

THE NARUNGA AND EUROPEANS: CROSS-CULTURAL
RELATIONS ON YORKE PENINSULA IN THE NINETEENTH
CENTURY

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Abstract

The Narungga are the Aboriginal people of Yorke Peninsula, South Australia. This thesis explores cross-cultural encounters and relations between the Narungga and Europeans in the nineteenth century. Contemporary Narungga people, hoping to learn about the lives of their forebears, instigated this research. The Narungga have not previously been the focus of serious historical or anthropological investigation. This thesis therefore fills a significant gap in the historiography.

This thesis seeks to re-imagine the past in a way which is empathetic and realistic to Narungga people who lived in the nineteenth century. To understand the impact of the arrival and permanent settlement of Europeans upon the lives of the Narungga, it is necessary to look closely at the cultural systems which orientated and encompassed both the Narungga and the newcomers. The two groups impacted on and shaped the lives of the other and neither can be looked at in isolation. This work has been inspired by the writings of historical anthropologists and ethno-historians. The findings of anthropologists, linguists, geographers, botanists and archaeologists are drawn upon. First hand accounts which provide graphic and immediate depictions of events have been closely analysed. The primary sources that have been examined include local and Adelaide newspapers, official correspondence between settlers, police, the Protector of Aborigines, the Governor and the Colonial Secretary, and private letters, diaries, paintings, photographs and sketches.

The archives continuously reveal great injustices committed against the Narungga, and this thesis does not seek to minimize the brutality of 'white' settlement nor the devastating outcomes of British colonialism on the Narungga. But the records also reveal the majority of Narungga people living in the nineteenth century were not helpless victims being pushed around by autocratic pastoralists or disengaged bureaucrats. On Yorke Peninsula in the nineteenth century, the future was unknown; the Narungga were largely able to maintain their autonomy while Europeans were often in a vulnerable and dependent position. The Narungga were active agents who adapted to and incorporated the new circumstances as they were able and as they saw fit. Rather than living in a closed or static society, the Narungga readily accommodated and even welcomed the Europeans, with their strange customs and exotic animals, plants and goods. The Narungga responded to the presence of Europeans in a way which made sense to them and which was in keeping with their customs and beliefs.

Declaration

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan or photocopying, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

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