongst other commodities, obtained from a great crowd of islands to the south but Macknight does not accept this as a reference to Macassan trade with Australia. The ethnographers R.M. and C.H. Berndt also suggested in 1947, from their observation of the depth of influence, that there had been some form of contact between the Aborigines, the people of Marege, and Macassar from the early sixteenth century. This too is rejected by Macknight. He insists that letters from 1751 and 1754 provide the first reliable evidence of the trepang trade between these Muslims and Marege. [21] Perhaps other commodities dominated commerce until the opening of the more lucrative Chinese trepang market, but this is still within the realms of speculation.

Pobassoo, the Macassan master of a fleet of six prahus, was encountered by Flinders in 1803 in the Malay Roads at the north eastern tip of Arnhem Land. He informed the English visitor that he had made six or seven voyages in the preceding twenty years and that he was one of the first to come. Flinders recorded, "These people were Mahometans, and on looking in the launch expressed great horror to see hogs there. Nevertheless they had no objection to port wine, and even requested a bottle to carry away with them at sunset." [22]

Each year in December, as the low pressure cell moved over Australia and the winds blew towards the south, the prahus left Macassar for camps along the shores of Marege. Then four months later, as the sun moved over the northern hemisphere and the winds blew from the continent towards the northern equatorial zone, they sailed back. By May they had all gone. While they were here they caught, cooked and dried the sea slug or trepang in beach camps. One of the markers of these camps, apart from the stone fireplaces, is the presence of tamarind trees. Tamarind pods were used to flavour their rice and the seeds thrown away near the camps. [23]

So significant was the Macassan trade that for many years the British tried schemes to make the northern coast into a second Singapore. Smarter than modern Australian policy-makers, they quickly understood that the Muslims offered a bridge to trade with the region. While the Dutch tried to wrest control of Singapore to the east of the Indonesian archipelago from them, the British believed that they could, through trading with the Macassans and Buginese, economically infiltrate the Dutch controlled areas of the west. A second Singapore on Australia's northern coast offered great wealth. William Barns put this plan to the British government in 1823 and gained the support of a lobby of London merchants. An expedition was sent to northern Australia in 1824 and Fort Dundas established on the strait between Melville and Bathurst Islands. However British control of the first Singapore was assured by the Treaty of London March 1824 thus removing one major incentive for its establishment. It was also soon understood that the fort was located too far from the trepang fleet's camps to trade. It was a failure.

In 1827 a second settlement was established 200 miles further east in Raffles Bay. Fort Wellington was built but abandoned in 1829. Blainey argues that this abandonment was a mistake for by 1829 "Regular contact with the Indonesian fleet had at last been made." [24] Thirty-four prahus with more than 1000 men had arrived but there were no merchants at the trading post to barter textiles and metals for their trepang. It was abandoned too quickly, possibly on the verge of success, based on an outdated 1827 report. Thus died the hopes for great trade with the near north for another hundred years.

The trepang trade continued but it was viewed with jaundiced eyes by the new masters of the north coast. Searcy, sent to impose customs duties upon the prahus, revealed the thinking of the time. "So long as this portion of the coast was waste there was no reason why the Malays should not gather the annual harvest and turn it to their own profitable account. But now that there was some chance of Europeans following suit, and with the idea of local trading on the coast, it was decided that the time had come for the Malays to be placed on an equal footing with the local people, and to pay something towards the revenue of the country..." [25] Oppressive imposition of the customs dues by men such as Searcy, growing racism in Australia after the introduction of the 1901 Immigration Restriction Act and jealousy over Macassan success, combined to crush this link with our neighbours.

A telegram which appeared in the S.A. Register 9 September 1904 reveals something of the thinking about this trade and of the tactics used to destroy it. It is significant that Searcy included it in the preface to his 1909 publication. "The Malays who man the proas which sail down from Macassar to Port Bowen in the Northern Territory, are suspected by officers of the Customs Department of smuggling, and it was recently suggested that some of their number also obtain admission to Australia despite the Immigration Restriction Act. After considering these representations, the Minister for Customs determined to close Port Bowen as a reporting station from January 1, and make overseas Asiatics who wish to engage in the trepang industry go to Port Darwin. It is believed that the trade-winds will not enable proas to go to Port Darwin, and therefore they will in all probability be prevented from visiting Northern Australia." [26] By changing the reporting station at which

custom dues were paid, the administration opened the way to intensify harassment of the Macassans so that they would cease their annual visits.

The trepang trade with Macassar had ceased by 1907, but the frequent arrests of Indonesian fishing trawlers off Darwin indicates that old habits die hard. Fishermen used to centuries of traversing waters to our north are hard to deter. Indeed the Sultanate of Gowa, in southern Sulawesi, the old Macassan Kingdom, included the coast of northern Australia within its realm. [27] Arnhem Land Aborigines performed an opera about the historical links between the Yolnu people and Macassar at the foundation day anniversary of the city of Gowa in 1997 [28]. That sense of belonging does not vanish without trace.

