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THE 1872–3 CRUISE OF THE PEARL-SHELLING SCHOONER *FRANZ*: REORDERING THE SOUTHWEST PACIFIC MARITIME TRADE

By Steve Mullins

On 2 July 1872 the 148 ton schooner *Franz*, under the command of the Prussian Edwin Redlich, cleared from Sydney on a pearl-shelling cruise to Torres Strait. News of the discovery of rich pearl-shell beds in the Strait had first reached Sydney late in 1869 when William Banner of the brig *Pakeha* returned with 50 tons of highly prized *Pinctada maxima*, the large silver or gold lip shell that would soon make the north Australian grounds the richest source of mother-of-pearl in the world. Banner's cargo, collected in a few weeks from shallow water adjacent to his bêche-de-mer (trepang) station at Tutu Island, fetched between £150 and £180 a ton in Sydney, and was worth at least £7,500. This represented a spectacular profit and sparked a rush of Sydney vessels to the Strait. In 1871 the *Australasian Packet* collected 20 tons of shell in just three weeks; the *Kate Kearney* 21 tons in two months. By 1872 there were 20 vessels with 500 boat crew and divers working the Torres Strait grounds.[1] The *Franz*, however, was not among them. Although the vessel had cleared for Torres Strait,[2] Redlich, after engaging divers in the southwest Pacific, took the schooner around the north coast of New Guinea, and did not reach his declared destination for seven months. The *Franz* ghosted into Somerset, the small outpost at the eastern tip of Cape York Peninsula that was the Strait's administrative centre, on 10 February 1873. Half its crew had been killed, the other half were severely debilitated by fever, and Redlich had missed the 1872 Torres Strait pearl-shelling season altogether.

The *Franz*'s 1872–3 voyage occurred at a time when Australian pearl-shelling was in its infancy, and only beginning to shake off its southwest Pacific maritime trade origins. Although initially it was carried on using the same technologies, and within the same framework of capital and labour as those earlier key southwest Pacific maritime industries, sandalwood and bêche-de-mer (dried sea cucumber), owners, managers and sailing masters had to adapt quickly when the lucrative shell became harder to find. Then, in the late 1870s, pearl-shelling was revolutionized by the introduction of Augustus Siebe's full-dress, helmet deep-diving technology, which made it more capital intensive, more concentrated, shifted the balance of power favourably from capital towards labour, and altered and then fixed for nearly a century the ethnic composition of the workforce. The *Franz*'s voyage provides useful insights into the industry in the very early stages of transition, at a time when the most demanding challenge for pearl-shelling masters was adjusting to rapidly changing regulatory regimes and shifting loci of power along the maritime frontiers of colonialism.

SOUTHWEST PACIFIC MARITIME TRADE

Collecting pearl-shell is an ancient business, but for most of its history its principal object has been to find the lustrous pearl the shell occasionally produces. In antiquity, the main sources of high quality pearls were the Red Sea, the Arabian Gulf, and the Gulf of Mannar between Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and India.[3] However, most pearl-bearing shells are useless for anything but burning for lime, and while some, like those in the Mexican Gulf, are workable, they do not match *Pinctada maxima*, which is large and flat and has for centuries been preferred for carving and inlay. The more valuable silver lip variety is mainly found in four regions: the Mergui Archipelago, the Sulu Islands between Borneo and Mindanao, the northern Arafura Sea, and on the tropical coast of northern Australia. Pearl-shelling, that is the business of collecting mother-of-pearl, emerged in its modern industrial form in Australia. This came about as a result of rising demand in Europe and the United States from the 1850s for high quality buttons, the expansion in the late 1860s of the Pacific maritime trade west to discover the rich shelling grounds of Torres Strait, and the application of existing technologies and new techniques to the problem of finding and collecting shell in deep water. Mother-of-pearl from various sources continued to be used for ornamentation, but 80 to 90 per cent of the *Pinctada maxima* collected by full-dress helmet divers was stamped into buttons. Pearl-shell had long been used for superior buttons on exclusive hand-made garments, but the shift towards the mass production of better quality clothes in the middle of the nineteenth century greatly accelerated demand.[4] Of course *Pinctada maxima* produces beautiful pearls, and shellers always welcomed finds, but even in the best managed operations, with tight procedures to ensure that managers recovered the gems from divers, pearls usually represented less than 12 per cent of profit.[5]

The *Franz* left Sydney at a time when pearl-shelling in Torres Strait was still easily identifiable as a frontier of the southwest Pacific maritime trade, marked by all the characteristics that typified that complex pattern of behaviours and practices. Most vessels sailed from Sydney, and had previously been engaged in cutting sandalwood and collecting bêche-de-mer. There were no official means of issuing master's certificates in the Australasian colonies until the mid-1870s,[6] and while most of those commanding larger trading vessels had undergone the usual apprenticeships in the merchant service or the navy, many of the smaller operators were ordinary sailors, who after years of experience at sea, had been placed in charge of vessels or had purchased their own. Generally speaking, the 'respectable' classes in the Australasian colonies held sailors in low regard, and this applied particularly to those in the southwest Pacific trade. In 1853 the captain of a French frigate stationed at Noumea described them as being 'formed of whatever was most foul and abandoned of the outcastes of Sydney'.[7] By the late 1860s, however, the majority of sailors in the southwest Pacific were Islanders from one group or another.[8] Most were mission-educated Protestants, and spoke bêche-le-mar, the *lingua franca* of the southwest Pacific trade.[9]

