

CONVICT VOYAGES LEARNING RESOURCE:

BRITISH ASIA AND THE ANDAMAN ISLANDS (INDIA)

TEACHERS' NOTES

Overview and summary

Convict transportation was an extensive practice that many nations and empires used as a form of punishment for convicted criminals and political prisoners. Between 1789 and 1945 the British transported around 108,000 Indian, Burmese and Malay convict men, women and children to penal settlements and colonies all over the Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal, including Mauritius, Penang, Singapore, Malacca, Burma and the Andaman Islands, which received the large majority. The British Asian transportation process was overseen, first, by the East India Company, and following the Indian uprising of 1857 by the British Crown. It was heavily influenced by developments within theories of punishment and was also tied to the needs of Empire. Britain's strategic requirements were important, and other motivations for transporting convicts included the removal of unwanted criminals from their homes and communities, the desire for unfree convict labour and the expansion of British power and control.

These transported convicts left profound legacies, affecting British, Indian, and global histories. The material histories of convict transportation persist in many of the infrastructure projects built with convict labour, including prisons, roads, bridges and dockyards. Convict transportation also produced new cultures and societies. The largest number of Asian convicts went to the Andaman Islands, 1857-1939, and their transportation overlapped with and contributed to the violence and dispossession of their Indigenous peoples. The study of convict transportation and penal colonies in British Asia is a key way of understanding many important aspects of imperial and colonial history, the development of globalisation, and for the Andaman Islands the making of the Indian nation after independence in 1947.

Key facts

- Large areas of the nations that we now know as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Singapore, Malaysia and Myanmar were once part of the British Empire. They were governed by the East India Company before 1858, and subsequently by the British crown. There were numerous penal settlements in Southeast Asia,

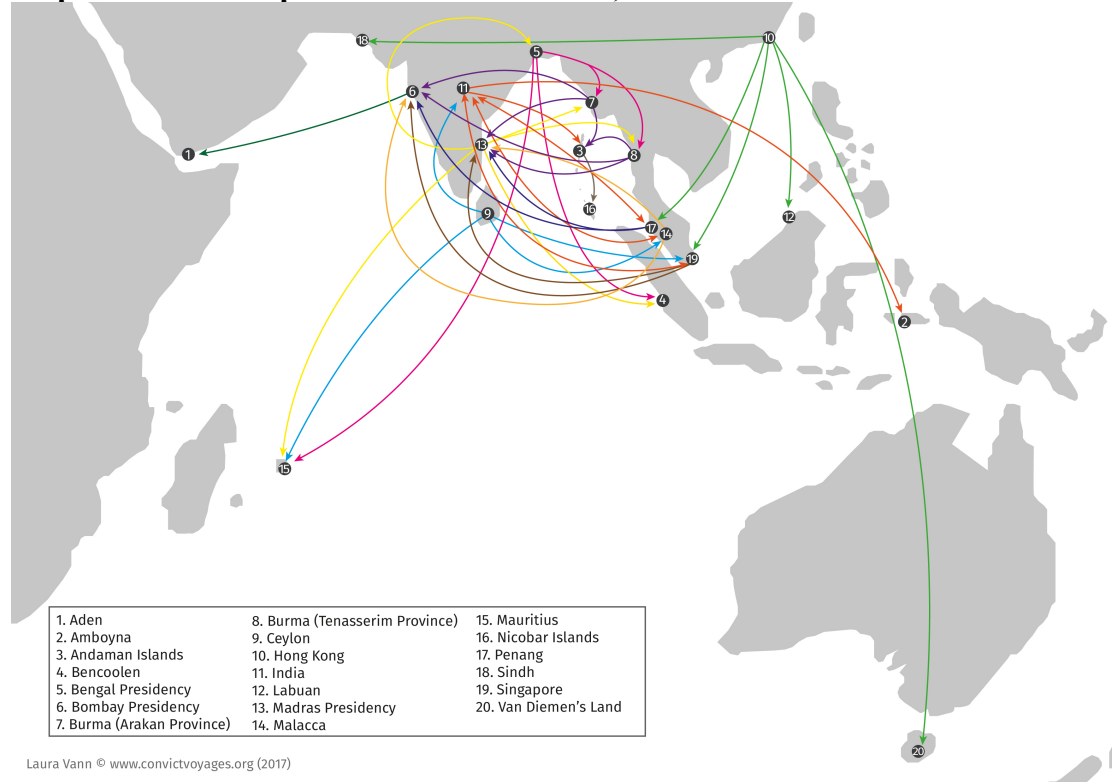
as well as in Aden and Mauritius, to which convicts from the Indian subcontinent were sent.

