

AUSTRALIA AND THE CRIMEAN WAR

The Crimean War (1854–1856), which blazed up thousands of miles from Australia — a war in which only a handful of Australians directly took part — nevertheless touched all strata of the colonial population, which both morally and materially supported its mother country. This war exerted a most powerful influence on the formation of the image of Russia and the Russians in the consciousness of Australians. Never before had the Australian newspapers written so much about Russia; never before had Russian tsarism been subjected to such mass condemnation at meetings attended by many thousands. The war also left a visible legacy — the map of Australia is to this day adorned with a multitude of Russian place names that appeared here during the military operations on the other side of the earth, while Fort Denison, built in the middle of Port Jackson in the years of the Crimean War, became a kind of symbol of the unrealised development of Australian-Russian relations.

At the same time, from the very beginning of the war there was no complete unanimity in Australia in its assessment. For example, a curious discussion unfolded at a crowded meeting in Sydney on 22 May 1854, soon after news of England's entry into the war reached Australia. The participants of the meeting were already prepared to support a loyal address to Her Majesty expressing "hearty approval" and readiness "to submit to the calamities of war in defence of the great principles of national independence and general civilization", when unexpectedly the floor was taken by the Reverend John Lang, who declared in his speech that this address was "a piece of sheer absurdity", nothing other than "a virtual declaration of war on the part of this puny colony against the whole Russian Empire... one of the most powerful nations in the world". Lang argued that the colony, cut off from the whole world, should "not in any way mix up in the disputes pending between the mother country and Russia". "What have we to do with the quarrels between Russia, Turkey and France?" he asked his listeners. Moreover, Lang was not afraid to encroach on the most sacred of all and to pose the main question: after all was this a righteous war? — arguing to an audience roaring with indignation that the aim of the war in reality consisted by no means in the defence of civilisation and freedom in Europe. After all, England had undertaken nothing when tsarism cruelly crushed freedom in Poland and Hungary, which represented no strategic interest for her — "Why should England do that for Turkey which she has declined to do for Poland and Hungary?" he urged his opponents. And although his speech provoked a storm of indignation, even at this critical moment a group of supporters gathered around him — those who stood at the origins of Australian nationalism, conscious of themselves as an independent nation and not a mere appendage of England. It is not surprising that Lang's opponents, on whose behalf the well-known Australian politician Henry Parkes spoke, had nothing to reply except: "What, and are we no longer Englishmen?" John Lang, "the advocate of peace", as his opponents mockingly nicknamed him, in essence became the spiritual father of today's Australian pacifists as well.

Lang's feelings were shared by his contemporary, the well-known Australian poet Charles Harpur, who was convinced that this war was "undertaken to uphold one despotism against another". In his poem "Battle of Inkerman (The Truest Version)" he wrote that France and Britain, "Despite of Waterloo, / Combined against one foe, / For what they hardly know". Harpur's pen also produced satirical verses devoted to one of the jingoistic Australian meetings. And yet it must be said that neither Lang, nor Harpur, nor their supporters were champions of Russia. The pathos of their speeches was directed against the hypocrisy of Australian society itself. As the war took on an ever more protracted and bloody character, critical attitudes towards it grew both in England and in the colonies.

The notions Australians had of Russia and the Russians at that time were very vague. The influential *Sydney Morning Herald* wrote at the beginning of the war: Among our readers are many to whom the Russian Empire is known only as a name; to others it presents only the image of a gloomy despot carrying a knout, or a poor exile shivering in a snow storm... There are many things... which perhaps in England are not necessary to be told, [but] which have been forgotten by people who have to kill their own mutton.” The formation of notions about Russia took place in the war years under the influence of several factors — above all, of course, under the influence of the fact that England, and consequently her Australian colonies, found themselves in a state of war with Russia. This set of stereotypes is of no particular interest, since the epithets applied to the Russians could equally well have been applied to any other people who happened at the given moment to be the adversary. This was demonstrated most graphically by the nanny who lived in the family of William Denison, at that time Governor of Tasmania. Formerly, when scolding her charge, a naughty little boy, she had called him a “little Turk”; with the beginning of the Crimean War he turned into “a Russian”.