### **The Impact of Macassar**

Contact brought changes to language. The languages of the tribes along the northern coast can be as distinct as English and Greek. Although the children of Marege grew up in communities which had a variety of language and were all multilingual, [29] contact with tribes from different areas could be difficult. As the Macassans were in contact with widely dispersed tribes, their language became a lingua franca right along the coast. Searcy's vessel was manned by Malays, who were valued by the English colonists, as they had the ability to communicate with the prahu masters and the local inhabitants. There are several vocabulary lists demonstrating the widespread use of Macassan terms [30] [31] but there is evidence of a deeper influence than just vocabulary. "A number of verbs in Gupabuyngu, the best known language of northeast Arnhem Land, are used in irregular fashion. All are derived from Macassarese." [32]

Another consequence of the relationship with Macassar was noticed by several British explorers. Stokes, who visited the northern coastline on several occasions between 1837 and 1843, reports observations by Captain Grey in 1838 and a Mr Osborne in 1840 that they had noticed individuals of different physical appearance from their peers in groups of Aborigines they had encountered in the north. [33] While Grey considered that they were probably the descendants of shipwrecked

Dutch sailors, Stokes was more of a mind that they were Malays either captured from the trepangers or voluntarily associating with the locals. There was quite close contact between them. "As we know that the Australian not infrequently abandons his country and his mode of life, to visit the Indian archipelago with them (the trepangers)." [34] There were several documented cases of Macassan Muslims living amongst the Aborigines. Timbo, a Macassan left at Port Essington in 1839 to act as interpreter with the Aborigines, walked into the interior with the local tribespeople and was gone several months. Da' Atea from Macassar deserted a prahu in 1829 and walked across the northern part of the Cobourg Peninsula. [35]

Searcy in the 1880s also remarked upon the results of association with the Macassans. "Naturally some of the aborigines showed unmistakable signs of having Malay blood, in the way of a lighter skin and sharper and more refined features. In some of the women it was very marked." [36] Using (Hussain) Daeng Rangka had children to an Aboriginal wife in eastern Arnhem Land and one of his Australian daughters visited Macassar. [37] In 1985 his 81 year old daughter, Ibn Saribanung Daeng Nganna, appealed from Sulawesi through the Northern Territory News for contact with her Australian relatives. The result was a field trip by 11 teacher trainees from Batchelor College to Sulawesi to re-establish family relationships. [38]

The introduction of new commodities into tribal communities, such as metal knives, axes and spear-heads, increased the efficiency of hunting and gathering. The Macassan dug-out canoe, which replaced the more fragile indigenous bark canoe, also permitted expanded trading and contact with other tribes. Inter-tribal trade appears to have expanded as a result of the introduction of such commodities. [39] The pearls, pearl-shell and turtle-shell prized by the annual visitors also meant that there was some specific production for the market. Aborigines occasionally worked for payment in the process of trepanging, an unusual development in a hunter-gatherer economy.

Despite these innovations there was little impact upon the dynamics of tribal society. This has been attributed by European commentators to the great strength of tribal culture with its focus upon social relations. In a



society in which kinship is the dominant feature, capital accumulation cannot occur. According to Worsely, writing in 1955 "Since everybody in such a society is closely related, there is no chance of accumulating wealth when one's relatives cannot rightly be refused if they are in need." [40] Whatever the reasons, Aboriginal culture was not disrupted by contact with the Muslims, something which cannot be said about the later cultural contact experiences of these now oppressed people.

There were cultural and religious effects from contact with the Macassans, but these were not destructive either. New developments in carving, particularly carving in the round, are found in Marege, "unknown elsewhere in Australia except in that part of Cape Yorke Peninsula under the influence of the culture of the Torres Strait Islands." Worsley commented "Mourning ceremonies, magical practices and important religious ceremonies... are all shot through with Macassarese influences". He also mentioned that the totemic system on Groote Eylandt in the Gulf of Carpentaria was also modified with the introduction of the Ship totem and of the north-west and south-east wind totems. [41]

Arnhem Land Aborigines later spoke of the period of contact with Macassar as a Golden Age. There is a resentful undercurrent in some of the European commentary, for this attitude of the indigenous people contrasted starkly with relations during the period of assimilation and oppression under the white colonial administration. Worsley understood: "The contrast is plainly between the generosity and democracy of the Macassarese and the parsimony and colour bar of the Whites." [42] Both Macassans and inhabitants of Arnhem Land remembered each others names, significant from the Aboriginal viewpoint where identification implied some 'placement within the kinship framework'. Revealing an attitude similar to that of other white commentators, Macknight adds "but the clan affiliations suggested by some informants for several names may reflect later rationalisation rather than the reality of direct contact." [43] Today the positive attitude remains despite decades of separation. [44]