- Indian convicts were transported outwards from the Indian subcontinent (now India, Pakistan and Bangladesh) to penal settlements in Bencoolen (now part of Indonesia), the Straits Settlements (Penang, Malacca and Singapore), Burma (now Myanmar), and the Andaman Islands. Convicts from the Straits Settlements and Burma were transported to mainland prisons in the Bombay and Madras presidencies. Britain's crown colonies of Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and Hong Kong also transported convicts - Ceylon to Mauritius, Malacca and the Andamans, and Hong Kong to various sites in Southeast Asia and Van Diemen's Land (Australia).
- Transportation began in 1789, and the first destination was Penang. After the Indian revolt of 1857, most convicts were shipped to the Andaman Islands, though transportation to other locations did not cease altogether until 1866. Transportation continued until the outbreak of World War II.
- In total, around 108,000 convicts were transported. The largest convict flows approximate to:
 - a) The Andaman Islands 83,500, 1793-6 & 1848-1939.
 - b) Amboyna and Bencoolen, 2,800, 1797-1823.
 - c) The Straits Settlements (Penang, Malacca and Singapore), 13,500, 1789-1960.
 - d) Burma, 6,800, 1830-60.

The Andaman Islands received more convicts than any other British colony, including those in Australia.

- The majority of convicts were sentenced for violent offences, including murder, gang robbery, and theft by violence (in stark contrast to the British and Irish convicts sent to the Australian colonies, who were mainly sent for petty offences). Because they are not always clearly defined in the records, it is difficult to quantify precisely how many convicts were political prisoners. The total can be estimated at between 5-10%.
- Sentences of transportation were for 7, 14 years or life. Government did not pay the return passages of convicts sentenced to a term of years (i.e. not life), and the large majority never went home. Few convicts spent their whole lives in penal transportation, and most gained a ticket-of-leave (probationary status subject to good conduct), or a conditional or absolute pardon, and were subsequently allowed them to earn money and live independently.
- The large majority of convicts were men, and only a very small minority were women. There were more women in the Andamans than in the other settlements, but even here their numbers rarely rose above 10% of the total.
- In the Andaman Islands today, the descendants of convicts and other involuntary settlers call themselves 'local-born' or 'pre-42', and as a 'scheduled caste' enjoy some government privileges. (NB: '42 designates the year that the Japanese occupied the Andamans, during World War II).

Map: Convict transportation in British Asia, 1789-1945



Learning Outcomes and Placement in Curriculum

This guide is designed to speak to three different levels of educational progression. These are: Level 1 - Early Secondary (roughly ages 12-16); Level 2 - Upper Secondary (roughly ages 16-18); and Level 3 - Undergraduate.

Level 1 – Early Secondary: At this level, discussions of convict transportation in British Asia can constitute an in-depth study of the history of the British Empire in Asia in one or more of the penal settlements. (The Andaman Islands, as the largest penal colony, is recommended). Students at this level will engage with materials in such a way as to understand the logic of transportation, convict experiences and resistance, and the impact of the penal colony on the indigenous populations of the Andamans.

Level 2 – Upper Secondary: At this level, students undertake more advanced studies of different contexts, and exposure to convict transportation history across different regions will help students study aspects of the past in breadth over a 150-year period. Students will be asked to link together a range of settlements, events, developments and issues across a broad historical and geographical range, to identify developments affecting convicts, Indigenous people, and other communities, and to understand and articulate a range of appropriate historical perspectives.