At a higher level, the newspapers spoke of the “the unrighteous and monstrous invasion”, “the aggression of the strong upon the weak”, “Russian intrigue... in Paris and Vienna”, “Russian insolence”, depicting Russia as an invader hiding behind words about a “holy war”. “Russia, the enemy” became the leitmotif of numerous patriotic meetings.

At the same time, publications appeared directed against the political order existing in Russia. The tone was set by an article which noted that the coming war would be directed not against the Russian people but against the political system, and that it would kindle the light of liberation over Russia. As the most typical utterances of this kind let us note such clichés and characterisations as “tyranny and oppression”, “the Northern despotism” and “the despotic authority”. The Russian tsar the newspapers called nothing other than “the Autocrat of the Russians”, “the Muscovite Autocrat”, “the Russian despot”, “this modern bandit, the devil of Russia” (in the last case the name of Nicholas I was played upon, since in English “Old Nick” is used to name the devil or Satan). A number of articles pointed to the direct influence of the tsarist political regime on the state of the army: “the Russian soldier knows that he can never be but what he is - a serf in uniform”; the Russian army is “suffering from an inefficient commissariat and a defective system of discipline”. Australian publicists and politicians invariably contrasted “the constitutional freedoms of the nations of Europe” with Russian despotism, and, of course, England and her allies were represented as the champions of “the cause of justice and humanity”, waging a struggle “in defence of liberty all over Europe”.

And finally, in this period, under the influence of the military confrontation, ethnic stereotypes and prejudices blossomed luxuriantly and filled the pages of the Australian press, creating a completely inadequate image of the Russian people. The definition “barbarians” became one of the most common in application to the Russians. For example, at the meeting in Sydney of which we have already spoken above, the following clichés constantly sounded in the speeches of the orators: “hordes of barbarians”, “the most barbarous nation in Europe”, “the most barbarous potentate in the world”. Somewhat less frequent was “the Russian Bear”. Not so hackneyed, but no less unfounded, was the assertion of a *Sydney Morning Herald* leader that “The Russians have, unfortunately, a dogma, which not only exists in the brains of their statesmen, but which forms part of the pride and fanaticism of their people. They believe they are destined to subdue the earth, and to impose upon it the verities of their religion.”

But credit must be given to the Sydneysiders, who, in answer to widespread Russophobia, showered the *Sydney Morning Herald* with a series of witty caricatures. In one of them, over the signature “Penelope”, the image of the Russian “barbarians” was carried to complete

grotesque: “Those horrid Russians are coming to batter down our houses, and carry us women away and make slaves of us, with their nasty moustaches and beards, and condemn us to live upon bears' grease and tallow.” Sometimes Russian researchers mistakenly take this Australian-style “black humour” at face value. On the whole, though black paint predominated in the depiction of the Russians of that time, it was not the only colour. An attentive reader could encounter grains of objective information, portraying individual Russians with sympathy and showing the heroism of Russian soldiers and sailors. And nevertheless, despite the jokes of the wags and individual attempts at an objective approach to the Russians, all three groups of anti-Russian notions — Russia as the adversary, Russia as a land of despotism, and Russia as a land of repulsive barbarians — predominated in the minds of Australians and were constantly fuelled by reports from the theatre of military operations.