Southwest Pacific traders first went to Torres Strait prospecting for more profitable bêche-de-mer grounds.[10] Sandalwood was petering out, and they were forced to rely more on bêche-de-mer to make up their cargoes. William Banner was the first to arrive. Backed by the pioneer trader James Paddon, he set out from Noumea in the 100 ton brig *Julia Percy* in July 1860 to reconnoitre Torres Strait and

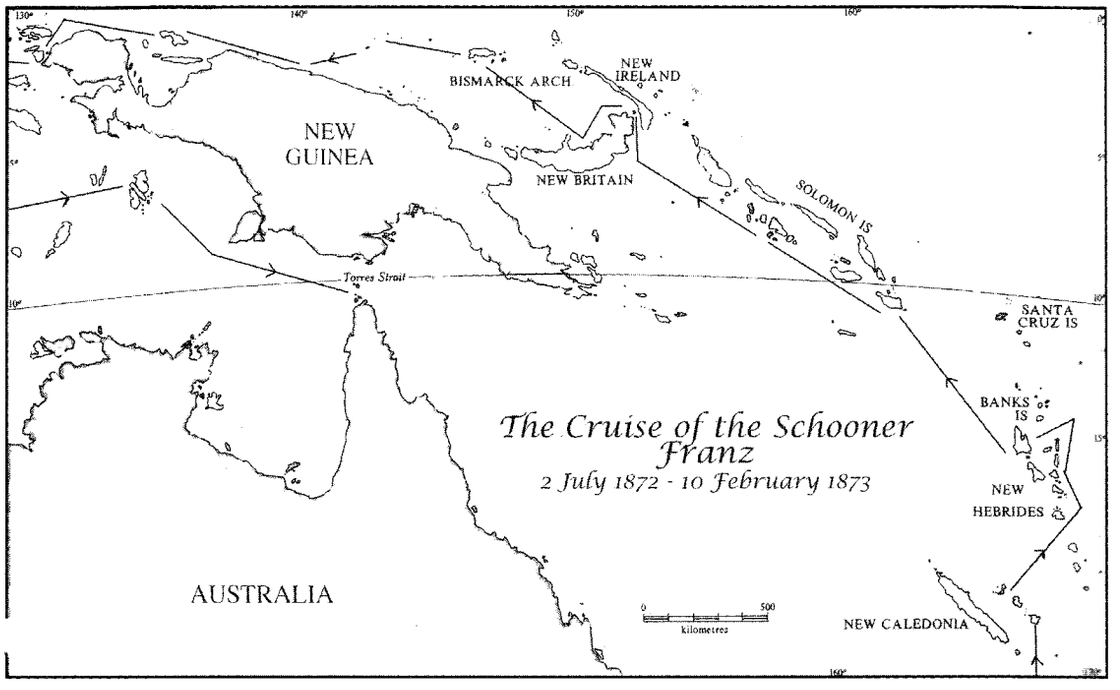

Fig. 1. Map showing the course of the schooner *Franz*, 1872–3.

the Great Barrier Reef.[11] Banner found bêche-de-mer in payable quantities and was soon followed by Charles Edwards, another of Paddon's partners, but now in association with the prominent Sydney merchant-shipowner Robert Towns. By 1869 there were seven bêche-de-mer vessels regularly working the waters of the Strait, and most turned immediately to pearl-shelling when, as we have seen, Banner revealed the extent and quality of the ground.[12]

The Torres Strait industry started virtually from scratch. A small cargo of 12 tons of *Pinctada maxima* had been shipped from the northwest coast of Australia in 1867, and news of it in the Fremantle press encouraged others to try their luck.[13] But the beginnings of pearl-shelling in the west coincided so closely with that of Torres Strait that there was nothing to be learned from there about how best to go about the business.[14] Thus, the pioneer Torres Strait shellers trusted to methods of management honed in the southwest Pacific. Finance continued to be raised mostly in Sydney. The nature of the arrangements between merchants and masters were much the same, complex and informal, and initially at least, shell was collected by Pacific Islanders swimming from small luggers, who were engaged and paid as in the bêche-de-mer business.[15] But the socio-political context of Torres Strait pearl-shelling was about to undergo radical change.

In August 1872, while the *Franz* was at sea, the British colony of Queensland extended its maritime boundary 60 miles to encompass half of Torres Strait, which brought the southern islands under the provisions of its Polynesian Labourers Protection Act of 1868, which had been designed to regulate the employment of Pacific Islander labourers on Queensland's burgeoning sugar plantations.[16] In the

same month, Britain passed the Imperial Kidnapping Act of 1872 to eliminate the use of force and deception by British vessels recruiting Pacific Islander labourers 'not being within the jurisdiction of any civilized power'.[17] As I have pointed out elsewhere, the conjunction of these laws in Torres Strait caused considerable confusion among colonial officials, Royal Navy officers and pearl-shelling masters about how the employment of Pacific Islanders in Torres Strait's maritime industries was to be regulated, or whether it was lawful at all.[18] By late 1872 most shellers had abandoned the Strait for fear of seizure, and the uncertainty discouraged Redlich from proceeding directly there, and diverted him instead to the west coast of New Guinea where he encountered power relationships that were even more unfathomable, and which for him and his crew were to prove disastrous.