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Level 3 - Undergraduate: At the undergraduate level, studies of convict transportation can be employed in many history, geography, and sociology modules. Penal transportation and colonisation in British Asia can be provided as a case study in world history, the history of imperialism and colonialism, globalisation, migration and labour history, histories of crime and punishment, penology, and many other broad subject matters. Interactive resources are ideal for seminar and workshop use, with students investigating both primary documents and contemporary research to develop nuanced understandings of how convict transportation helped to shape the modern world. This teaching resource can be read alongside those for other geographical contexts, opening up the possibility of imperial/ global comparisons.

Across all levels, the aim is for students to:

- Understand the complex, multiple histories of colonisation and the founding of British Asian penal settlements, including the role of convicts in occupying the frontiers of empire, working as unfree labour, and in the Andaman Islands context displacing Indigenous peoples.
- Identify some of the roots of contemporary globalisation in the history of British imperialism, the building of global networks of migration, and/ or the penal settlements' role in developing infrastructure and trade.
- Discuss some of the issues relating to social technologies of punishment, surveillance, discipline, and control, and the imperial reliance on forced labour.

Scaffolding and scaling of lessons

This teaching resource is predicated on a level-by-level increase in detail and focus in scale to encompass increasingly complex demonstrations of social, political, and cultural interactions through the penal colonisation process in British Asia.

Students at Level 1 (unfamiliar with any of the issues around convict transportation and penal colonisation) can study the Andaman Islands. They can engage with the reading provided in the Convict Voyages expert essay series, and various primary sources (supplied).

At Level 2, students should explore the longer and geographically more extensive history of penal colonisation in British Asia. The Convict Voyages expert essays and statistics are the starting point here. Links are supplied.

At Level 3 (undergraduate level), students should begin undertaking sustained, focused studies of particular penal colonies and settlements, connections between these places and where relevant to their course of study to the wider imperial world, including through global comparisons. The focus here depends on the module in which it is taught, but can include: tracing the impacts of convict transportation on

localities, changing penal forms, unfree labour, the development of convict identities, the material ties between penal settlements and Indigenous dispossession, and the technologies of surveillance, punishment, and reform that shaped prisons and relationships between wardens, guards, colonial officials, and wider family and community contexts. The students can draw on relevant Convict Voyages essays and statistics, the key readings identified in those essays, and further resources supplied below.

Key themes

History of punishment: Includes the continuing use of convict transportation in British Asia, 1789-1939, in parallel to imprisonment in jails.

Imperialism and colonialism: Includes the role of convicts in both construction of penal settlements and other colonial infrastructure, and also their encounters with indigenous people.

Networks and population flows: Includes communication between distant peripheries of Empire, the flow of ideas about punishment, and an appreciation of where convict transportation figures fit in larger histories of forced labour migration.

Labour history: Includes the importance of convict labour as unfree labour, and its relationship to other labour forms, notably enslavement and Indian indenture.

Social and political history: Includes the transportation and exile of political prisoners.

'Race' and difference: Includes the racialised treatment of Indian convicts, and the claiming of lands for penal settlements from Indigenous people represented as 'savage' (Andamans).

Resources: Starting points

Level 1

The Andaman Islands (by Clare Anderson)

URL: <http://convictvoyages.org/expert-essays/the-andaman-islands>

Levels 2 & 3

The Andaman Islands (by Clare Anderson)

URL: <http://convictvoyages.org/expert-essays/the-andaman-islands>

Asia and Mauritius (by Clare Anderson)

URL: <http://convictvoyages.org/expert-essays/penal-transportation-in-east-india-company-asia-and-colonial-mauritius>

Flows of convicts transported to the Andaman Islands, 1858-1939

URL: <http://convictvoyages.org/statistic/the-andaman-islands>

Flows of convicts transported to Mauritius, 1815-37

URL: <http://convictvoyages.org/statistic/mauritius>

And for Level 3 only - Clare Anderson, 'Transnational Histories of Penal Transportation: punishment, labour and governance in the British Imperial World, 1787-1939', *Australian Historical Studies*, 47 (3), 381-97 (**open access**).

