

## AUSTRALIA IN SEARCH OF IDENTITY: THE CENTENARY OF THE BRITISH COLONIZATION AND THE PROBLEM OF A NATIONAL TRADITION CONSTRUCTING

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By the end of the 1880s the development course of British colonies in Australia made some politicians and public figures bring up the issue of political unification of separate autonomies and their rise in imperial matters in the South Pacific. In 1888 there appeared a reason to express the loyalty to the British Empire as well as to form public opinion on the future of Australia as a unified state. Colonial governments initiated the large-scale celebration of the British colonization centennial of the continent. Despite the doubts expressed by some people in autonomies about the necessity to remember the convict labour past of the continent and certain apathy of Australian cultural periphery, the celebration was significant and caused a broad public discussion on the past and future of Australia and about the attitude of Australians to their country, the Empire, themselves and the world. These events became an important milestone in the formation of Australian nationalism.

**Keywords:** *history of Australia, Australian federation, Australian centenary, Australian Commonwealth, Australian nationalism.*

In the generalizing monograph *The Invention of Tradition* (1983) Eric Hobsbawm first proposed the same-name method of historical research. According to him an *invented tradition* is a combination of social practices that claim certain values and standards of conduct in the mass consciousness by appealing to the past and the repetition of symbolic rules and rituals [10].

Such “*invention*”, as claimed by Hobsbawm, practiced in situations of radical transformation of social structures when outdated traditions lost their power. For example, it happened during the change of political regimes, the transformation of society, the loss or acquisition of new functions by social institutions. The author especially stressed the importance of “*invented traditions*” for studies of modern and contemporary history. In his opinion this tool would allow a better understanding of the “*nation*” phenomenon. “The national phenomenon cannot be adequately investigated without careful attention to the “*invention of tradition*” – Hobsbawm wrote [10. P. 14].

Within this perspective the history of Australia is a broad field of research. In the Russian historical science the process of Australian national ideology formation has not been studied sufficiently. Among the researchers who have addressed to the theme of Australian Nationalist ideology formation one can mention the works of N.S. Skorobogatykh and A.S. Petrikovskaya [3; 5]. The work of I.M. Nokhrin is dedicated to similar subjects but the case study is one more “white” British colony – Canada [2]. The foreign historiography got interested in the national

category of Australia especially due to the bicentennial of British colonization. The works dedicated to the national idea in Australia, written by S. Aloms, L. Traynor, N. McLachan, as well as the collective work on the development of national identity in the British autonomies under the editorship of J. Eddy and D. Schreuder are particularly noteworthy [6; 7; 8; 11]. They study the phenomenon of nationalism as a political discourse in terms of the latest approaches. Nevertheless, the rapid transformation of separate self-governing colonies into Australia, which was based on the idea of the young Australian nation, was significantly unique. In particular, this distinction was in a peaceful, evolutionary creation of a federal state.

The beginning of the British colonization of Australia is traditionally considered to be January 26, 1788, when the First Fleet of convicts arrived at Port Jackson. One hundred years later the continent changed beyond recognition. By 1840 the number of free people already exceeded the number of convicts [4]. “Gold Rush” in the middle of the XIX accelerated the economic development of Australia. For example, the profit from precious metal extraction and subsequent foreign investments allowed the colonies to build railroads and telegraph lines, including transcontinental one [1]. The financial well-being of autonomies affected their cultural development as well. For instance, one can mention a relatively high level of literacy – by 1881 69 % of Australians were able to read and write (and more 9% only read)<sup>1</sup>. Australia

<sup>1</sup> Estimated on materials of: Historical and Colonial Census Data Archive – HCCDA. <http://hccda.ada.edu.au/>

lia's population in the early 1880s was of 2.3 million people in total, most of whom were not migrants but natives of the colonies<sup>1</sup>.

By 1888 there were six colonies, five of which (New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and Queensland) had a responsible government, the rest one – Western Australia – was preparing for the acquisition of a similar status.

The logic of the colonies' development led some public and political figures to the idea of unification of Australasia. This was consistent with the concepts of a common defense system in the region, common tariffs and custom duties, unification of legislation, establishing of trade and commercial relations. However, disunity and "provincial jealousy" of the colonies, the differences in economic policy and in the level of development, lack of communication, the reluctance to share power with the federal government and to lose control over internal affairs were deemed as obstacles to the implementation of the plan.

However, Australians had seen successful examples of federal unions before – the United States, Canada, Germany, and Switzerland. Therefore, in Australia they worked extensively on their own projects of federalization in the last third of the XIX century.