ENGAGING MEN

When the *Franz* left Sydney in July 1872 Redlich had 17 hands aboard all told: two Prussian mates, a Rotuman leading hand, a Chinese cook, four Fijians and nine Loyalty Islanders.[19] According to the log, Jimmy Rotumah was in the 'last stages of consumption' when the *Franz* set out, which suggests Redlich was desperate for leading hands, and after passing through Sydney Heads he made straight for the Loyalty Islands where he could expect to engage experienced crew. Loyalty Islanders had been sailing on European ships since the first whalers passed through the region in the early nineteenth century, and the London Missionary Society (LMS) that had been established there since the 1840s was not adverse to the young men in its congregations joining colonial traders. Indeed, the Protestant missionaries considered work on a British trading vessel preferable to them remaining under the influence of the French, and therefore Catholic regime in Noumea, which had governed the Loyalty Islands since 1853.[20] The conjunction between Loyalty Islanders, the sea-going life and the activities of the LMS is well illustrated in a sermon given by a Lifuian missionary to his countrymen, who in 1871 were about to begin the daunting work of converting the island of New Guinea. He explained their task thus:

> New Guinea is the whale. It is sighted. We are going to chase it. You are the first boat, remember. Take care and make fast; and we will follow and help to tow it in. The consequences of any mismanagement on your part may be very serious. You may only wound the whale and drive it away.[21]

On 13 July 1872 Redlich anchored at Maré and shipped two men, one of them Samoan, in the presence of the Revd Archibald Murray. At the time, Murray was in the throes of establishing the LMS's New Guinea mission. The Society had decided to use the Torres Strait islands as 'stepping stones' to that large and formidable place, and the first contingent of Pacific Islander missionaries had been disembarked there a year before in July 1871. Murray was just about to return, and thus he had good reason to cultivate the goodwill of traders who were making for the Strait, and to encourage Pacific Islanders sympathetic to the LMS to go to there as well.[22] Murray witnessed the agreements, and both men shipped on a 200th lay. The Fijians engaged in Sydney also were on a 200th lay, but with a £5 advance. Redlich then sailed to Lifu where, with the help of a European interpreter, he engaged two more men, one of them a New Hebridean, before leaving for Uvea, where he hired two more Loyalty

Islanders. Redlich returned to Lifu before heading north, and managed to engage three more men before leaving. Apart from the two who had signed on before Murray at Maré, all those engaged in the Loyalty Islands were taken on at £1 per month.[23] This was a third of that paid to colonial sailors,[24] but twice the going rate for Pacific Islander agricultural labourers destined for the sugar plantations of Queensland and Fiji.

The lay was brought to the southwest Pacific by the early whalers, and was adopted by traders in the sandalwood and bêche-de-mer industries. It was common for them to pay a mixture of lay and wages, depending on experience, skill or activity. The lay was, of course, an incentive to encourage productivity. The usual lay for a colonial seaman in the sandalwood industry was a 70th or a 75th[25] so Redlich's offer of a 200th to his men was roughly proportionate to the third of a white wage the £1 represented. By the late 1860s bêche-de-mer crews in Torres Strait mostly were on a lay, but it was calculated on the profit of the voyage, and not, as in the whaling industry, as a percentage of the value of the catch. Calculating the profit was left to the shipowners and sailing masters, and there was considerable scope for deception.[26] The slippage between the whaling and bêche-de-mer lay probably occurred because bêche-de-mer collecting was less skilled, the crews were almost entirely Pacific Islanders, and they often consisted of a high proportion of green hands. It was also common for women to be employed at the stations, and this probably also acted to suppress wages. In short, bêche-de-mer crews were more vulnerable to exploitation than were the more cosmopolitan and industrially alert whaling crews.

The Torres Strait pearl-shell fishery was only two seasons old when the *Franz* made its voyage, and the £1 a month that Redlich paid his divers reflects the generally low value placed on their labour at that stage. From the Red Sea to the Gulf of Mexico, divers had always been drawn from the very poorest classes, often the dispossessed. In the early years in Torres Strait, good sailors were more difficult to find than swimming divers, and were paid accordingly. Experienced sailors were more likely to be offered a lay, like the Samoan engaged at Lifu, who was entered as a 'good hand'. Within a decade, though, the situation was reversed. As pearl-shell was fished out in shallow water, intense competition developed for experienced Pacific Islander divers, and this forced their wages up. With the advent of full-dress helmet deep-diving technology, never a viable option on the ancient pearling grounds, experienced and highly skilled 'hard hat' divers were even more valuable to their employers. By the late 1870s divers were being paid between £6 and £12 a month, plus a lay of between £6 and £12 a ton. Pump tenders earned £2 a month and ordinary sailors £1.[27] By the late 1880s the best Pacific Islander divers could earn £200 a year, and the lay had become restricted to divers.[28] By the 1890s the lay had risen to between £20 and £25, but by then divers were almost exclusively Asian – Japanese, Filipinos and Malays.

That Redlich failed to engage sufficient divers in the Loyalty Islands to make up his full complement probably indicates that he had misread the rapidly changing labour market and miscalculated their worth. Whatever the case, he now had to cruise further north and be content with whatever men he could get. The *Franz* visited all the islands in the Banks group but Redlich was wary of landing. He was right to be cautious. When a boat party from the *Franz* eventually did land, at Ureaparapara, it was rushed. There was a short, sharp confrontation before the sailors

could get away, fortunately without loss of life on either side. Redlich then sailed northwest to San Cristobal, arriving on 3 August. Jimmy Rotumah died two days later, finally succumbing to the pulmonary disease that had dogged him since Sydney. He was taken ashore and given a Christian burial before the *Franz* continued on to Makira Bay on the northwest side of San Cristobal. Whalers often visited Makira Bay, and there had been a missionary station there, but Redlich was unable to persuade any men to go pearl-shelling. He wooded and watered ship, then stood for the Admiralty Islands. Once there, the prevailing trade winds made it almost impossible to set any course but for the west coast of New Guinea, which meant forgoing a sure ground, Torres Strait, for the vicissitudes of prospecting.