URL: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1031461X.2016.1203962>

ACTIVITIES

Level 1 – The Andaman Islands penal colony

The goal of this activity is to help students understand the history of the Andaman Islands through investigation of one or more of: a nineteenth-century newspaper report, historic objects, and a photograph, and to teach skills around using primary sources and material history as the basis of historical inquiry. Students will work individually or in groups, to investigate a newspaper report from Britain, and/ or objects and an historic photograph from the Andamans. These will be provided by the instructor. The primary sources are:

- (a) A parliamentary report of the murder of the Viceroy of India at the hands of a convict in 1872, the convict's own statement, and his photograph.
- (b) Images of the cellular jail (est. 1906).
- (c) Convict identity tags (which transportation convicts wore around their necks).
- (d) A black and white photograph of convicts in the Islands.

At the start of the class, the instructor could summarise the expert essay on the Andaman Islands to give the students the historical background to the activity, and also show the students a map (e.g. on google maps). They could also introduce the students to the history of the cellular jail (est. 1906), via information and images at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cellular_Jail The UNESCO register of World Heritage also contains important and interesting information <http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5888/>

They can then present one or more of the report, cellular jail images, neck tags and convict photograph:

- (a) Murder of the viceroy

ASSASSINATION OF THE GOVERNOR GENERAL OF INDIA:

House of Lords, 12 February 1872 - The Duke of Argyll rose and said,—My Lords, it grieves me to say that I have a most painful communication to make to your Lordships' House. This afternoon, at half-past 1 o'clock, a telegraphic message was received at the India Office from Mr. Ellis, a Member of the Indian Council. It is dated Saugor Island [near Calcutta], February 12, and was, I believe, sent this morning. This is the message— I have to announce with the deepest regret that the Viceroy was assassinated by a convict at Port Blair on the 8th inst.[of this month], at 7 in the evening. The Viceroy had inspected the several stations of the settlement, and had reached the pier on his way to the boat to return to the man-of-war [boat] Glasgow, when a convict, under cover of darkness, suddenly broke through the guard surrounding the Viceroy, and stabbed him twice in the back. The Viceroy expired shortly afterwards. The assassin was arrested at once, and is being tried. His name is Sher Ali, a resident in foreign territory beyond the Peshawur frontier. He was convicted of murder by the Commissioner of Peshawur in 1867, and sentenced to transportation for life. He was received in the Settlement in May, 1869. My Lords, it is my duty, on behalf of the Government, to express, in the first place, the deep sympathy which we feel with the family of Lord Mayo in a calamity and an affliction so unlooked for and so overwhelming. As regards the friends of Lord Mayo, this House is full of his personal friends. I believe no man ever had more friends than he, and I believe no man ever deserved better to have them. ... On his way to Burmah he thought it his duty to visit the Andaman Islands, to inspect the convict establishments and see in what manner the rules and discipline of a convict prison were carried out there. My Lords, it was in the discharge of that duty he met his death.

Letter from the Andaman Islands administration to the government of India, 11 February 1871

'... when asked at his trial if he anything to say in his defence, the assassin replied that he had nothing to say further than that the judge had heard the evidence, and might decide as he wished, and that when the account was made in the next world, the judge would know. He added that he did not care to beg for his life, or words to that effect, but that on the day that he might be hanged he would make a statement – When questioned the night before by Mr Aitchison and Mr Eden [British officials] he acknowledged being a Mussalman [Muslim] Pathan and that he had done the deed "by order of God" he said that he had no associates in his crime but that God was his partner.'

Letter to the Head Clerk, Hope Town [site of the assassination], 9 February 1872

'It appears that the assassin Shere Ally gave out openly a couple of months back that he had received a letter informing him that his elder brother – whether his actual brother by blood relationship, or merely in the common use of the term amongst natives is not clear to me, had murdered Judge Norman and he

professed to be proud of the deed¹ then about 14 days ago, upon the man's hearing that Lord Mayo was certainly coming here, in the beginning of the month, he took the names of all the convicts – or nearly all in the station, and expended the whole of his savings, amounting to from 25 to 30 Rupees in providing a treat for them. He had flour cakes made for all the Mussulman and distributed sugar among the Hindoos. But I cannot discover the least trace of his having assigned a reason for so doing, and all the men I spoke to affirm that he never hinted at an intention to perform any extraordinary act.