Simultaneously with the first news of England's forthcoming participation in the war (March–April 1854), the Australians were gripped by the first “Russian scare”, caused by fear of a Russian invasion. The fear of foreign invasion, of the seizure of the port cities — which, in the opinion of Australians, became especially well-founded after the discovery of gold in Australia — ran through the whole of Australian history. Before the Crimean War the three most formidable potential adversaries seemed to Australians to be France, Russia and America, and immediately before the Crimean War France and America seemed a more real adversary than Russia. The force of inertia was so great that even after the beginning of the Russo-Turkish war the Australian colonies still continued to build their defence doctrine on the basis of the supposed French threat. For example, John Lang declared at a meeting that “Louis Napoleon, the Emperor of France, at his stronghold in New Caledonia, a far more dangerous enemy to [our] trade and commerce in the Pacific than any other power in Europe.” Nor did the Australians' fear of a possible raid by American privateers pass. And nevertheless, it was precisely the threat of Russian invasion that caused a real panic in the Australian colonies.

“Russian scares” gripped Australia more than once throughout the whole second half of the nineteenth century — in 1863, 1870, 1882 and 1885. But the first panic, experienced by the Australians during the Crimean War, was perhaps the strongest and most memorable. What forms did it not take! Some newspapers, for example, quite seriously discussed which city — Sydney or Melbourne — the Russians would attack, and what form this attack would take: the destruction of the cities, their occupation, or only the seizure of the gold in the banks; and also who exactly would carry out the seizure of Australia — buccaneers, privateers or the navy. One or another variant received preference in connection with the movements of the Russian squadron in the Pacific. The panic gripped all strata of Australian society. J.C.Breillot, chairman of a defence meeting, fancied that “Emissaries from Russia might even now be here, noting the defenceless state of our harbour”. Inhabitants of the coast at night imagined “a Russian frigate or steamer, coming... in quest of gold”. At times the panic assumed the most whimsical character — from the fears of a certain drunkard from Adelong who intended to do away with himself because he imagined that the Russians had already taken him prisoner, to the mass panic in Melbourne on 7 September 1854, when someone, hearing the bangs of festive firecrackers, shouted “The Russians!” The news instantly spread through the whole city, passing from mouth to mouth, and soon valiant detachments of volunteers, armed with whatever came to hand, rushed to the seashore — but, of course, found no one there.



An open-air museum in the environs of the city of Ballarat (state of Victoria), which bears the name Sovereign Hill. Here, in 1851, began one of the largest gold rushes in world history. Its peak fell in the years of the Crimean War. Before you is a board of administrative announcements and posters. With such an announcement (photo by the author) the colonial administration informed the inhabitants of the settlement in 1855 of the fall of Sevastopol, which meant the end of the war. Many of the prospectors and members of their families had brothers, fathers or sons in the British army.

One could cite more than one further example of the Australians' fears of the threat of a Russian invasion — they now, for example, recalled with dread the visit of the Russian warship *Dvina*, which had called at Sydney in May–June 1853, just on the eve of the war, and suspected her of espionage — but it must be admitted that in Australian society there were always sober heads as well, who understood the groundlessness of the Russian threat and called upon their fellow citizens to consider how the crew of a Russian ship could in practice capture and hold an Australian city, how it could force its way through the crowded throng along the streets of an unfamiliar city to the bank — to say nothing of the enormous distance separating Russia from Australia, and of Russia's weakness at sea, which had become evident at that time. Xed

Did the threat of a Russian invasion of Australia in reality have any grounds? The writer I.A. Goncharov, who served during the Crimean War on the frigate *Pallada* in the Pacific, would seem to confirm that the Australians' fears had some foundation: "As far as I remember, the admiral and the captain more than once resolved on a bold raid to the shores of Australia to capture English vessels, and ... only uncertainty that our good old *Pallada* would endure another long voyage from Japan to Australia held them back — and also, of course, the uncertainty, in the absence of any news, of finding foreign vessels there." The Petersburg historian Alexander Massov was the first to attempt to clarify this on the basis of the materials of the Russian State Naval Archive. Many years of research allowed him to assert with full justification that during the Crimean War and in the following decades "no concrete plans of attack on the fifth continent existed. Neither in the discussion in the Main Naval Staff of possible operations in the waters of the Pacific in the event of the outbreak of war with England, nor in the corresponding instructions to the commanders of the Pacific squadron, was the question of any actions on the Australian coast even raised." An attack on Australia was impossible both because of its remoteness and because of the lack of sufficient resources in the Russian fleet. During military operations, therefore, the task of the Russian ships was limited to the blockading of the enemy's trade routes in the Pacific.