THE *BASILISK* SEIZURES

There is no direct evidence to explain why Redlich made this choice. He still needed more men to pearl-shell efficiently. A schooner the size of the *Franz* would usually employ 40 or 50 swimming divers.[29] He had about 25. By now he was convinced that Solomon Islanders would not join colonial trading vessels because of the depredations of plantation labour recruiters,[30] and he may have decided that it was imperative to continue into more lightly contacted regions to find willing men: this

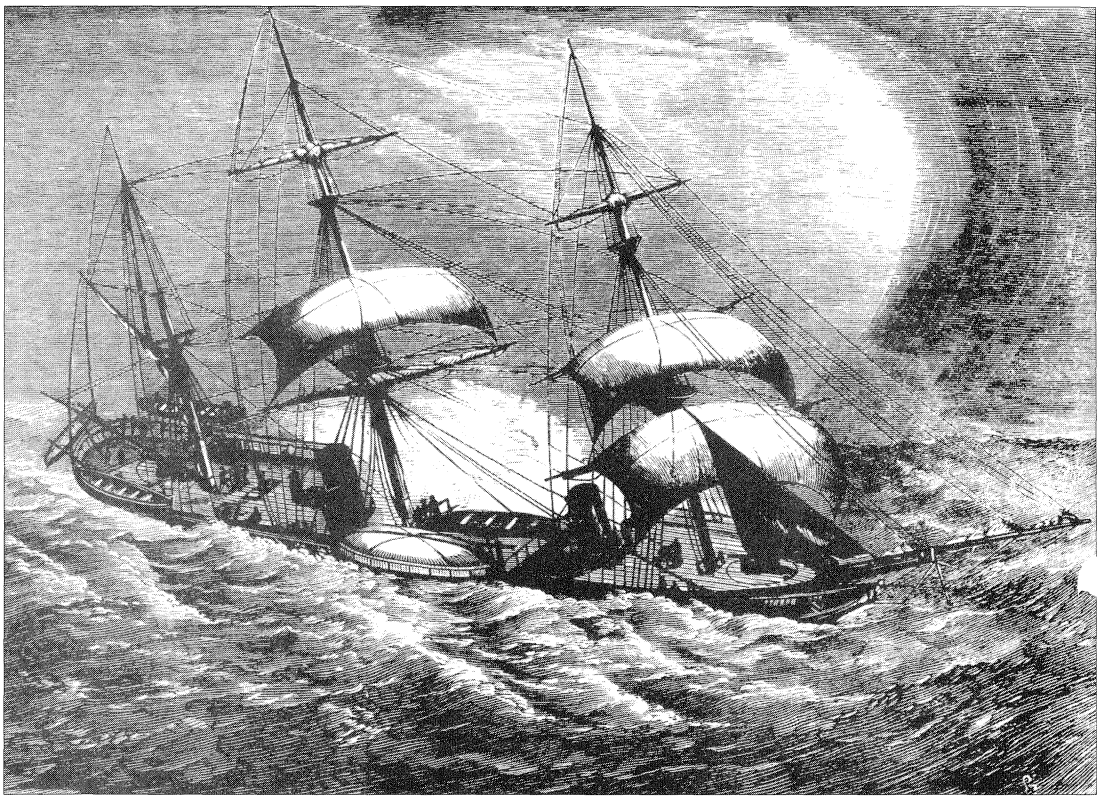

Fig. 2. HMS *Basilisk*. (*Illustrated Sydney News*, 7 August 1871)

logic might have taken him beyond the point of no return. But it is more probable that he was avoiding Torres Strait because of the implications of Queensland's extended maritime boundary and the Imperial Kidnapping Act of 1872.

The Kidnapping Act was passed on 27 June 1872, less than a week before the *Franz* left Sydney, and came into immediate effect on the high seas. It was proclaimed in Queensland on 31 August 1872, the same month that that colony extended its jurisdiction 60 miles into Torres Strait, and in New South Wales on 5 September 1872. Although its purpose was to prevent deception in the recruitment of Pacific Islander plantation labourers, it had an immediate impact on the maritime industries. Among other things, the Act required all masters intending to take Pacific Islanders on a voyage to obtain a licence and enter into a bond of £500, or risk seizure. On 1 August 1872 the masters of the schooners *Melanie* and *Western Star*, pearl-shelling in Torres Strait, brought their crews into Somerset to be formally signed on before the police magistrate, in an attempt to conform to the Act. If these masters, so remote from the lines of communication, were, by the end of July, alert to their vulnerability under the new regulations, surely Redlich, who had only just left Sydney, also was aware of the risk he was taking engaging divers in the southwest Pacific. And the risk was real. On 5 January 1873 Captain John Moresby of the 1,030 ton paddlewheel steamer HMS *Basilisk* seized and placed prize crews aboard the pearl-shelling schooners *Melanie* and *Challenge*, and on 9 January the pearl-shelling barque *Woodbine*, and on 14 January the bêche-de-mer barque *Chrisna*. They were all intercepted while returning to Sydney from Torres Strait at the end of the 1872 pearl-shelling season; a few weeks before the *Franz* finally arrived at Somerset. They had all gone to sea, and engaged their crews, well before the new regulations came into force.

