

The Two Kingdoms:
Lutheran Missionaries and the British Civilizing
Mission in early South Australia

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ABSTRACT

The establishment of South Australia in 1836 coincided with growing concern about the treatment of subject peoples in the British Empire. This fuelled demands that Indigenous peoples and their rights be protected. A conviction prevailed that the interests of Indigenous people as well as colonisers were best served by Europeanising the former and assimilating them as British subjects and 'useful' participants in colonial society. It was assumed Christian missionaries would play a key role in this 'civilising mission.' This led South Australian Company chairman George Fife Angas to recruit missionaries from the Evangelical Lutheran Mission Society in Dresden who worked among Aboriginal South Australians from 1838-53.

This thesis challenges the historiography of Christian missions in Australia by illustrating the need to consider individual missionaries and mission societies and how they interacted with government, settler society, home mission societies as well as Aboriginal people. It further argues that a proper understanding of the Dresden Society's missionaries in South Australia must take into account their confessional Lutheran background and origin in German states which at the time lacked an overseas empire or colonial ambitions. The Dresden Mission Society's core objectives were to share the gospel of Christ and establish an Aboriginal Christian church. While its missionaries saw the need to broaden their activities to address the physical needs and injustices suffered by Aboriginal people, they did not see their goals in terms of Europeanization and assimilation.

The Dresden missionaries did significant pioneering work in the areas of linguistics, ethnography, Aboriginal education and evangelism. However, as with Christian mission efforts in other Australian colonies in the first half of the nineteenth century, their work was short-lived. This thesis argues that this was partly due to the nature and priorities of Aboriginal society and the impact of colonisation on the Aboriginal population. Just as importantly, the implementation of the government's agenda, as it developed over time, was antithetical to the Lutheran missionaries' real aims. The Dresden missionaries were caught between a mission society wanting them to focus on spiritual work, a government expecting them to advance British culture and colonial ambitions, Christians with their own denominational ambitions who saw Christianity and 'civilisation' as inseparable, and the missionaries' own concern for the Aboriginal people's general welfare. Without financial independence, they were compromised by their relationship with a government and settler society which tried to harness them to their own agenda and whose expectations they failed to meet.

This analysis throws light on the complexities of relationships between church and state, colonial society and missionaries, and culture and theology. It warns against a simplistic identification of Christianity with Western civilisation and colonising agendas.

DECLARATION

I certify that 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. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible of the joint-award of this degree.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AGSA: Art Gallery of South Australia

ALMW: Archiv Leipziger Missionswerk (Archives of the Leipzig Mission held in the Franck Foundation Archives in Halle)

CMS: Church Missionary Society

CSO: Colonial Secretary's Office

DMS: Evangelisch-lutherische Mission zu Dresden (Evangelical Lutheran Mission Society in Dresden) or 'Dresden Mission Society'

ELMS: Evangelical Lutheran Mission Society in Dresden

LMS: London Missionary Society

NGA: National Gallery of Australia

NLA: National Library of Australia

NSW: New South Wales

MC: Meyer Correspondence

SA: South Australia/South Australian

SAGG: South Australian Government Gazette

SC: Schürmann Correspondence

SD: Schürmann Diaries

SLSA: State Library of South Australia.