The Australian colonists, meanwhile, prepared to defend themselves against the Russian invasion. At the meetings, thunderous speeches resounded, full of boastfulness and disdain for the forces of the Russians. "Should a Russian frigate enter the harbour with any view to aggression, she would leave her planks to rot," threatened J.B. Darvall, while Sir Thomas Mitchell assured the assembled company that "Old as he was, he had yet some vigour left in him, and cheerfully would he lead a boarding steamer against any Russian opponent that should enter the harbour. He would take the pike in hand and with a firm and steady band of armed Australians at his back, he would have no fear of its result." Yet in Australian society there was no complete unanimity on the question of defence either; its financing became the stumbling block. Thus a certain person hiding behind the pseudonym "Very Defenceless" approached the question of defence from class positions, asserting that only the rich owners of gold would suffer from the supposed invasion: "The richer the man, the greater the sufferer... It is of very small consequence to the mass of people in this country whether the French, Russians, or Turks come and walk into the gold-lined vaults." The already repeatedly mentioned Lang approached the question of defence from another side, demanding greater independence from the metropolis: "give us the form of government we require and we shall do all in our power to defend it."

The threat of Russian invasion prompted many Australians to take part in the discussion of defence questions in the pages of the newspapers. Alongside serious proposals, which were then considered in parliament, there also appeared, if one may so express it, an "anti-Russian defence folklore". This was a specifically Australian reaction to the "fashionable Russophobia of the hour". In a letter to the editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, "Pater familias", another joker, touchingly related how his daughter "has told her mamma that she cannot sleep for dreaming of Russian officers", while the already mentioned "Penelope" proposed, as the best defence against the Russian guns... featherbeds. "Let the governor, she said, make every one provide a feather bed or mattress, and have them hung upon high poles all round the coast". The newspapers also poked fun at the especially patriotic editor of the *Goulburn Herald*, describing how he supposedly expected from day to day the appearance of formidable Cossacks, arriving with news for the people of Goulburn that the Russian admiral Knockymdounouski (the jokers would resort more than once to disguised "Russian-sounding" surnames) was already installed in Government House in Sydney and had sent an imperial "ukase" (precisely so!) on the resettlement of all the people of Goulburn, headed by the editor, to the Siberian snows. And a dealer in baskets began the advertisement of his little shop in a newspaper with verses:

*The Russians are coming, and we propose
To treat them as friends and not as foes;
For why should we go killing and eating
These men, while we have so many sheep bleating?
Men of the mind can turn to good uses
Even their enemies vilest abuses;
Then dolts must we be if we can't make a profit
Of this Russian invasion, and think nothing of it...*

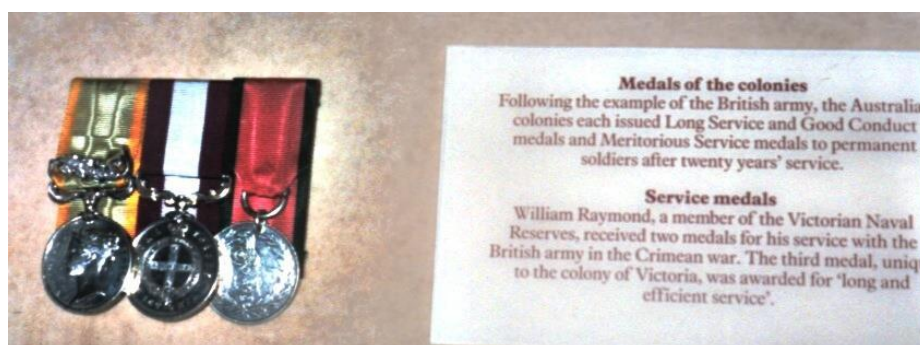
These verses ended with an invitation to the shop for baskets.