PROSPECTING FOR PEARL-SHELL

Redlich made his way to Simbo Bay, and although he stayed almost a week he was still unable to recruit divers. As his log records, 'Many natives came off, but we found them in dread of being taken away, as they sang out, "No make man fast" '.[31] He then sailed through the passage that separates New Britain and New Ireland and anchored in the northwest bay of Duke of York Island. Here at last the islanders were friendly, and 'came aboard in swarms'. Redlich bartered Hamburg plug tobacco for pigs, fowl and vegetables, and using a local headman as intermediary was able to put seven more men on articles at £1 a month. Now with an adequate complement of 34, Redlich continued to the Admiralty Islands where he commenced to search for pearl-shell. He worked for nearly a month in the group without success, before moving to the L'Exchequer Islands where, in a frightening incident, the *Franz* was becalmed and jammed by strong currents onto a reef. This was always a danger when prospecting for pearl-shell in reef-strewn, poorly charted tropical waters. Redlich immediately ordered a party onto the reef to build a shelter for provisions in case the *Franz* began to take water and slide into the deep. He then set the rest of the crew with crowbars and hammers to break up the coral under the schooner. Working desperately, they managed to clear the rudder just as a land breeze sprang up to push the vessel clear. Once over this calamity, Redlich spent a week fruitlessly prospecting for shell in the group before deciding on 26 October 1872 to make for the New Guinea coast.

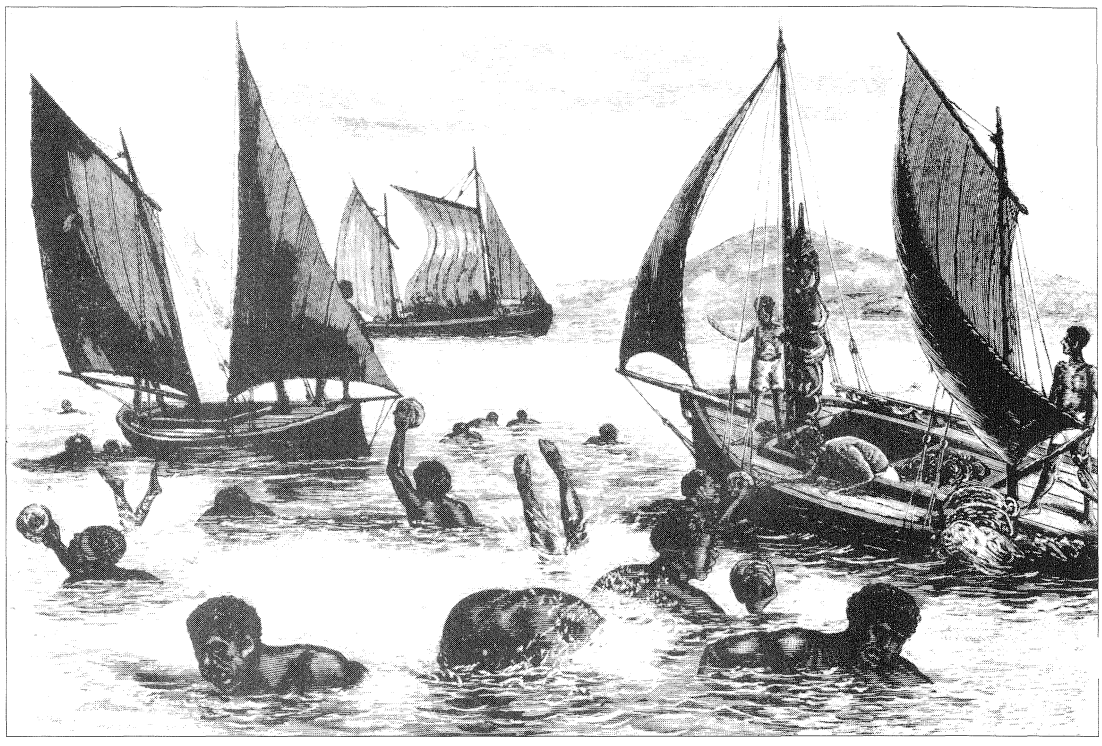

Fig. 3. The Pearl Fleet. (Andrew Garran [ed.], *Picturesque Atlas of Australasia* [Sydney, 1886])

NETHERLANDS NEW GUINEA

On 10 November 1872 the *Franz* reached the head of Sele Strait between the island of Salawati and the western extremity of New Guinea, coming to anchor off the town of Sorong. Here Redlich was safe from seizure by a British man-of-war under the Kidnapping Act, because these waters were within the jurisdiction of a 'civilized power', the Netherlands. However, although Sorong flew the Dutch flag, political authority in the region did not reside absolutely with the colonial power. Indeed, the situation was ambiguous. Since 1848 the Dutch, by secret decree, had exercised authority over the Papuan islands and the west coast of New Guinea indirectly through treaties with the spice-rich Sultan of Tidore. However, by an earlier 1828 proclamation, these areas had been annexed directly to the Dutch Crown. Thus, there existed a legal anomaly. Furthermore, the 1848 decree describing Tidorean territory could hardly have been more vague. It was those areas 'which are in possession of His Highness at present and are considered to belong to his realm in accordance with existing and later to be completed description'.[32] Nevertheless, the Dutch encouraged the Sultan vigorously to exert authority over his domain, and he did this by *Hongi* raids led by local Rajahs, the main purpose of which was to collect tribute and take slaves.[33] In 1872 the Dutch once again asserted formal sovereignty over western New Guinea by redefining the Sultan's authority as a kind of feudal tenure.[34] But although the Sultan's authority was now diminished, and perhaps threatened, the 1872 contract still required him to manage his territory, though in a

3. 4. Map showing western New Guinea.

more humane fashion than in the past. Thus, when the *Franz* arrived in Sele Strait the political situation was in flux, and the source of real authority uncertain. At the core of power, however, was the imperative to control resources, either through monopoly or tribute, and this remained in the hands of the local Rajah. Although there was intense rivalry among the Rajahs of the Papuan islands, at Sorong Redlich had arrived in the domain of Abu Kasim, the Rajah of Salawati.