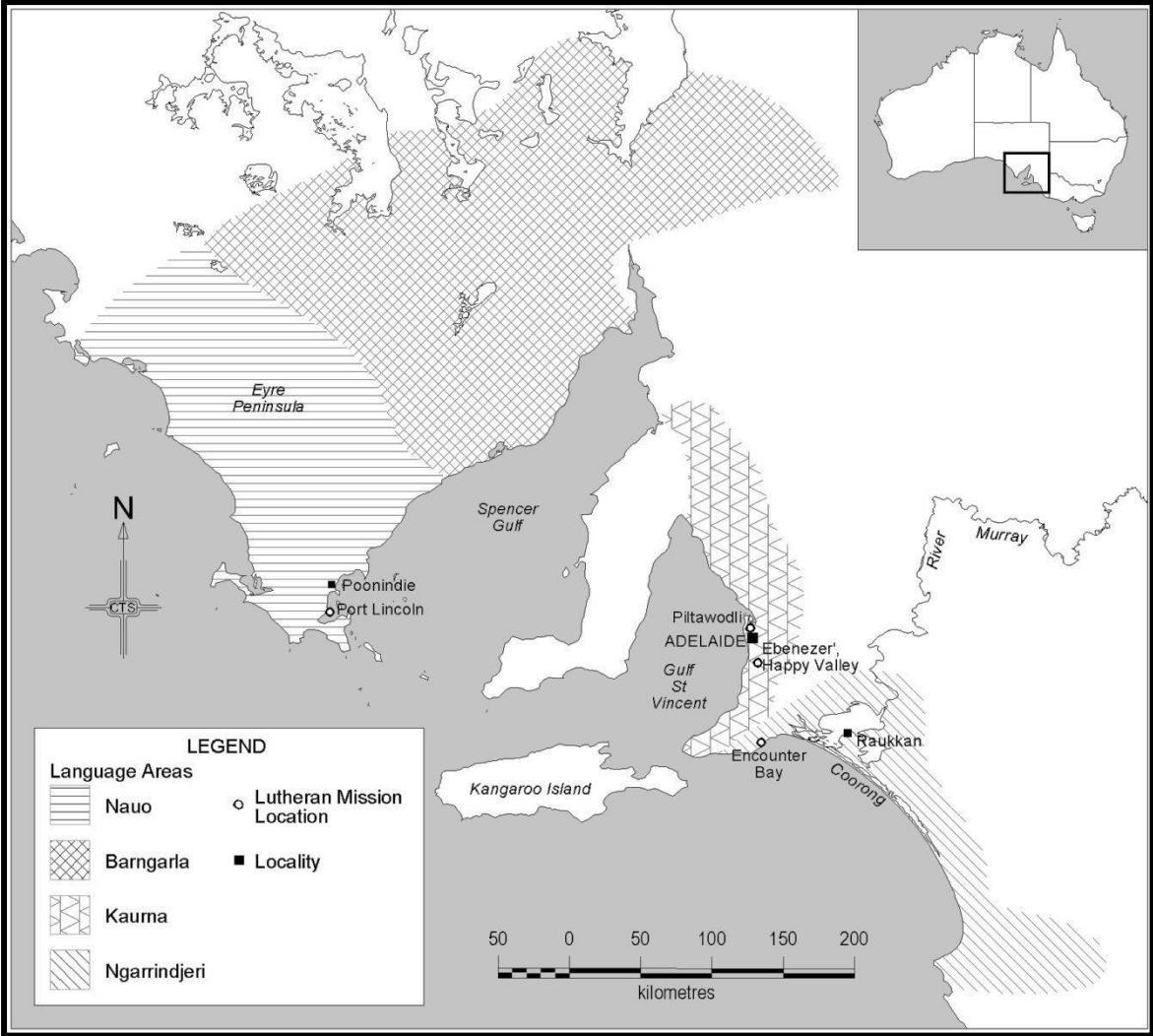
SPG: Society for the Propagation of the Gospel

SRSA: State Records of South Australia.