Sober-minded Australian politicians, perhaps, did not differ very greatly from this dealer. Yielding neither to the general panic nor to recklessness, they skilfully pursued their defence doctrine, successfully making use of precisely the Australians' prejudices with regard to the Russians. For example, the Australian politician William Denison wrote during the Crimean War to his friend Robert Murchison: "You laugh, and with reason, at the panic which led people

in these colonies to insist upon fortifying themselves against the Russians. I never partook of this panic, but I have gone into the question of the defence of Sydney for the purpose of keeping off more unpleasant neighbours than the Russians; namely our friends the French, and our relations the Americans... Of Russia I have not the slightest fear..." And almost simultaneously he was requesting London for armaments to defend the Australian colonies from "buccaneers flying the Russian flag", while Fort Denison, built under him in the middle of Port Jackson, went down in history as a fort built precisely for defence against a Russian attack, and became a symbol of the Australians' groundless fears.

Such forts "against the Russians" can be found along the whole coast of Australia, from Cape York to Hobart and from Sydney to Adelaide. Strange as it may seem, of all the diversity of Russian-Australian contacts in the nineteenth century most Australians know only one aspect — the forts against a Russian invasion. At the same time, historians have long known that in reality matters stood far more complicated. The mass historical memory of Australians concerning the defensive structures against the Russians, which has survived to our time and been fixed in tourist booklets and popular commentaries, is nothing other than the result of the skilful influence of politicians on public consciousness. In actual fact the coastal forts were part of the ordinary defence system that every state creates. The problem lay in the financing of the fortification works. Often they began long before the next scare of a Russian invasion, dragged on for many years, and their financing was endlessly discussed in parliament, but the cart never moved from the spot. And only the next panic over a "Russian invasion in preparation" helped to make both English politicians and ordinary Australians loosen their purse-strings — while the fort, of course, acquired its fame as one built against the Russians.

Why did the bogey of precisely the Russian threat (as distinct from the American or French one) act so successfully on the mass consciousness of Australians? What told here was the influence not so much of a real threat as of the role of Australians' notions of Russia and the Russians: the negative image of tsarism, which suppressed its own peoples and pursued an expansionist policy in the international arena; the frightening geo-ethnic image of Russia — an enormous country populated by numerous half-savage peoples; and, indeed, the image of the Russian people itself, so different from other Europeans both in outward appearance and in religion.



An Australian from the state of Victoria, William Raymond, was awarded two medals for participation in the Crimean War (including a Turkish one). The third medal is for Long and Efficient Service (photo by the author, Australian War Memorial)

For quite understandable reasons, a very small number of Australians took part in the war itself. Some of their names are known from the newspaper articles of the time: William Moriarty, whose parents lived not far from Sydney; the Sydney-born John Phelps — his name was later mentioned among the participants of the battle at Rangiriri between a British regiment and Maori warriors during the uprising of the New Zealand Waikato tribe in 1863. The journalists,