To the Hindoos he distributed the sugar on parade following the calling of the names and giving each man a portion; and the Musslamen he summoned about him at a house in Hope town and distributed amongst them sweet cakes made of flour, rice and sugar and also the meat of two goats and the sole reason he gave was that he wished to give them a treat. But it is known that he expended on this all the money he was possessed of.

He followed the calling of a Barber among the labouring convicts, and was remarkable for seldom or never holding any conversation with the men while shaving them etc.'

Photograph of Mayo's convict assassin:

<http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/apac/photocoll/s/019pho000000127u00096000.html> (British Library)

(b) Images of the cellular jail:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cellular_Jail (and/ or search on google images)

(c) Photograph of convicts:

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Andamans_QE3_116.jpg

(d) Convict neck tickets:

http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?assetId=1373530001&objectId=559965&partId=1

The Andaman Islands penal colony was established in a place already inhabited by indigenous people, including the Jarawa, and their communities have been devastated by settlers. In extending the activity, the instructor might wish to introduce the students to a report (inc. video clips) by Survival International, which introduces the issue of settler colonial contact. <http://www.survivalinternational.org/tribes/jarawa>

Basic information about indigenous islanders is located at:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andaman_Islands#Indigenous_Andamanese

¹ This refers to a real event – officiating chief justice of the supreme court was John Norman was stabbed to death on the steps of Calcutta's town hall, on 20 September 1871.

The students can engage in several activities based on the essay and resources: e.g. creating the front page of a newspaper report on the murder of the Viceroy; writing the history of the murder of the Viceroy from convict Sher Ali's perspective; writing a short first-person 'day in the life of a convict' account; writing an imaginative story or journalistic report of convict encounters with Indigenous people; making a map or plan of their own design for a penal colony (e.g. showing workplace, labour sites, barracks etc.).

Instructors can encourage students to consider intersections of concepts. Prompts can include:

- Q. What are convicts wearing and why? (A. The sashes in the photograph denote convict overseers, who were themselves (well behaved ticket-of-leave) convicts. Q. Why are they outside and not in a jail (A. the penal colony was 'open', and convicts worked outside).
- Q. Why is the cellular jail designed in this way? (A. guards could see into each cell from the central tower, but convicts could not see the guards from their cells). Note that convicts spent an initial 'penal stage' in the jail before being released to the outdoor work gangs.
- Q. Why did convicts wear neck tickets? If the Islands' Indigenous people wanted iron, what did this mean for relationships between the penal colony and the outside world? (A. as a means of identification; they showed their number, crime and sentence. They were sometimes attacked for the tickets by Indigenous peoples, but may also have bartered them.)
- Q. Why did Sher Ali attack the Viceroy? Was the attack on the Viceroy an attack on the whole Empire? What do you think might have happened afterwards? (A. The whole event is somewhat murky. The British tried to work out whether there had been a conspiracy, but figured that this was not the case and that the murder was the work of a single man, Sher Ali. He was accused of being a 'fanatic', and executed by hanging.)
- Q. Why did so many indigenous people in the Andamans die after colonization? (A. Violence, disease, land displacement).

Level 2 – British Asia and the Andaman Islands

In this activity, students will study the Andaman Islands (see Level 1, above) and the other British Asian penal settlements. Students will consider the ways that the character of penal settlements changed over time, their similarities and differences, and how this related to the larger context – both with respect to changing ideas about punishment and imperial events.

Students should begin by reading the two expert essays, identified above, on British Asia and Mauritius, and the Andaman Islands; alongside the Andaman convict statistics (again, see above), those for Mauritius. (Statistics for other places in Southeast Asia may become available on the website later, so do check the relevant

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pages). The instructor can also repurpose any of the resources on the Andaman Islands listed above (Level 1). There is, unfortunately, minimal online information on the other penal settlements suitable for this level of study.