MASSACRE

On 12 November Redlich sent the *Franz*'s first mate, Henry Schluetor, with 17 men in two boats provisioned for three weeks to prospect for pearl-shell. When the boats had not returned by 6 December a whale boat was sent to search, and to take a request for assistance to a man-of-war that Redlich knew was anchored at Gilolo (Halmahera), 300 miles to the west. The whale boat returned two days later with news that the man-of-war, which turned out to be the Italian *Vittor Pisani*, had departed, and that there were no signs of the missing pearl-shelling boats. Redlich then sailed the *Franz* to Samaté on Salawati to seek the help of Abu Kasim, but the Rajah was away at sea. While they waited for his return Redlich learned that the missing pearl-shelling boats had visited Samaté before starting their expedition, and he became suspicious of the Rajah. When Kasim returned, however, he diverted blame to the Papuans on the coast: Schluetor had been warned that they were dangerous, but laughed this off, pointing to the arms his men carried. Pearl-shelling crews in this era often went well armed, and they were composed of very fit men in their prime. In most places, the sight of them was intimidation enough: apparently not so on the west coast of New Guinea.

Abu Kasim agreed to search for the lost boats, and Redlich supplied him with 'guns, revolvers and ammunition', but Kasim would not let Redlich join the expedition 'because he did not wish the natives to see white men in the boats'.[35] To be seen as subordinate to anyone risked diminishing his authority. But it may also have been a convenient cover, to allow time to obscure any traces of his involvement in the fate of the missing divers. Whatever the case, Kasim returned five days later with six guns, a double-barrelled breech-loader, a revolver, a compass and a cartridge pouch, all from the *Franz*, and Schluetor's watch and jacket; he reported nothing of the boats. It was now certain that Redlich's men were dead, so the pearl-sheller insisted that Kasim mount a punitive expedition. On 30 December Kasim with 120 of his followers, and this time with Redlich and his remaining crew, set out in nine *kora kora* (Moluccan war praus). They quickly determined where the boats had been attacked and which village was responsible. Two *kora kora* were despatched and returned with three captives, one of whom, Kasim revealed, had admitted his guilt. Redlich shot him, he was beheaded, and his body was hanged in a tree to serve as a warning to others. The other two were taken by Kasim, and in Redlich's words, 'died a most horrible death'.[36]

About a year after this gruesome event, rumours began to circulate among foreigners in the Moluccas that Redlich's men had been killed on the instructions of Abu Kasim himself. Dr Adolf Meyer, an ethnographer and countryman of Redlich, was in the region shortly afterwards. On the authority of a sailing master, Meyer maintained that Kasim had warned Redlich's men not to shell in his territory, and when they defied him they were killed. Meyer described Abu Kasim as a particularly treacherous and dangerous man, and in his opinion the three executed Papuans were innocent stooges.[37] The French naturalist A. Raffray, on his 1877 voyage to the north coast of New Guinea, heard the same version of the story.[38] The Italian naturalists D'Albertis and Becarri were actually in Sele Strait at the time of the incident. Indeed, on the evening of 21 November 1872, shortly after the *Franz* divers had set out, Redlich joined the Italians aboard their schooner to do 'honour to Bacchus'.[39] D'Albertis also had a low opinion of Abu Kasim. When he and Becarri first arrived

at Salawati, Kasim was away raiding the New Guinea coast.[40]

Given the nature of power relations in the west Papuan islands, where in 1872 the Dutch were nervous about foreign intervention,[41] the Sultan of Tidore faced loss of status and therefore wealth, and the Rajah's authority was perhaps even more dependent upon his ability to maintain control over trade and tribute by violent threat, it seems unlikely that Kasim would have been content to allow foreigners a free hand to collect pearl-shell. Even the naturalists who visited the region were expected to carry written permission from the Sultan.[42] Although Redlich's published accounts agree with Kasim's version of events, there are discrepancies that suggest that in the aftermath of the affair it had occurred to him he had been too quick to execute a perhaps innocent Papuan. It is also suspicious that D'Albertis's otherwise chatty two-volume book about his time in New Guinea, in which Redlich features a number of times, fails to mention this sensational incident. Whoever was responsible for the *Franz* massacre – Papuan villagers, Abu Kasim's men, or Abu Kasim working on unwritten but long held understandings between the Rajah of Salawati and the Sultan of Tidore – it was rank arrogance and a terrible error of judgement on Redlich's part to have been so cavalier about the dangers of ignoring local authority. It is, of course, more damning that he executed a man on the 'sanction' of the Rajah of Salawati.