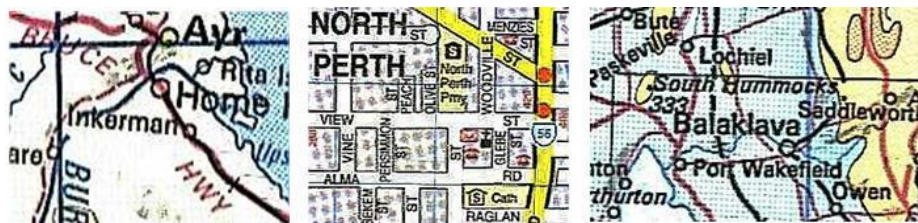
of course, closely followed the military fortunes of the son of Governor FitzRoy, at one time his father's assistant in New South Wales. He was called up into the army in 1853. On 20 February 1855 the *Herald* wrote that he had distinguished himself at the very beginning of his military career, being lightly wounded in the battle of the Alma and severely at Inkerman. On the twenty-first of January 1856 the *Herald* reported his death in battle. Yet another historical figure was Colonel John Richardson (later promoted to the rank of major-general), a veteran of the Crimean War. At 48 he took command of the Australian contingent from New South Wales that took part in the Anglo-Sudan war (spring 1885). Among the Australian volunteers in the Sudan there were many more veterans of the Crimean War, but to distinguish among them the native-born colonists from immigrants from Great Britain is not possible.



*An unknown officer of the 50th infantry regiment, based in Sydney in 1866–1869 after service during the military operations in New Zealand. The insignia on the cuff and collar denote the rank of captain; the medals on the officer's chest testify to his participation in the Crimean War (photo from the book *The Australian Army, Navy and Air Force in Eleven Wars*, 1994)*

The Crimean War left a noticeable trace in Australian geography. In the war years Australia found itself literally swept by a whirlwind of Russian toponyms — geographical names. In Australia at this time new territories were being opened up, goldfields were being discovered, and new streets were being laid out in the cities. The townships of Alma and Balaklava exist in South Australia, Sevastopol in New South Wales, and Lake Alma in South Australia. Queensland, too, is rich in Russian names connected with the Crimean War: the name of Alma is borne here by no fewer than eight townships, mountains and streams. Inkerman, Balaklava and the Malakhov Range are also to be met with. Let us add that Crimean names abound among the streets of Melbourne, Sydney, Perth and many other cities. For example, the eastern part of the St Kilda district in Melbourne is crossed by three main thoroughfares — Balaklava, Inkerman and Alma — and between them lie the streets Odessa, Crimea, two more Almas, Sevastopol and Malakoff, as well as Alma Park. In the neighbouring district of Caulfield we again find the streets Sevastopol, Malakoff and Crimea. Similar clusters of Russian toponyms

exist in other districts of Melbourne as well. Some names of towns and streets bear the names of the commanders of the allied forces who fought in the Crimea — St Arnaud (a French general), Raglan (the commander-in-chief of the allied forces, who died of cholera during the war), Cardigan (the commander of the notorious Light Brigade, which suffered heavy losses in its mad charge under the fire of the Russian artillery). Soon after the Crimean War the English traveller Charles Dilke discovered that, knowing the main events of the Crimean War, one could trace the sequence in which the settlement of, for example, Victoria had proceeded. “St Arnaud is a township lying between Ballarat and Castlemaine, and Alma is situated near it, while the hill of Balaclava is near Ballarat, where there are also Raglan and Sevastopol. Inkerman is not far from Castlemaine... while the Malakhov mine (finally closed only in the 1950s — V.K.), opened undoubtedly towards the end of the war, lies to the north, in the Wimmera.” It is noteworthy that at the end of the last century, in the period of the gold rush that gripped Western Australia, a multitude of prospectors and miners came to the new places from Victoria. Here they once more gave some of the new goldfields and mines their “Crimean” names.



The town of Inkerman in the state of Queensland; Alma and Raglan Streets in Perth, state of Western Australia; the town of Balaklava in the state of South Australia

The Crimean War exerted an enormous influence on Australian society, and not only on the formation and practical implementation of its defence doctrine, but also on its political self-awareness and consolidation, on the maturing of the ideas of Australian nationalism — which subsequently led to the formation of the Australian Federation. As for the image of Russia in the minds of Australians — alas, almost three years of daily anti-Russian propaganda added little to their knowledge; on the contrary, at this time a stable set of negative stereotypes connected with Russia and the Russians became fixed for a long time in the consciousness of Australians. A hundred years later these feelings would flare up anew in the years of the so-called Cold War.

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