Science and Power in the Nineteenth-Century Tasman World

The contentious science of phrenology once promised insight into character and intellect through external 'reading' of the head. In the transforming settler-colonial landscapes of nineteenth-century Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, popular phrenologists – figures who often hailed from the margins – performed their science of touch and cranial jargon everywhere from mechanics' institutions to public houses. In this compelling work, Alexandra Roginski recounts a history of this everyday practice, exploring how it featured in the fates of people living in, and moving through, the Tasman World. Innovatively drawing on historical newspapers and a network of archives, she traces the careers of a diverse range of popular phrenologists and those they encountered. By analysing the actions at play in scientific episodes through ethnographic, social and cultural history, Roginski considers how this now-discredited science could, in its own day, yield fleeting power and advantage, even against a backdrop of large-scale dispossession and social brittleness.

Dr Alexandra Roginski is a historian and writer based on Wurundjeri lands in Melbourne, Australia, and a visiting fellow of the State Library of New South Wales and Deakin University.

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Popular Phrenology in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand

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For my parents, who travelled to the Tasman World.

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The story of Jim Crow that I mention in the epilogue nests in earlier research carried out with the support of the Mindaribba Local Aboriginal Land Council, the Wonnarua Nation, Museum Victoria and individuals including Uncle Tom and Aunty Narelle Miller, Aunty Di Mills-Smith, James Wilson-Miller, Laurie Perry, Angela, Lorraine Martyn, Mick Chenery, Tara Dever, Leanne Miller, Brad Welsh, Uncle Bing Morris, Rob McWilliams, Lindy Allen and Richard Gillespie. Any history of the playful edges of popular science must remain grounded in the ongoing legacies of European knowledges that trouble the lives of Peoples dispossessed and subjugated by Empire.

This is a work about interconnections. And I could not have completed this book without the friends and family who held me close during these pandemic years and always believed in me and this project – Cassandra Ng, Leila Picken, Katherine Watson, Jane Atkin, Piers Kelly, Emily Weekes, Callum Fletcher (and Greater Fletchers), Alanna Egan, Charlie Ward, Amanda Fitzgerald, Martin Schulz, Belinda Larocca, the Glampers and Microglampers, Rajith Savanadasa, Mel Joosten, Ash and Luke Mustchin, Serge Rubenstein, Steven Weir, Jason Hilliar, Naomi Bailey, Felicity and Ian Pollock, Nic Low, Leigh Hopkinson, Jessica Ridout, Liz Phelan, Ludo, Judd, Ruthie and Zelda. I wrote this book despite the best efforts of Winifred Doginski, who rejected my writing practice as a legitimate activity for a bonded human, but I am better for her devotion. Finally, I owe thanks and love to Zofia Sagala and the Sagala-Mortimer family, my sister Maz, and – most of all – my parents Hubert and Jadwiga, who are actual scientists.

A Note on Language

My use of the place name 'Aotearoa' or 'Aotearoa New Zealand' throughout this book recognises the prior claim of Māori to the islands that became a settler colony and then a nation. I use these national designations except in cases where I refer to settler institutions such as the Colony of New Zealand or the Parliament of New Zealand, in which case it would be historically inaccurate to use 'Aotearoa' and would also mask the European biases inherent in these institutions.

In the chapters of the book focused on Aotearoa New Zealand, I also use the widely accepted Māori term 'Pākehā' to refer to Anglo-European New Zealanders, and 'iwi' and 'hapū' to refer respectively to community and intra-community groups.

Where possible, this book also relates Aboriginal and Māori figures to the groups with which they identified. In cases of variance in orthography, I use the accepted contemporary spelling in the body of the text, while maintaining variance in direct quotations. Throughout the book I also use contemporary spellings of Māori words, which often include macrons, except where directly quoting from historical sources.

Some of the quotations and ideas scrutinised in this book reflect the ugly currents of racism that drifted through the historical period considered in this work. I have chosen to retain these words and phrases in direct quotations, when relevant, for reasons of fidelity to the context. I also believe that to dampen such language sanitises the complexities and transgressions of historical actors.

A Note on Related Texts

An earlier version of Chapter 5, 'Talking Heads on a Murray River Mission', has appeared as a journal article titled 'Reading Heads on a Murray River Mission' in *History Australia*, 2019, 16 (4): 714–732.

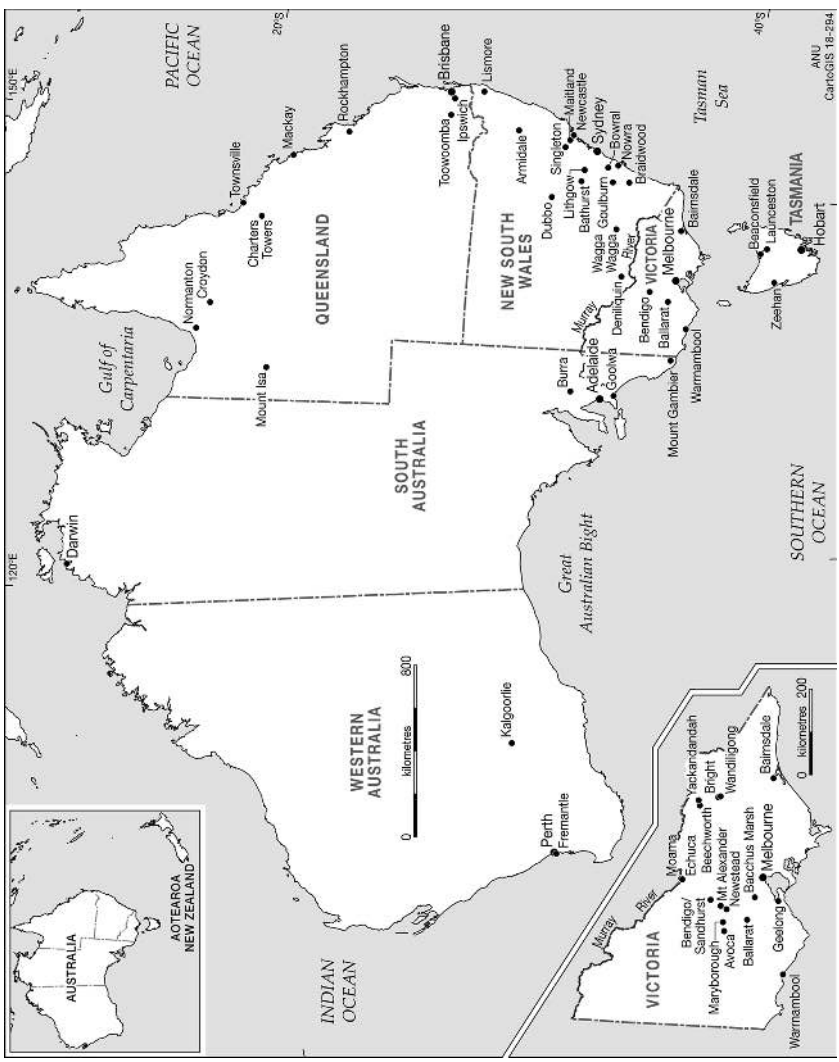

Figure i Australia, late nineteenth century.
CartoGIS Services, College of Asia and the Pacific, Australian National University.

Figure ii Aotearoa New Zealand, present day.
CartoGIS Services, College of Asia and the Pacific, Australian National University.