On 6 January 1873 the *kora kora* expedition returned to Salawati. Redlich made a written statement about the incident, and left one copy with Abu Kasim, another for the captain of the next man-of-war to visit Salawati, another for the Prussian Consul-General at Hamburg, who happened to be his brother, a fourth for the Sultan of Tidore[43] and a fifth for Barron and Austin, who owned the *Franz*. It is difficult to say what was in Redlich's mind now. Many of his remaining crew were down with fever, and he had lost his only two large boats. First he set off to Gilolo (Halmahera), perhaps looking for trade to retrieve something from the voyage. Eventually, however, he began to make his way to Torres Strait and British territory. On 21 January 1873 the *Franz* broke her voyage at Dobo in the Aru Islands,[44] ironically one of the world's richest pearl-shelling grounds, of which Redlich was now in no position to take advantage. Dobo was also a vibrant centre of trade for a whole range of valuable marine and forest products, including bêche-de-mer and pearl-shell, but business was confined to a season that usually did not start until late February. When D'Albertis was there in late December 1872, he described it as a 'desert', with no more than 'ten or twelve inhabitants, who are for the most part old and infirm, and remain there to take charge of the empty houses'.[45] The *Franz* sailed on, arriving in Torres Strait early in February.

TORRES STRAIT

The *Franz* came to anchor at Somerset on 10 February 1873, and Redlich wasted no time in reporting to the Queensland colonial authorities. Two days later Frank Jardine, the Somerset police magistrate, forwarded a copy of an extracted version of the *Franz* log to his superiors in Brisbane, with a covering letter explaining that

> from the log, and evidence taken, all transactions connected with the shipment of natives appear to have been honestly made and carried out; the men themselves state that they joined the vessel voluntarily, and make no complaints about their treatment on board

> the ship. By adhering strictly to the letter of the Act, the master is perhaps liable to punishment for bringing Polynesians [*sic*] into the colony without the necessary authority for doing so.[46]

Jardine advised that he would take no action against Redlich. However, he would hold the *Franz* until HMS *Basilisk* arrived, which was expected on 1 March.

Be that as it may, a week later Jardine had Redlich and his surviving mate, August Baumgarten, up before him to formally answer complains that they had mistreated their crew. Jardine took signed statements from five Pacific Islander sailors, John Hannay, the Chinese cook, and Baumgarten and Redlich. From the depositions it was clear that the mate sometimes struck the men, and was in the habit of using abusive language towards them, but given the events of the voyage, and perhaps the tenor of the letter that already had been despatched to Brisbane, Jardine determined that the charges were 'frivolous and unfounded'.[47] Redlich and Baumgarten maintained that the Revd Murray, who had arrived at Somerset on 11 October 1872 with a missionary party of 47, had turned their men against them. Since the *Franz* had arrived at Somerset, the crew spent most of their time with the missionaries, and Johnni Samoa, who had signed on before Murray at Maré, would not return to the schooner.[48] This was the first sign of a shift in LMS attitudes towards British traders in the southwest Pacific, and an early indication of the struggle that would ensue between LMS missionaries and pearl-shellers for the hearts, minds and muscles of the hundreds of Pacific Islander seamen who came to Torres Strait in the course of the following decades.[49]

When Moresby brought HMS *Basilisk* into Somerset on 5 March 1873 he took no action against Redlich, even though only a few weeks before he had seized the *Melanie*, *Challenge* and *Woodbine* for what the New South Wales Supreme Court finally determined were technical infringements of the Kidnapping Act.[50] Moresby may have been having second thoughts about his swashbuckling seizure of four vessels in a little over a week, and the outcry that it was bound to cause among the well-connected merchant-shipowners of Sydney. Perhaps he reckoned the *Franz* had suffered tribulations enough. News of the massacre had already reached Brisbane, and on 26 February 1873 a letter appeared in the *Brisbane Courier* condemning the Royal Navy, and Moresby in particular, for 'grounding on their beef bones' and not being prepared to go beyond the limits of the Australia Station (10° South Latitude) to patrol the coast of New Guinea. The writer, a former Somerset police magistrate, wanted Exeter Hall's 'pet cannibals' punished for the murder of Schluetor and his party.[51]

In the circumstances, Moresby might have decided that it was better to stay his hand. He met Redlich at Somerset, but the sources are silent about what transpired between them. In his memoirs, however, Morseby explained that when he was at Somerset in March 1873 he 'drew Mr Jardine's attention to the fishery question', alluding to the fact that the *Basilisk* seizures had brought the Torres Strait pearl-shelling industry to a standstill. Moresby now felt it was time to set 'the fishing establishments free to work again without further delay'. He urged Jardine to issue temporary licences for the employment of the indigenous Torres Strait Islanders,[52] who although they were Melanesians were not subject to imperial or colonial labour restrictions as long as they resided on islands within Queensland's jurisdiction. A little more than a year later in 1874 the Commodore of the Australia Station, James

Goodenough, went further. On appeal the seized *Melanie* and *Challenge* had been restored to their owners, and in light of this Goodenough informed the Admiralty that he would not proceed against pearl-shellers who failed to comply with the provisions of the Kidnapping Act, except where there was evidence that crews were being mistreated.[53] In 1875 the Act was amended to reflect practice, and pearl-shelling masters no longer needed to pay a bond or obtain a licence to employ Pacific Islander maritime workers.[54]

