



RESOURCE 7 - Miago's travels - Background Information

With John Septimus Roe:

As well as his mediating skills, Miago was considered a useful tracker and guide, having assisted survey parties and tracking lost settlers in the bush. He was employed as a guide in 1835 on Government Surveyor John Septimus Roe's overland expedition from Swan River to what was then known as King George's Sound.

When Roe travelled overland with Miago, he observed the foreignness between Miago and Aboriginal people only a few hundred kilometres from Swan River. During an encounter with an Aboriginal man and boy near 'the Williams', Miago could not translate their conversation, and the strangers' 'mode of talking, afforded [Miago], for many days afterwards abundant opportunity for the display of his own powers of mimicry.

Roe was impressed with this ability and recommended Miago to the Beagle expedition even though he knew that Miago would not be acquainted with the Aboriginal languages in the north. However, he valued Miago's assistance as a guide and broker, mentioning him frequently in his journal and even bestowing an island near Torbay with Miago's name:

'Our friend Migo having very narrowly escaped drowning while swimming to this Island, I distinguished it by the name Isle Migo, in remembrance of him and his many sterling good qualities.'

With Lieutenant John Lort Stokes, assistant surveyor on the Beagle and chronicler of the 1837-43 voyage,

He wrote that:

Among the many useful hints, for which we were indebted to Mr Roe, was that of taking a native with us to the northward ... named Miago; he proved in some respects, exceedingly useful, and made an excellent gun-room waiter' a lowly servants role.

Miago's fear of Waylo - men of the north people was deeply imbedded in his psyche as Stokes recorded that Miago 'evidently holds these north men in great dread'.

Rather than embracing his role as Aboriginal mediator, Miago used his in-between position in interesting ways. For one, he attempted to place the crew at the centre of meetings with the northern groups to protect himself.

On the *Beagle's* return journey, Miago was increasingly impatient for the Swan River and would stand by the gangway singing songs. Stokes suggested that Miago's songs were mournful and that he was homesick for his country. Some of his songs were also intended for the northern men he had met with:

' Miago ... was as anxious as any one on board for the sight of his native land. He would stand gazing steadily and in silence over the sea, and then sometimes, perceiving that I watched him, say to me 'Miago sing, by and by northern men wind jump up': then would he station himself for hours at the lee-gangway, and chant to some imaginary deity an incantation or prayer to change the opposing wind'



With Explorer George Grey

In April 1838, the *Beagle* met up with Grey in Hanover Bay who had experienced a difficult land based expedition that included hostile meetings with Aboriginal people and being wounded in the hip by a spear. Grey spent the night on board the *Beagle* and Miago served Grey that evening in the gun room mess.

Grey then sailed to Swan River, arriving in September 1838, to retrieve a new schooner before returning to the north-west. However, he was delayed there and spent several months and here again Grey again met up with Miago. They spent time together at Grey's residence where Miago offered him descriptions of Nyungar culture. Grey recorded these in his journal alongside details gathered from other cultural experts and events he had observed around the Swan River area.

Noongar songs were of particular interest to him. Miago's singing on board the *Beagle* may have been a way of dealing with his homesickness, but it could also have been a means of protecting himself from potential sorcery from the Waylo, or attempting some kind of sorcery on them.

Referencing:

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