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- [3] Liu Chih. The Life of the Prophet. 12 vols. 1721
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- [5] Majul, Cesar Adib. Muslims in the Philippines p. 44
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- [7] Whitehouse, Eric. B. Australia in Old Maps 820-1770. Boolarong Press. Queensland. 1995 p. 65
- [8] Whitehouse p. 16. 66
- [9] Ibn Battuta. Travels in Asia and Africa 1325-1354. Translated and Selected by H.A.R. Gibb. Augustus M Kelley Publishers. NY 1969 p. 274
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- [11] Levathes, Louise. When China Ruled the Seas: The Treasure Fleet of the Dragon Throne. Simon and Schuster. N.Y. 1994 p. 197
- [12] Worsley, P.M. Early Asian Contacts with Australia. Past and Present 1955 pp. 1-11
- [13] Clark, C.M.H. Vol I p. 8
- [14] Clark, C.M.H. Vol I p. 9
- [15] Clark. C.M.H. Vol I p. 11
- [16] Macknight, C.C. The Voyage to Marege MUP 1976 p. 67, 98
- [17] Levathes, Louise. p. 198
- [18] Macknight, C.C. p. 95 quoting from Alexander Dalrymple A Plan for Extending the Commerce of this Kingdom and The East-India Company. London 1769 p. 92
- [19] Macknight, C.C. p. 96
- [20] Worsley, P.M. p. 1
- [21] Macknight C.C. p. 94-95
- [22] Searcy, Alfred. In Australian tropics. 2nd edition. George Robertson and Co. London 1909 p. 15
- [23] Macknight C.C. p. 48-60
- [24] Blainey, Geoffrey. p. 87
- [25] Searcy, Alfred. p. 13
- [26] Searcy, Alfred. p. vi
- [27] Batchelor College Report 22 June-4 July 1986. Makassar and Northeast Arnhem Land: Missing Links and Living Bridges. 2nd printing. Batchelor College N.T. Oct. 1987 p. 45-46
- [28] Alan Whykes, group interpreter and assistant to the Coordinator of

the Trepanng Project. Interview with Greg Clough Secretary of the Islamic Society of the Northern Territory, March 1998.

[29] Batchelor College Report pp. 7-8

[30] Batchelor College Report pp. 53-58

[31] Jones, Mary Lucille. Muslim Impact on Early Australian Life in Mary Lucille Jones, (ed.) An Australian Pilgrimage: Muslims in Australia from the Seventeenth Century to the Present. Victoria Press. Melbourne. 1993 p. 36

[32] Macknight, C.C. p89

[33] Stokes, J. Lort Discoveries in Australia... in the Years 1837-43. Vols I and II. T & W Bone, New Bond St. London 1846 p. 73

[34] Stokes, J. Lort p. 211

[35] Macknight, C.C. p. 86

[36] Searcy, Alfred p. 58

[37] Macknight, C.C. p. 87

[38] Batchelor College Report p. 2

[39] Worsley, P.M. p. 4

[40] Worsely, P.M. p. 7

[41] Worsley P.M. p. 5

[42] Worsely, P.M. p. 8

[43] Macknight, C.C. p. 85

[44] Batchelor College Report p. 12-37

## THE CONQUEST OF THE INTERIOR

As pastoralism expanded in the Australian colonies and it became apparent that convict labour could never fulfill the needs of the growing economy, free labour had to be obtained. From 1840 to 1880 European settlement spread from the southeastern lands across the continent. This was the period of exploration of the interior of the country, of the extermination of large numbers of indigenous people, of massive immigration schemes and of a booming wool industry. The demand for wool from Britain's factories was immense and the ten million pounds weight of wool supplied by Australia in 1840 increased to three hundred million pounds by 1880. Over the same period the number of sheep

increased from four million to eighty million. [70] By 1891, on the verge of the economic depression, the Australian colonies were supplying five hundred and forty million pounds weight of wool from a flock of one hundred and seven million sheep. [71]

The Gold Rush of the 1850s added another strand to economic development, that of minerals and interest in exploration for minerals. It also served to deliver a huge increase in population to the colonies. For example, the population of Victoria increased from 97,489 in 1851 to 539,764 by 1861. [72] This led to demand for farms and the development of agriculture. This in turn required the opening up new lands in the interior of the continent.