And in 1883 at the conference in Sydney they reached an intercolonial agreement on the formation of the Federal Council – an advisory body, purpose of which was to deal with issues common for all the autonomies. It was an expressed desire for cooperation of self-governing colonies.

However, something more was required for political union of Australia. Even the Federal Council was ineffective, in part because not all the autonomies sent representatives to attend its meetings<sup>2</sup>. As one of its activists wrote, the future prime minister of Australia Alfred Deakin, the Council "remained little more than a debating society, though very useful as a milestone and meeting place for the representatives of the four colonies included"<sup>3</sup>.

On the other hand, the mother country also gave impulses. The year 1887 was an important milestone in the history of Australia. Then in London they had splendid celebrations on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of Queen Victoria's reign. This event was the reason to discuss and rethink the place and role of getting stronger Australian colonies in the

British Empire. As part of the anniversary the first Colonial Conference was held where the "The Australasian Naval Agreement" was adopted with the assistance of the mother country and representatives of all the British autonomies. According to it the squadron of British naval ships should have been based in the ports of Australia and New Zealand, funded by both the imperial government and the autonomies. In peacetime ships going beyond the established boundaries of the Australasian waters would have to be agreed with local governments<sup>4</sup>.

This document caused a discussion about new principles of political relations between Great Britain and resettlement colonies, which would have been affected by the increased capacity of the latter.

The valid idea of the Australian nation was necessary for the autonomies to extend their authority while dealing with regional issues. The interaction between the autonomies and foreign states increased in matters of territorial expansion, trade and migration, which led the colonial elite to the desire to act in the international affairs on behalf of the British Empire. In their view, such a goal could be achieved through the union of autonomies, allowing them to interact with other states as a "guardian" of the whole Empire interests in the South Pacific. Sir Samuel Griffith, Premier of Queensland, wrote, "Not many years would elapse before we should see a united Australian Dominion, controlling the Southern hemisphere"<sup>5</sup>. For example, when the upcoming celebration of the next centennial of Australia being discussed in the Parliament of New South Wales, the following remark was made: if the centenary passes unnoticed, then the autonomy will be completely discredited in the eyes of the European financial market [11].

The idea of the future union of colonies assumed that previously disjointed autonomies would be perceived as a single state with a common history and broad prospects for development. The need for a national ideology pushed Australian authorities to create a new tradition – the celebration of the anniversary of Australia.

The idea of such a celebration was not new, for example, in 1876 the USA celebrated the centenary of the Declaration of Independence. In Australia January 26 was a holiday since 1808, but unofficial and little. It acquired an official status only in 1830 and remained insignificant. In 1888 they celebrated the centennial of Australia's settlement by Europeans as a national event.

<sup>1</sup> Estimated on materials of: Historical and Colonial Census Data Archive – HCCDA. <http://hccda.ada.edu.au/>

<sup>2</sup> New South Wales has never participated in the Federal Council for reasons of principle. In addition to New South Wales, New Zealand did not take part in its work, and South Australia send their delegates only in 1889–1891.

<sup>3</sup> Deakin A. (2000). *Federal Story: The Inner History of Federal Cause (1880–1900)*. Sydney. P. 23.

<sup>4</sup> The Australasian Naval Agreement // *Speeches and documents on New Zealand history*. Oxford, 1971. Pp. 252–253

<sup>5</sup> *Imperial Federation. The Journal of the Imperial Federation League*. Vol. V. January to December 1890. P. 78.

The Governments of autonomies were initiators and organizers of the celebrations, which distinguished Australia from, for example, the United States where similar events were held thanks to many independent private organizations [9]. The initiative came from the Parliament of New South Wales and Victoria.

The event had a small response from the metropolis. The offices of Australian agents-general in London were closed in honor of the holiday<sup>1</sup>. Several London newspapers published articles on the anniversary, including congratulations<sup>2</sup>, and reported on the banquet organized in the British capital by F. Dangar from Sydney<sup>3</sup>.

In the very Australia not only governments took active part in the celebrations but also public organizations. Among them one should note the Australian Natives Association, known for its support for the federal movement. Other organizations also joined the celebrations. They were labour unions, religious, sports, women, educational and other societies such as Victoria Amateur Turf Club (racing club) in Melbourne or music bands in Sydney.