However, students can also study and consider two further themes/ resources:

(1) an in-depth investigation from *The Guardian*, on the ‘freedom fighters’ (political prisoners) sent to the Andaman Islands:

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2001/jun/23/weekend.adrianlevy>

(2) There have been recent allegations (first reported in the British *Observer* newspaper) that Indian tourists are paying to go into the forests in the hope of seeing Jarawa people; they called this a ‘human safari’. There are numerous clips and reports on this issue online – google ‘Andamans human safari’ to find newspaper reports from *The Guardian* and *The Observer*, and video footage.

Based on these resources, students could be asked to engage in several activities: e.g. to come up with a basic timeline, a list of key terms, and a summary of the key features of convict transportation – its importance and relevance and how it has changed over time. An interesting focus for discussion, facilitated by the instructor, is whether in the colonial context it is always possible to draw a line of distinction between ‘criminals’ and ‘political prisoners’. And finally, how society today should deal with the legacies of colonization as respects indigenous people.

Either individually or in groups, the instructor can encourage students to make a comprehensive argument on different perspectives on convict transportation and penal colonies in British Asia: by British officials and elites, convicts, and indigenous peoples. Students could summarize the differences within and across the various contexts through a ‘compare and contrast’ argument. They can do this in writing, in a prezzi or power point presentation including using video clips, or via mixed-media.

Level 3 – Convict Flows in the British Empire: A PBL Exercise

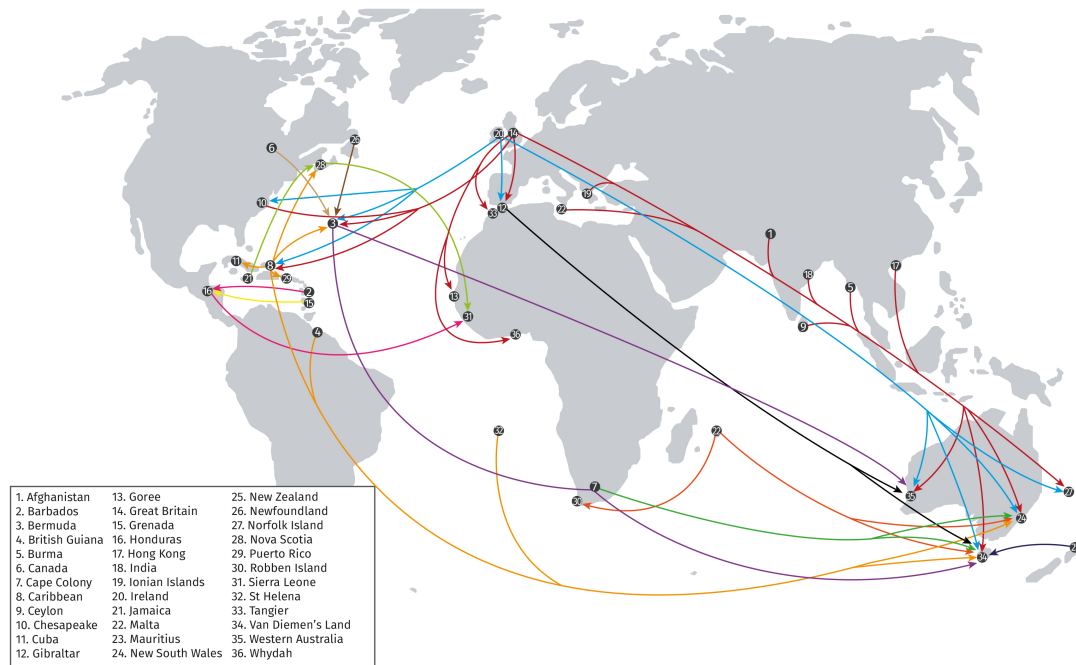
This activity is based on the framework of Problem Based Learning (PBL).² Students should first read the expert essays on North America, the Caribbean, Australia, the Andaman Islands, and Asia and Mauritius.