Early explorations of the southeastern part of the continent, the last of which was that of Major Mitchell through southern NSW and the Western District of Victoria in 1836, opened up vast tracts of land for the squatters and their sheep. The terrain and the climate allowed reliance upon horses. When the drier west and central parts of the continent had to be explored, horses were found to be of limited value. Camels from India were first suggested as suitable in 1837. [73] A few years later at the suggestion of Governor Gawler of South Australia, the Colonial Commissioner in London purchased six camels in Tenerife but only one survived the trip, landing in Adelaide in October 1840. [74] They could carry "...from seven to eight hundred pounds weight... they last out several generations of mules... the price paid for them does not exceed one half of that paid for mules... and it is proved that these 'ships of the deserts' of Arabia are equally adaptable to our climate." [75]

Marvellous Melbourne, rich with the gold of the 1850s, certain of its leading role in the future of Australia, was eager to spread its influence into the far reaches of the continent. In 1858 the Victorian Exploration Committee requested George Landells, who regularly accompanied exported Australian horses to India, to buy camels and recruit camel drivers on his next visit. He bought twenty-four beasts and hired three drivers, Samla, a Hindu and two Muslims, Esan Khan and Dost Mahomet. They arrived in 1860 and were housed at Parliament House and both beasts and men were kept in stables there. The men were hardly regarded at all. It is interesting to note that Manning Clark in his

History of Australia reports upon the whole Burke and Wills Expedition and the debacle it became, without mention of the Afghan cameleers at all. [76] The expedition set out with great fanfare in August. Dost Mahomet and Esan Khan "killed their own expedition stock cattle in the al halal manner prescribed by the Qur'an. Though severely ill with dysentery, they diligently performed the five daily Muslim prayers and held to their faith in Allah during the months of waiting at Menindie." [77] Dost Mahomet was bitten by a camel at this camp, his arm was smashed. He was effectively disabled for life at the age of twenty-three. Despite his appeals to the Victorian Government he was awarded only 200 pounds compensation and was never to see his home again. He also requested that he be paid as promised. He had been told that he would have the same pay as the other members of the exploration team, ten pounds a month. This was not honoured. He and Esan Khan were paid only three pounds a month, increased to four pounds five shillings a month after Landells had resigned from the party. [78] Afghans were not white and not Christian. Dost Mahomet died soon after this refusal and is buried at Menindie.

Although the various exploration parties which went into the interior depended upon the camels and their Muslim drivers, they were scarcely recognised for their contribution. The white leaders of the expeditions received the credit from their peers and their exploits were recorded by white historians. It was Kamran who, with Gosse in July 1873, was the first recorded non-indigenous person to see the great rock, Uluru, named for the then Governor of South Australia Sir Henry Ayers. [79] Gosse at least had the grace to name a "Kamran's Well" between Uluru and Lake Amadeus for his leading Afghan cameleer and "Allanah Hill" 28 miles southeast of Uluru for the other Muslim on the team.

Saleh, who physically led the Giles Expedition of 1875-76 across the Nullabor Plain and then to Perth and back via Geraldton to South Australia, was given the honour of having "Saleh's Fish Pond" named for him near Mount Gould on the way back east from Geraldton. A suggestion of the type of intolerant superiority these Muslims had to cope with is indicated. "Saleh faithfully performed his lone daily prayers, regularly teased by the others. Sometimes he would ask Giles the direction of east and the leader would playfully point the other way. On

these occasions Saleh was more likely to have been facing closer to Mecca for, from Australia, the Holy City was not eastwards but north-westwards." [80] Of course Saleh from Afghanistan would have been used to the qiblah facing west and no doubt had prayed in many mosques in Australia. For an experienced cameleer and bushman not to have known his directions or the qiblah rather stretches the imagination. This has the ring of a smart story from Giles rather than truth.

These expeditions were not just brave manly exploits. They had economic motives. Giles was being supported by the major importer of camels Thomas Elder and on this expedition had agreed to survey country near Fowlers Bay for a prospective English squatter, a friend of Elder's. [81] The expedition that Saleh accompanied some years later in 1886, surveying the Queensland-Northern Territory Border, took prospecting parties with it, hoping to find new mineral wealth. [82]

With camels from Marree and Farina, Moosha Balooch and Guzzie Balooch accompanied the 1894 Horn Expedition, named for the director of the Broken Hill Proprietary Company who financed it. He wanted it to seek out minerals between the Macdonnell Ranges and Oodnadatta and to study new biological, botanical and ethnological material. Another two famous cameleers, Bejah Dervish and Said Ameer accompanied the 1896 Calvert Expedition. Two of the European members managed to get lost and starve to death. The willingness of the Afghans to search for days in terrible conditions and the offer from the major camel owner Faiz Mahomet to send his camels and men to the search, impressed contemporary opinion. Larry Wells, the leader of the expedition, named a landmark in the sandy desert "Bejah Hill" and gave Bejah Dervish his compass. [83] Years later Nora Bejah, daughter-in-law of Bejah, still had that compass. She also recalled that Bejah had been given the name "the Faithful". [84]

Abdul or "Jack" Dervish, the son of Bejah, was most significant in getting the Madigan Expedition across the Simpson Desert in 1939. This was the last major exploration of the interior. Afghan Muslims had been on all of them since 1860. The second Afghan on this expedition, "Nurie", Nur Mohamed Moosha, was the son of Moosha Balooch who had accompanied the Horn Expedition over forty years earlier. However

things had changed. "By the 1930s the second generation of cameleers ate the same meat as the Europeans. The Muslim faith had diluted and halal-killed meat was no longer a requirement to the younger men." [85]