However, there were some doubts about the dissonant cause for celebration because it was the anniversary of convict settlement. Associations with the criminal past did not fit in the image of a prosperous and respectable autonomy, which was formed in New South Wales in the 1880s. The influential Sydney journal *Bulletin* offered not to celebrate the landing of prisoners at all, and suggested the date of Eureka Rebellion, which had resulted in the democratization of local government, as all-Australian celebration<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, according to the rest of Australasia, Sydney put this holiday in a too privileged position against other colonies which had not existed 100 years before [11]. It can be seen on the materials of the Australian press. Thus, the weekly newspaper *Western Mail* (Perth, Western Australia) wrote that all the celebration was organized mainly in honor of New South Wales, not Australia. "Australians by no means a sentimental people, – *Western Mail* journalists continued their argument, – and, although the national spirit is growing up amongst them, their separate existence has been too short for any wide dissemination of those glowing feelings of patriotic love by which elsewhere men's minds are animated to their "fatherland". Therefore, Sydney celebrated with great enthusiasm, and, for example, in Perth

there were no any special celebrations different from any other public holiday<sup>5</sup>. However, while comparing with the United States, the researchers note that in Australia the alienation from the celebration was not of an equally serious nature as the position of the American South in 1876 [9].

The convict past of "mother colony" gave rise to a different positioning of autonomies in this celebration. The newspaper *South Australian Register* (Adelaide, South Australia) drew readers' attention to the fact that, unlike New South Wales, South Australia emerged as initially free settlement, and it was proud of it<sup>6</sup>. *Western Mail*, on the contrary, emphasized a similar to "mother colony" path of transformation of Western Australia from the place of convicts to the free land, and it was also the subject of its pride<sup>7</sup>.

However, all the newspapers had a common picture of the continent development after colonization. In their articles, the history of Australia was presented as a way to overcome all kinds of difficulties. The unusual nature and climate, unexplored territory, the psychological discomfort of people permanently expelled from the homeland, and initially vicious management system had created difficult conditions for the early settlers. However, Australia made incredible progress in a hundred years according to world standards, and that ensured the continent a bright future, the newspapers wrote<sup>8</sup>.

It is worth noting that there was a difference in the reflection of the anniversary celebrations in the press of richer autonomies in comparison with their neighbours. New South Wales and, to a lesser extent, Victoria, the two most developed colonies, became the centre of events. In other autonomies the events dedicated to the centenary of Australia were less ambitious. In the press they often published news from Sydney and Melbourne as telegraphic messages from their own correspondents with minimal mentioning of local events, as, for example, in *Mercury* (Hobart, Tasmania) and *South Australian Register* (Adelaide, South Australia). There was even a letter sent by one anonymous reader of the last newspaper to the editor. He was indignant at small-scale celebrations in South Australia where offices had to work unlike the rest of autonomies. The author asked the South Australian authorities not to keep out of the national

<sup>5</sup> *Western Mail*. January 28, 1888. P. 13, 24.

<sup>6</sup> *South Australian Register*. January 26, 1888. P. 4-5.

<sup>7</sup> *Western Mail*. January 21, 1888. P. 15.

*Western Mail*. January 28, 1888. P. 28.

<sup>8</sup> *South Australian Register*. January 26, 1888. P. 4-5.

*Western Mail*. January 28, 1888. P. 28.

*Brisbane Courier*. January 27, 1888. P. 6.

*Argus*. January 26, 1888. P. 5.

*Sydney Morning Herald*. January 26, 1888. P. 7

<sup>1</sup> *South Australian Register*. January 26, 1888. P. 5.

<sup>2</sup> *South Australian Advertiser*. January 27, 1888. P. 5.

<sup>3</sup> *Argus*. January 28, 1888. P. 12.

<sup>4</sup> A centennial oration // Colonial voices: Letters, Diaries, Journalism and other accounts of nineteenth-century Australia. (1989) Ed. by Webby E. St. Lucia. Pp. 391-397.

holiday and assured readers that businessmen would support the idea of closing their stores in honour of Australia Day.<sup>1</sup> It shows a much smaller value of traditions formed away from the main cultural, political and economic centres.

The newspapers reported that official banquets, meetings of public organizations, theatrical performances, illuminations and fireworks were the main forms of celebrations. As it had been in the US in 1876, this time in Melbourne an international exhibition was opened (though not on the anniversary date, only in August). And the centre of events – Sydney – saw a ceremonial opening of the city park and the monument to the Queen as well as a lush state banquet. In the areas remote from Sydney and Melbourne private parties, balls, masquerades, picnics, walks were more typical. However, on a continental scale sporting events such as regattas, racing, cricket and baseball competitions were the most frequent ways of celebration.