Depending on the nature of the class, the instructor can summarise some of the above, and then show the students the following maps. S/he can encourage the students to

² Those not familiar with PBL may wish to review the following document: Savery, J. R. (2006). Overview of Problem-based Learning: Definitions and Distinctions. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Problem-Based Learning*, 1(1). Available at: pdfs.semanticscholar.org/ccaf/5b96e849f85544876cfda698c3dad845dd57.pdf

elaborate on what the various lines represent (e.g. transportation from Ireland, intra-colonial transportation, uni- or multi-directionality etc.)

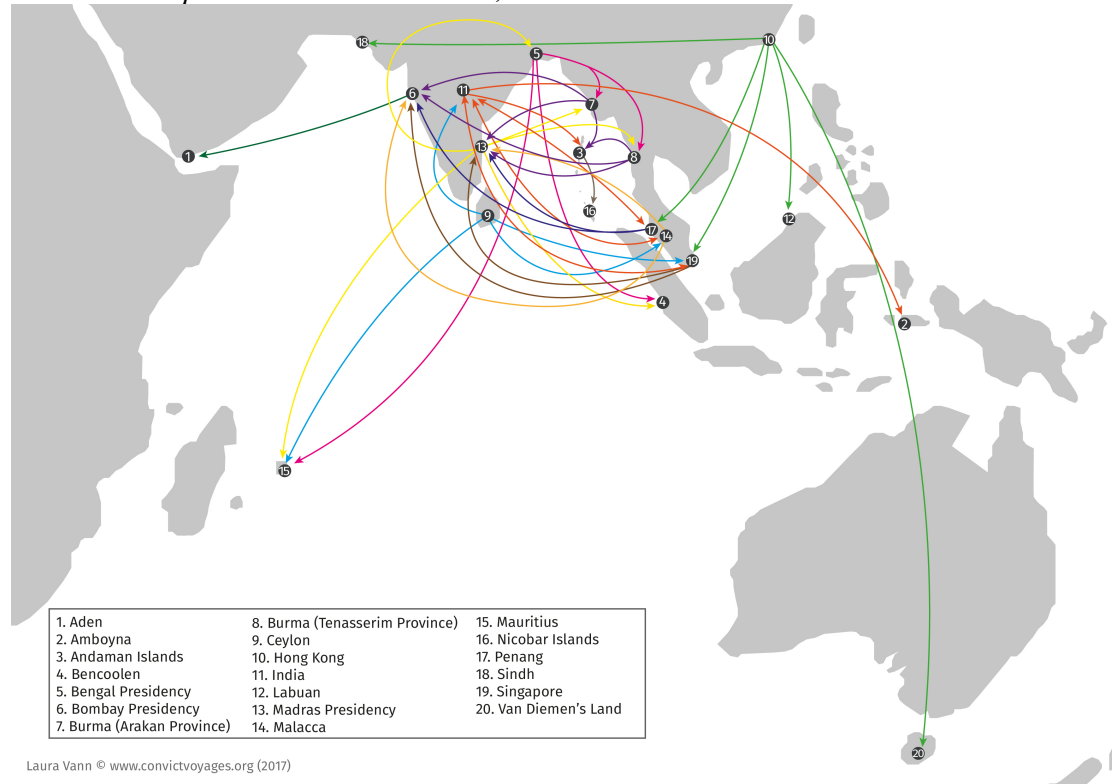
Transportation in the British Empire to Atlantic and Australasian destinations, 1615-1875



Laura Vann © www.convictvoyages.org (2017)