## **The Camel Communications Network**

It was the Afghans and their camels who gave access to the vast interior of the continent. They proved themselves during the construction of the Overland Telegraph Line 1870-72. They were used in both the survey and construction work, carrying loads of materials into otherwise impenetrable country. "The workers were able to forge ahead into the arid unknown for they could be assured of regular and reliable service and supply by the camels and cameleers. Horses and bullocks often could not travel the long waterless stretches with any degree of reliability." [86]

Marree, formerly known as Hergott Springs, was an important centre in the "interstate camel communications network" the first outback "train" in this region. [87] "Several sources state that in 1880, four years before the arrival of the line, Hergott was "a little Asia", the focus of camel strings that travelled the Queensland Road (later to become known as the Birdsville Track); the Strzelecki Track to Innamincka; the way through Blanchewater eastwards into New South Wales; the track to Charlotte Waters, and so to Alice Springs and other far northern stations on the Overland Telegraph Line. These were the chief routes of the camel communications network, though all-particularly those leading to the east-branched into many side tracks." [88]

Winifred Stegar, the wife of Ali, a cameleer in Birdsville in the early twentieth century, has left us an account of the scene at one railhead where the Afghans picked up the goods. "Once the mail was cleared the station-master would take off his shirt and, with his one porter, would repair to the goods shed, loaded with cart-note books; consignee notes must match with corresponding loads, and then the load would be allocated to the particular camel train. Not only the shed but the dirt platform would overflow with huge mounds of bundles and cases; the station-master would grow so frantic that his voice at times, would fade almost to nothing as he hurled orders and directions to the camel-men

and their native helpers while he endeavoured to collect the consignments in their correct order. The loadings for transit were assigned to different drivers by the station-owners or their managers. Some goods had hundreds of miles to go, and the return trip might take months." Asked to help the camel-men with their consignment notes and bills of lading, Winifred reports "The trouble really began when I had to make out their freight charges, each man clamouring to tell me his idea of what his freight should be, each load going to a different station with its corresponding mileage, different freights for different goods-it was bedlam." [89]

When the Coolgardie gold rush occurred in 1894, the cameleers were quick to move in. The goldfields could not have continued without the food and water they transported. In March that year a caravan of six Afghans, forty-seven camels and eleven calves, set out across the desert from Marree to the goldfield. It arrived in July with the camels, carrying between 135 and 270 kilograms each, in good condition. [90] Another fifty-eight camels for Coolgardie arrived by ship in Albany in September.

There was some jealousy of the success enjoyed by the Afghans with their camel-carrying businesses. Already by September 1894 "The Bulletin" complained of Fez Mahomet that "there seems to be no limit to his camel carrying operations. He is said to have taken 20,000 sovereigns to Westralia; he has certainly taken thither upwards of 2000 camels. More than half of these are employed on the Coolgardie goldfield." [91] It also made a bigoted allusion, to Muslim acceptance of polygamy with the claim that "his camel-staff is believed to consist chiefly of brothers-in-law; many wives, many brothers-in-law." This was not the situation at all but it made for good reading for the Bulletin's readers at that time.

That same article in The Bulletin also describes the situation in 1894. "Afghans at Coolgardie are an exclusive section of the community. They mix not with whites and are encamped outside the town. They never trouble man or beast, but leave their camels for that business. Law prevents their dry-blowing or working quartz-reefs, but even if the statute were repealed tomorrow there would be no mad Afghan rush. Fez and



his minions allow the homogeneous white man to find gold, and they gather it by other means." The Afghans are portrayed as passive, but cunning. Although excluded from mining they make their own gold by exploiting the white miner.

*Table 1 Statistical information relating to Muslims Western Australia for the year 1898 [92]*

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	Coolgardie	Fremantle	Perth
No. Ministers	1	nil	1
No. Lay Readers or Local Preachers	3	1	3
No. Church Buildings	2	nil	nil
No. other buildings used for public worship	5	2	3
Total seating accommodation in Churches and Buildings	300	80	20
Average number attendants at Sunday morning and evening services	80	12	25
Average number attending Divine Service on weekdays	80	12	25
Approximate number of Public Services performed during the year (including weekday services)	1825	1825	1825
No. of marriages	nil	nil	nil
No. of burials	nil	nil	nil
Number of persons admitted to Membership of the Denomination in the District during the Year	nil	nil	nil
Estimated number of adherents in the District adults and children	male 300 female nil	female nil male 80	male 23 female nil

By 1898 there were 300 members of the Muslim community in Coolgardie and 80 on average attended Friday prayer. Indeed as is indicated by Table 1, Coolgardie held the main Muslim community in the colony at that time. There was not one Muslim woman amongst them, no marriages were performed and no burials, reflecting a relatively young, celibate and transient population. [93] There appear to have been two mosques in Coolgardie, if that is what was meant by "church buildings"

with five other buildings used for public worship. The one "Minister" and three "Lay Readers" might be taken for imam and other less educated prayer leaders. Fremantle had two buildings used for public worship but no main mosque and one lonely "Lay Reader" or prayer leader. Perth had three buildings used for public worship but no mosque at that stage. It claimed one imam and three prayer leaders.