TC: Teichelmann correspondence

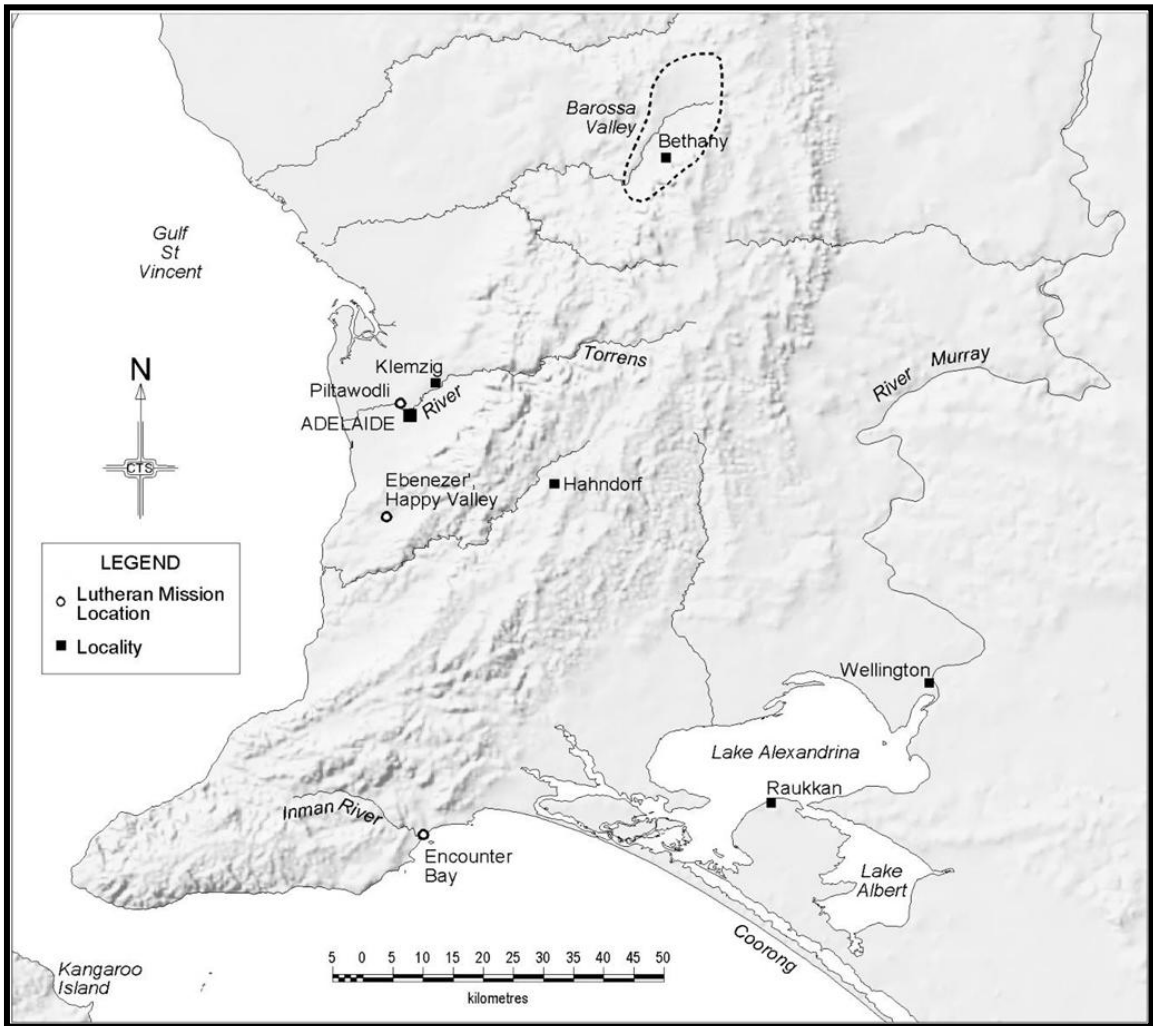
TD: Teichelmann Diaries

DRESDEN LUTHERAN MISSION LOCATIONS

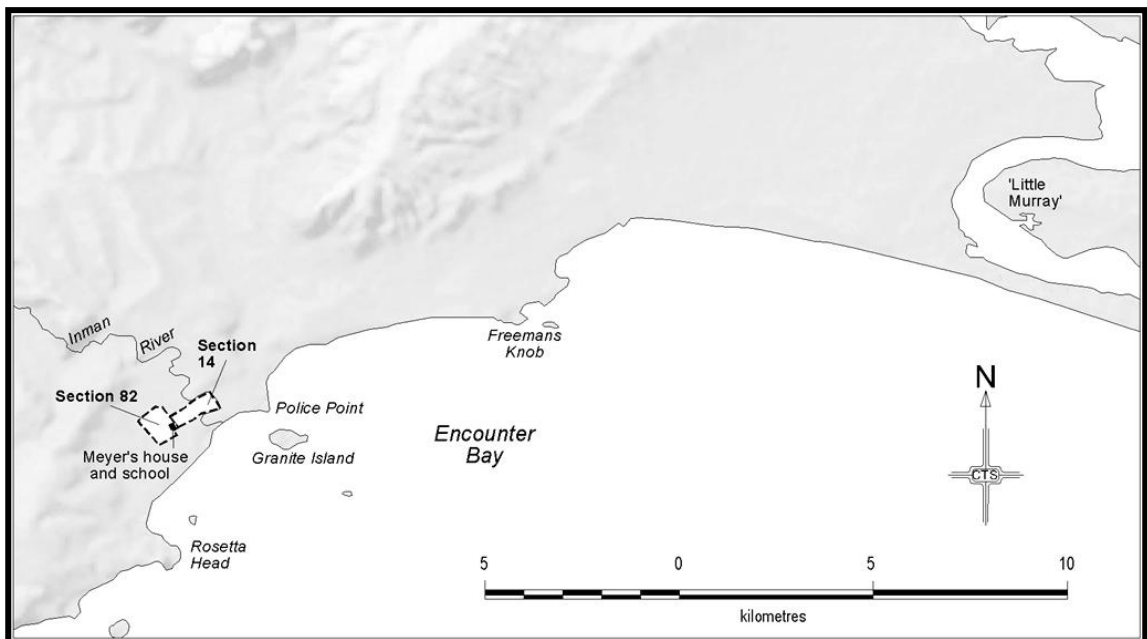


Map 1: Lutheran mission locations and related language areas

DRESDEN LUTHERAN MISSION LOCATIONS



Map 2: Lutheran mission locations in the Adelaide-Encounter Bay area



Map 3: The Encounter Bay area