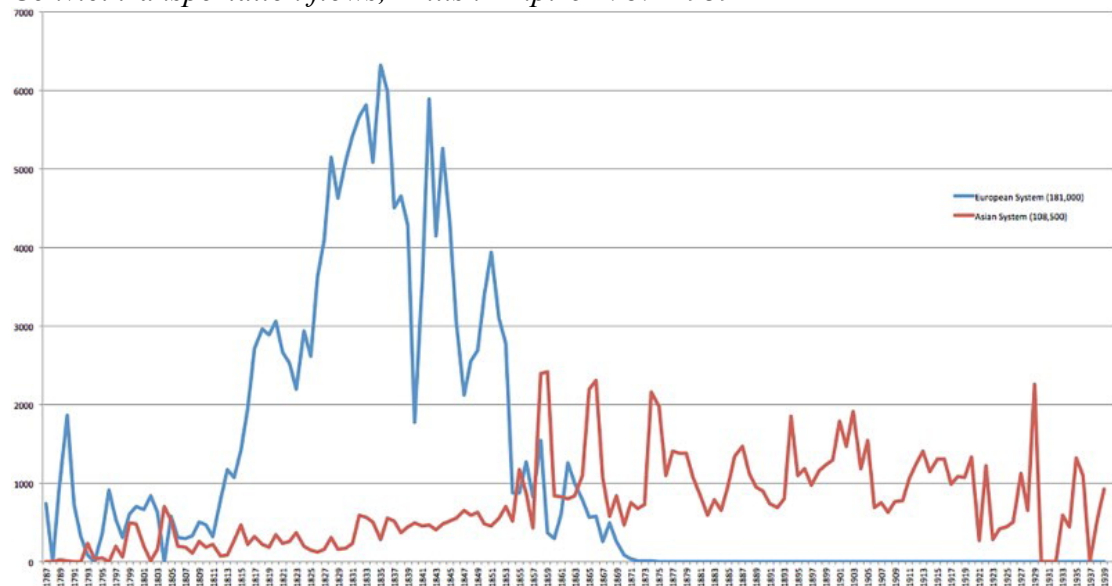
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Convict transportation in British Asia, 1789-1945



The instructor should then present the students with the following graph on British imperial convict flows, which shows transportation within the British Empire (map 1 - blue line) and British Asia (map 2 - red line).

Convict transportation flows, British Empire 1787-1939



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Though there are not online statistics for all the destinations represented in the maps, if required the instructor can supplement these/ break these down with the more detailed figures supplied for some of the contexts - on www.convictvoyages.org - e.g. for the Andamans, Australian colonies (NSW, VDL, WA, Norfolk Island), Mauritius and Bermuda.

With only their base knowledge of convict transportation from the expert essays, maps and statistics, the instructor should draw the students' attention drawn to the large swings in convict flows represented in the graph. The students should then be given the challenge: to explain them.

The first stage of inquiry should consist of large group work to identify what kinds of things would need to be known to formulate an explanation. With the instructor acting as facilitator, students should brainstorm questions and considerations – for example: Did transportation technology change during that time? Was punishment changing? Were penal settlements opening and closing at these times? What major wars, rebellions and national/ international events were happening at these times? What else was of global significance? Was there a change in what was considered 'criminal'? These questions should be roughly grouped together on a whiteboard or other visual aid. The instructor can decide at what stage students should be allowed to use their electronic devices to find further or more detailed information.

If students are having difficulty generating questions, or should the instructor wish to prompt students during the research phase, the following are all possible starting points for inquiry:

- 1) India: when were the Anglo-Sikh Wars, the Santal Rebellion and the Great Revolt?
- 2) When did the various penal settlements open and close?
- 3) What are the key events in British and Irish history at this time? When were the Swing riots, and the Irish famine? How about the Napoleonic Wars?
- 4) When was slavery abolished in the various contexts?
- 5) How about penal policy? How is it changing during this period? E.G. When was transportation suspended, and when was it restricted to life convicts only? When was it abolished, and how did this vary?
- 6) Can changing crime rates explain the differences? What are the problems with crime statistics more generally?

The students should then be given access to their electronic devices, and refer to the readings supplied above (and if the activity extends beyond the classroom the resources listed in them), in answering these questions. They should also read Clare Anderson's essay in *Australian Historical Studies* (which is open access, and listed above). They can do this work individually, or in groups. Their research could form the basis of a group presentation that involves reference to primary source documents and conceptual frameworks (developed in academic publications and scholarly writing), and make connections between multiple concepts related to convict

transportation. As alternative to group project work, alternatively all students could carry out this work individually over more than one week of a module.

If desired, instructors can provide students with any or all of the resources listed here or on the Convict Voyages website, or students may be left to conduct self-directed bibliographic and primary source inquiry. Instructors might find it useful to cross-refer to the teaching resource on Australian history, also on this site.