The extent of the camel industry in Coolgardie is indicated by the list of camel owners 1898-1899 in Table 2. The predominance of Afghans can be seen through the number of Muslim names on the list of owners. The sudden drop in the number of camels by 1899 is a reflection of the opening of the neighbouring field at Kalgoorlie.

*Table 2. A List of Owner of Camels in the Magisterial District of Coolgardie. [94*

Table 2. A List of Owner of Camels in the Magisterial District of Coolgardie. <sup>94</sup>					
1899			1898		
Duncan McGregor	12	Ahmad	12	Khram	20
F & T Mahomet	359	F & Tagh Mahomet	444	E. Leaney	1
do do	51	do do	56	Actor Mahomed	7
Abraham do	12	Anwar	72	Dean Mahomed	4
Parley Alline	42	Mahamet Azim	30	Malata Mahomed	30
Frank E. Randell	125	F.E.Randell Co.	142	S. Peer Mahomed	9
Mahomet Raswell	15	Cobb & Co. Ltd	2	G. Mahomed	19
Transport Trading Co of WA	61	Transport Trading Co of WA	60	Mamadriza	17
Gungzar Belooch	16	Geelan	10	Masum	7
Hampton Plains Estate Ltd.	6	Hampton Plains Estate Ltd.	7	Mazoola	3
Maurice Leaney	7	Osman Guny	35	Mohidin	18
<b>Total for 1899</b>	<b>700</b>	Mahomet Hasson	100	Said Nazar	12
		Said Hookmat	20	Neemomed	3
		Zrim	16	Produce	5
		Amer Jon	29	Rahmin	15
		Kahan	6	Mahomed Rassool	21
		Pain Kahn	18	Abdul Rennie	13
		Oom Kahn	13	Sabarizi	9
		Sultan Kaka	26	Shak	10
		Karam	8	Shacoor	22
		Amer Khan	15	Sing	10
		Esau Khan	14	Maosa Sing	26
		Derri Khan	17	Stura	15
		M. Llan	10	Vair	7
		Mizza Khan	32	General Water Supply	79
		Paster Khan	7	J.H.Wood	50
		Zar Khan	2	Zachan	14
		<b>Total for 1898</b>			<b>1649</b>

The working conditions of some of the Afghan camel drivers, even by the standards of the time, were appalling. The Bulletin, which had a less than favourable attitude to non-European labour, was moved in 1899 to support an appeal for "Afghans enslaved by the Bourke (NSW) Camel Carrying Co." The company was owned by a group of Europeans, mainly pastoralists, who hired their labour in India and Afghanistan. Abdul Wade, an Afghan, was appointed manager in 1895. [95] The men, who had been employed on an agreement which they had not understood, were jailed for refusing to work when ordered to do so by the company. They were to be paid 24 pounds a year. Three-quarters of their wages, held until they completed their six year contract, were to be forfeited if they missed even a day of work. The magistrate told them they could appeal the sentence to a higher court but as they were without funds that was not possible without public support. The poor response to the appeal was, complained this most racist of journals, "perhaps because of the circumstance that the oppressed men happen to be coloured foreigners instead of white Australians." [96] It at least contributed ten pounds towards the needed one hundred and fifty pounds for the appeal.

### **Racism Rears its Head**

Camel teams competed with the bullock drivers and horse teamsters. The cameleers were Afghan, the bullockies were European. Clear cases of assault against Afghans, even murder, were dismissed by racist courts. [97] In western Queensland in the 1890s there was a major campaign of racist vilification against the cameleers. Local newspapers declared Afghans as "more detestable than the Chinese" and attacked them for refusing to drink alcohol and for opening their own stores and butcher shops. [98]

The rising union movement in Queensland also had a strong racist rhetoric. Chinese and Afghans were seen as cheap labour, undermining the standard of living of the white man. Unionists did not fight for equal wages for all, apparently seeing economic exploitation as inextricably linked to "racial inferiority". Afghans, unaware of the greater social issues, for they were socially ostracised by the Europeans, continued to carry wool to railheads for the Queensland pastoralists during the

Shearer's Strike which nearly took the country into civil war, a watershed in the history of Australia. In 1891 the Toowoomba Infantry had to escort Afghans and their camels within Queensland and up to the NSW border as they were in danger from enraged and militant unionists. [99]