CONCLUSION

Despite the easing of restrictions on the employment of Pacific Islander maritime workers, and the shift in imperial and colonial policy that this implied, Redlich continued to feel uneasy in Queensland waters and his subsequent movements are difficult to track. On 22 April 1873 the Somerset Water Police Log reports the *Franz* lying in Banks Passage, a good shelling ground about 40 miles north of Somerset, and he appeared to be trying to engage Torres Strait Islander divers in accordance with Moresby's suggested policy.[55] By June 1873 he was master of police magistrate Jardine's private cutter *Vampire*, and appears to have been somehow involved in the private pearl-shelling enterprise that resulted in Jardine being removed from office in 1874.[56] After this Redlich moored the *Franz* at Gabba (Two Brothers), which although in Torres Strait, was on the fringes of Queensland territory and the Royal Navy's Australia Station (10° South Latitude). From that base he worked the cutter *Ida* inside Queensland waters. For further insurance, on 24 April 1874 the *Franz*'s colours were changed to German so that it was not subject to the Kidnapping Act, which only applied to British vessels.[57] When D'Albertis arrived in Torres Strait in December 1874 to commence his second New Guinea expedition, he arranged for Redlich to convey his party to Yule Island in the Gulf of Papua, and to take 16 Pacific Islanders off his hands. As D'Albertis saw it,

> He had men with him belonging to the islands of New Britain in the New Hebrides [*sic*]; and it appeared that Captain Redlich, by an act passed by the Australian colonies, called the Polynesian Act [*sic*], had incurred the risk of having his ship confiscated, by employing these people in the mother-of-pearl fisheries in the waters of Queensland. The Police Magistrate, having to deal with a German, had not the courage to confiscate the ship; on the other hand, instigated by the other pearl fishers, he did not want to allow a foreigner to encroach on so-called Polynesian privileges – that is, to avail himself of an advantage which was denied to British subjects. Captain Redlich, therefore, did not know but that he might be captured at any moment. All this turned to my advantage. The magistrate was delighted to see the men leave Queensland waters; the captain to escape from the danger hanging over him; and I, above all, to find men where I least expected such good fortune.[58]

By the time the Kidnapping Act was amended in 1875, few masters in the Torres Strait fishery needed to go into the southwest Pacific to engage crew. Many Pacific Islanders were choosing to stay in Sydney after being paid off there, re-engaging the following season. In early 1872 the master of the schooner *Challenge*, arrested by Moresby, signed on his entire crew, 31 Pacific Islanders, under the Merchant Seamen's Act in Sydney where there was a growing pool of willing and experienced Pacific Islander sailors and divers.[59] Also, time-expired Pacific Islander sugar plantation

Fig. 5. Full-dress helmet diver. (*Private collection of G. Jardine-Vidgen*)

workers were drifting into the pearl-shelling industry from Queensland ports, and the shift towards less labour intensive full-dress helmet diving had begun. Pearl-shelling continued to adapt and change until by the 1890s it had reached perhaps its most efficient form, that of the highly mobile 'floating stations'. These consisted of schooners of about 100 tons that were mother ships to fleets of 10 or 12 luggers, all equipped with state-of-the-art deep-diving technology. They could stay at sea for many months, had an almost limitless range of operation, and allowed owners to exert a high level of control over capital and labour. Increasing capitalization, improved communication in the form of the telegraph and mail-steamers, steadier Asian divers and increased government regulation transformed pearl-shelling, so that it emerged from its southwest Pacific maritime trade origins to become, at least for a few decades on the Australian coast, a modern, regulated, industrial activity.[60]

Like a number of other early Torres Strait pearl-shellers, Redlich was unable to adjust to the shifting circumstances, and his career was turbulent and short. As mentioned above, for a few years from February 1873 he shelled in the cutter *Ida*, using the *Franz* as a base, under the German flag and moored at islands in northern

Torres Strait.[61] In 1876 he blew his hand off while fishing with dynamite at Yule Island in the Gulf of Papua, and was nursed back to health by the Raratongan missionary Ruatoka.[62] He then went into partnership with J. McCourt and they formed a shore station at Gabba (Two Brothers).[63] In 1877 he relocated to New Guinea, and by July 1878 had purchased land at Port Moresby to build a store,[64] and also had established a bêche-de-mer station at Utian (Booker Island) in the Louisiade Archipelago. In 1878 his workers, some of them Torres Strait Islanders, mutinied and ransacked his Utian station.[65] In 1879 he was again bêche-de-mering, this time at East Cape, but late in the year fever and a relentless wet season forced him to retreat to the LMS station at Samurai.[66] Late one night in May 1880, he went missing from the LMS steamer *Ellengowan* while it was anchored at Boera village near Port Moresby. A few days later, a Pacific Islander missionary found his body on the beach, and he was buried at the mission station.[67] The missionaries reported that Redlich had seemed depressed on the night of his disappearance, and perhaps it is not too much to venture that the pattern of the rest of his life was set in December 1872, by the terrible events that occurred in Sele Strait.

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14 In August 1870 Robert Towns, Charles Edwards and Henry Burns diverted the schooners *Melanie* and *Kate Kearney* from the new Western Australian grounds to Torres Strait. All three owners had extensive experience in the southwestern Pacific trade. Supreme Court Reports – *Melanie* and *Challenge*, Royal Navy Australia Station, 21 Reel 20, Kidnapping 1869–75, G1819.

15 These small boats, lug-rigged, and often cutters, were soon replaced by gaff-rigged ketches, which became larger as the pearl-shelling fleet was progressively fitted with engines and power air pumps. However, the term 'pearling lugger' was retained, and the latter de-

signs are now emblematic of the north Australian pearl-shelling industry.

16 *An Act to Regulate and Control the Introduction and Treatment of Polynesian Labourers*, 31 Vic. no. 47.

17 *An Act for the Prevention and Punishment of Criminal Outrages Upon the Natives of the Islands of the Pacific*, 35 & 36 Vic.

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40 *Ibid*, 60.

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