Celebrations were complicated by the complex entity of colonial, Australian and Empire identity, which, on the one hand, cast doubt on the sincerity of politicians and the nature of celebrations [11], and on the other hand, it demonstrated the differences in the perception of Australia by its inhabitants – former migrants and “old-timers”, conservatives and radicals, residents of the capitals and the bush. For example, *Western Mail* reported, “provincial jealousies, sectional objects and local ambitions” still divide the continent<sup>2</sup>. “We are Victorians, Tasmanians, Queenslanders, in the first place – Australians only in the second”, – the same newspaper stated a week later<sup>3</sup>. And Henry Parkes, Premier of New South Wales, gave a speech at the official banquet in honour of the anniversary and called on the audience to express full loyalty to Britain, Empire and the Anglo-Saxon race, not to the unity of Australians, which he imagined only in the indefinite future<sup>4</sup>.

Moreover, Parks proposed to rename the New South Wales to Australia. The idea was accepted by other autonomies as highly eccentric, and it had a response as there appeared humorous ideas to re-

name the New South Wales to Convictoria or Injailia, where play on words was used to point at colonial convict past [8].

At the same time the newspaper *Argus* (Melbourne, Victoria) wrote that the uniting of Australia was the first step to an imperial federation, and it brought together nationalists and imperialists<sup>5</sup>.

While discussing the past and future, *Argus* mentioned interesting facts in what way Australians differed from the British due to the history of one hundred years. According to the newspaper, Australians had the following appearance. They were taller and slimmer than the inhabitants of the British Isles, they also had less broad chest and elongated limbs. By nature they were initiative, friendly and open-hearted. They especially liked physical activity and they could not stand routine. Australian women were also taller and slimmer than English women were. They had high-pitched voices, and, like men, they loved physical activity and that is why they were good horse riders and they could dance without getting tired. By nature Australian women were freer and braver than women from the British Isles. All these features were explained by the climate and difficult conditions of life on the fifth continent<sup>6</sup>.

Such stereotypes created the same invented tradition. To celebrate the day of the whole of Australia it was necessary to explain its unity by population community, allegedly different from the rest of the world, including their “parents” – the inhabitants of the British Isles.

Thus, the centennial celebration of Australia’s colonization by the British set up one of the first national traditions which still exists today in the form of the national holiday – Australia Day. The need for integration of autonomies under the auspices of the young Australian nation pushed the inhabitants of the fifth continent to create a common history, celebrations of important events, even to defining of their own physical characteristics. Despite the fact that not everyone adopted this “tradition” at first, it was looking for the ground of the Australian nation in the past, and as a result had an impact on public attitudes towards the future of Australia.

<sup>1</sup> South Australian Register. January 25, 1888. P. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Western Mail. January 21, 1888. P. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Western Mail. January 28, 1888. P. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Brisbane Courier. January 27, 1888. P. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Argus. January 26, 1888. P. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. P. 5.

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## АВСТРАЛИЯ В ПОИСКАХ ИДЕНТИЧНОСТИ: СТОЛЕТНИЙ ЮБИЛЕЙ БРИТАНСКОЙ КОЛОНИЗАЦИИ И ПРОБЛЕМА КОНСТРУИРОВАНИЯ НАЦИОНАЛЬНОЙ ТРАДИЦИИ

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К концу 1880-х гг. логика развития британских колоний в Австралии заставляла некоторых политических и общественных деятелей поднимать вопрос о политическом объединении разрозненных автономий и обретении ими большего веса в имперских делах, касавшихся южной части Тихого океана. В 1888 г. появился повод как для выражения лояльности империи, так и для формирования общественного мнения по вопросу будущего Австралии как единого государства. По инициативе властей автономий было проведено масштабное празднование столетия со дня британской колонизации континента. Несмотря на сомнения некоторой части населения автономий касательно необходимости вспоминать каторжное прошлое континента, а также некоторую апатию культурной периферии Австралии, это празднование имело значительный масштаб и стало поводом для широкого общественного обсуждения вопросов о прошлом и будущем Австралии, об отношении австралийцев к своей стране и к империи, к себе самим и всему миру. Эти события стали важной вехой в процессе создания австралийского национализма.

**Ключевые слова:** *история Австралии, австралийская федерация, столетие Австралии, Австралийский Союз, австралийский национализм.*

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