In 1892 "Unionist" of Bourke NSW, in a letter to the Bulletin, wrote "the introduction of camels and Afghans is worse than the introduction of Chinese to the masses." [100] Attacking the "hopeless conservatism" of this position regarding the camel, which The Bulletin steadfastly maintained was the saviour of the outback, the editor had an alternative suggestion. "There is no earthly reason why the Afghan and the camel should go together; the Australian has at least as much intelligence as that imported Asiatic, and he knows enough to make use of that 'ship of the desert' without hiring any cheap Mohammedan to help him. But, apparently, he never dreams of making the attempt, and because the Afghan is another cheap labour curse in a land where such curses are already much too plentiful, therefore he wants to abolish him and the animal altogether. The idea of abolishing the man and not the animal has not yet, so far as we are aware, been proposed by anybody." That was, ultimately, what occurred.

The link between the Afghan and the camel had direct political repercussions. At the November 1893 conference of the Labor Electoral League of New South Wales, the platform which called for "Prohibition by law of the use of camels as beasts of burden, as being inimical to the health and well-being of the residents where such beasts are used" was confirmed. As The Bulletin remarked in its commentary, "The only real reason for its (the camel's) abolition is that it is run by Asiatics", but this did not indicate sympathy for or solidarity with the Afghans. "Apart from its obnoxious Asiatic driver, there is just the same reason for abolishing the camel that there is for tearing up the railroads". [101]

In an article on "The Camel Odious" in 1894 the Bulletin included a comment by a Major Leonard, the author of a book on the camel, that the Afghan is "the dirtiest brute on record". [102] The very next edition of the magazine had a response from someone who strongly objected to this, pointing to the bravery of the Afghans throughout history and the defeats they had inflicted upon numerous invaders, including the British. The

letter, under the heading "The Odious Afghan", alluded to the number of whites who manage to get along without a bath from New Year to Christmas and to the many "women who have only bathed on their wedding day". It also mentioned the hospitality of the Afghans in Bourke and to the large number of whites who were happy to take the bounty offered. However even this sympathetic correspondent could not support the notion of Afghan-Australians : "I don't like the Afghan; he cannot mix with us; in some things he is a bit too good for us; and I think he is better out of the country; but he is more honest and manly than many of those who jeer at him." [103]

Open hostility was more common in public discourse. F.C.B. Vosper who had drifted to the Coolgardie goldfield and become editor of the Coolgardie Miner, was a strong supporter of the Queensland Shearer's Strike. He had also been editor of the Australian Republican, a Queensland newspaper. In 1894 he was supported by 2000 miners in his proposal to establish a body to put pressure on the government to have Afghans and other Asians removed from the fields. Nine branches of this Anti-Afghan League were established but died as rapidly as they had grown. [104] In several colonies of the time debates were occurring about the control and possible eradication of the 'coloured labour' problem, and from 1897 it became difficult for 'aliens' to enter the country.

The 1898 W.A. Royal Commission into Mining took evidence about the presence of Afghans on the goldfields and one witness raised objections which have rung down the years, being raised most recently with regard to Muslim attitudes to Saddam Hussein in the Gulf War of 1990-91. [105] Probyn-Smith, another journalist, in evidence to the WA parliament regarding local Afghans, claimed "Many... were still in sympathy with those Afghans who fought the British during the Second Afghan War. He declared they were traitorous by nature and warned of the peril to Australian lives if a Jihad (Holy War) were to be proclaimed somewhere in the Muslim world." [106]

A third journalist, the socialist editor of the Barrier Truth in Broken Hill, R.S. Ross wrote an article on "The Afghan Menace" 13 March 1903, well after the 1901 Immigration Restriction Act had introduced the White

Australia Policy. He attributed everything from sexual depravity to brutality and gross superstition to these people who were 'by breed and nature a bird of prey'. [107] There was no apparent awareness let alone gratitude shown for the contribution made by these isolated and exploited men to the economic development of Australia. In the atmosphere of European Australia, denigration of racial or religious difference was the norm. Similar venom was displayed in Protestant-Catholic disputes in the community at that time, overlain in many cases with anti-Irish racism.

The life of Mahomet Allum, Adelaide's much loved Afghan herbalist, spanned the history of the Afghan Muslims in Australia. [108] He had sold horses to the British Army in the Second Afghan War and came to the goldfields of WA as a cameleer. [109] He witnessed the opening of the Coolgardie water pipeline in 1903, [110] worked in the Broken Hill mines where he laboured for hours underground in icy cold water. [111] He bore witness to the teachings of Islam on racial difference in racist Australia. One of his letters to the press is reprinted by Brunato in which he challenges the editor. "If any Britisher can prove to me that he is white and I am black, I will unreservedly give him five hundred pounds. In God's earth we are all his creatures. He brought in the sun and the moon and the stars to function twenty-four hours a day for all of us, and as an indication that He expects us to, every hour of the day to do His work. Why then this invidious distinction, even in the cemetery, between peoples of different races?" [112]

His reputation for charity, six thousand pounds over four years, was explained as "a practical demonstration of the Islamic doctrine that all men are brothers and should be treated as such." [113] He was not without influence on the non-Muslims around him. Miss Halima Schwerdt of Adelaide, in her contribution "I am proud to be Muslim", in the publication "Charms of Islam" produced by the very British Muslim community of the Woking Mosque, indicated her debt to him. She wrote "Here in Australia where it is rare to come in general contact with anyone of the Muslim faith, I consider myself extremely lucky when I met Mahomet Allum Herbalist, "Wonder Man" and healer as he has been named by the people in Australia whom he has cured." [114] Unfortunately his entry in the Australian Dictionary of Biography is

marred by a doubtlessly false claim that he "referred to himself as God's messenger." [115] Such a claim is a crime in Islamic law and puts the claimant outside the faith of Islam. When he died at his home in Everard Park in 1964 at the age of 106, he had witnessed the decline of the Muslim population and was on the edge of witnessing its revival as the racially exclusive policy died. He had been denied Australian citizenship because he was classified as non-white and when the law changed he made no application. Perhaps he decided that it was not worthwhile.

Attitudes towards the Indians who were arriving in the cities were also rigidly hostile. The justifications for these hostile attitudes, common to racist rationalisation everywhere, associated the Indian and Syrian hawkers with filth, with criminal behaviour and with disease. An article in "The Illustrated Australian News" accuses them of bullying women in outlying farming districts whose husbands were away into buying the products they hawked. It alludes to one of the illustrations accompanying the piece which "show how these gentry are liable to fare if they try that little dodge while any of the men are about." [116] Part of the illustration shows "a summary ejection" with a white farmer wielding a whip at a turbaned and fleeing hawker. It mentions their living conditions in Melbourne, where "they herd together in squalid houses in Little Lonsdale-street and one or two other localities." The comments upon their lifestyle reveal a great degree of ignorance about them. It is considered strange that "they do not eat any meat food unless prepared by one of their own", an allusion to the need for halal meat. That they ate with their fingers was also considered quite disgusting. "When the dish is cooked, be it meat, rice, curry or what not, the party it is provided for gather round the pot, and discarding the use of knife and fork, proceed to business with their fingers." Even their sleeping conditions were food for contempt. "Their sleeping place in the house we visited was a hole wretchedly inadequate for the accommodation of the half dozen or more who were packed in it. They lie upon the floor, and with their turbans upon their heads and bands of linen swathed round the lower part of the face, covering the mouth, they resemble a lot of mummies."

A report "Undesirable Immigrants" written a few years later, noted that the 13 Indians destined for Melbourne and the 77 destined for Sydney from a ship which had just arrived in port, were "a fine looking lot of men"

of whom "the majority speak English fluently". [117] However they were associated with "the Asiatic evil in Melbourne". In a comparison of the relative filthiness of Mahometans and Hindus, the anonymous author wrote, "Everyone will be gratified to know that the Mahometans, at any rate once a year, indulge in a thorough wash and put on absolutely clean garments. This takes place at the feast of Ramazan, either in February or March." [118] It went on to urge action by the city authorities, for the general appalling habits of both these Hindus and Mahometans threatened the city with the black death or bubonic plague.

Some 120 hawkers' licences were issued in 1898 by magistrates in the Victorian centres of Ballarat, Bendigo, Echuca, Geelong, Shepparton, Bairnsdale and St Arnaud. [119] There were more in the city. Three hundred licences were issued to hawkers in the City Court Melbourne alone on hawkers' annual licensing day 12 December 1900. [120] They seemed to be in large enough numbers to represent a danger to the peace and tranquillity of the colony. The same sorts of opinions as had been expressed in 1891 were found again. The "Hindoo population" was notorious for its "disreputable mode of living" and when hawking in the countryside", by stealing, quarrelling amongst themselves and menacing women and children, they have become a dangerous nuisance." [121] Amongst the many evils associated with them was a traffic in hawking licences." A new arrival can usually buy at the stores of merchants with whom his countrymen deal partially expired licences which he is there and then free to trade upon." [122]

Another evil was the award of licences to inappropriate individuals, permitted by the fact that the magistrates could not distinguish between them. "When a number of these persons appear in court the magisterial eye takes them in en masse as a dusky nightmare of gibbering, truculent faces, and the difference between Murder Singh and Satan Shah utterly fails to strike one. Thus it is next to impossible at any time to prevent exactly the most objectionable persons from procuring licences." Lack of education was regarded as one of the root causes of such bad behaviour so, the Leader thought, the Victorian government should consider the South Australian system which meant it would "decline to issue licences as hawkers to Indians who cannot pass an educational test." [123]



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