

An Historical Mystery

THE LOST MAP

In 1608, Italian engineer Bautista Antoneli gave King Philip III a memorial and an accurate map of the Strait of Magellan. As the map was never filed in Spanish archives, it remained unknown until its rediscovery in the 2020s.

Held at the National Library of New Zealand, this document has preserved cartographic information thought lost (Alexander Turnbull Library, manuscript no. 0096, 490 mm x 360 mm, watercolor on paper).



A Map Ahead of Its Time

This map of the Strait of Magellan was based on a prior survey carried out in 1580 by Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa, who had explored and documented this maritime passage in great detail. The map was then be used to plan the 1581-1584 expedition run by Sarmiento and Diego Flores de Valdes on behalf of the Spanish Crown to fortify and colonize the Straits. Antoneli had been contracted to be a part of this last expedition, as an engineer in charge of the works.

Sarmiento's map was lost in 1585 on his way back to Spain, when he had to jettison it off the Azores islands, to prevent this confidential information from being revealed to the English. Although he did not reach the Straits, having deserted in Brazil, thanks to his position, Antoneli was able to copy the map, thus ensuring its preservation. Thanks to this daring act, one of the most advanced cartographic records of its time has been preserved. The map stands out for its remarkable accuracy for the 16th century, clearly depicting coastlines, channels, latitudes, and distances.

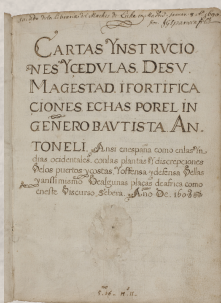
Furthermore, it incorporates original place names assigned in 1580, illustrations of ships from that era, symbols indicating places where encounters with Indigenous people took place, along with geographical and ethnographic descriptions of the territory. More than just a map, it is a strategic tool that reflects the importance of the Strait of Magellan as a key point for global oceanic control.

A comprehensive view of the territory

This map of the Strait of Magellan is not limited to depicting coastlines and channels, but rather provides a broad view of the southern territory. Through its lines, symbols, and annotations, it combines geographical, cartographic, and cultural information, allowing us to understand how this space was conceived and explored at the end of the 16th century. Its level of detail reflects the importance of the strait as a navigation route and as a strategic point within European maritime expansion.

Did you know...?

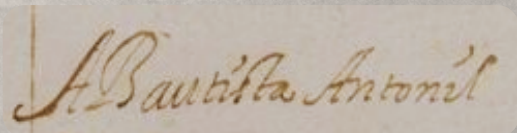
- 1 Antoneli's manuscript brings together letters, instructions, and strategic maps.
- 2 It includes symbols and drawings of Indigenous settlements and references to encounters with Indigenous people, a very rare record in 16th-century European cartography.



- 3 Of the 23 ships and nearly 3,000 people who sailed from Seville to colonize the Strait, only two naos and about 300 people managed to reach it.

- 4 The map reproduces confidential information gathered by Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa in 1580, the original of which was lost during his return to Europe.

Relevant photograph



Signature of Bautista Antoneli

How to decipher the map?

The map of the Strait of Magellan is not only a representation of coastlines, channels, and geographical features, but also a navigational guide, as it includes toponyms written directly on the land.

These annotations include different types of information:



Ethnographic descriptions

Accounts of the Indigenous people who inhabited different areas of the Strait and Patagonia. They reflect how European explorers observed the body, clothing, customs, and relationships between groups, from the perspective of their time.



Geographical and Environmental Observations

Information on terrain type, climate, flood-prone areas, snow-capped mountains, and landscape features that could affect navigation.



Nautical instructions

Useful indications for ships: bays, capes, ports, narrows, and rivers, essential for orientation and safe anchoring.



Historical Place Names

Names given to different points in the strait, many of them linked to saints, religious events, or key moments of the expedition.

What is the purpose of transcribing words on a map?

Transcription allows for the correct reading and understanding of the original texts on an old map, respecting their spelling and meaning. Thanks to transcription, place names, descriptions, and annotations that are difficult to read today can be interpreted, facilitating historical study, research, and the dissemination of cartographic heritage.



Transcriptions

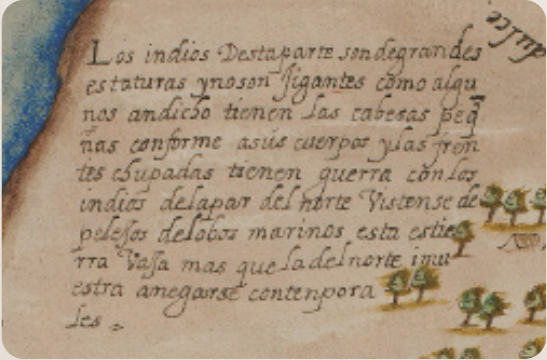
[Eastern part of the Strait] [North Coast] [Bay] of San Julián / Río Fresco / Río Gallegos / Ensenada de las Once Mil Vírgenes (Where Pedro Sarmiento stayed with the settlers) / Angostura de Nuestra Señora de la Esperanza where the castles were to be built / Puerto de San Gregorio / Ensenada de Santa Catalina / Punta de San Antonio de Padua / Cinco Ansimas / Punta del Placel / Río de San Juan / Cerro de San Isidro

[South Coast] Cabo del Nombre de Jesús / Ensenadas de Lomas / Punta Anegada / Ensenada de San Felipe / Cabo de San Vicente / Punta de Gente Grande / Caleta de Agua Dulce / Boca de San Bernardo / Boca de Salomón

[Western part of the Strait] [From South to North]

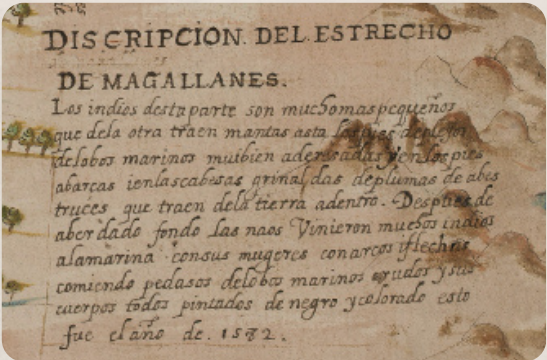
Sierras nevadas / Campana de Roldán / Cabo Corso / Puerto Angosto / Puerto de la Consolación / Puerto de Misericordia.

Transcripts



[Isla Grande de Tierra del Fuego]

The Indians of this part are tall, but they are not giants as some have said. They have small heads, in proportion to their bodies and receding foreheads. They are at war with the Indians of the northern region. They dress in sea lion skins. This land is lower than that to the north and is prone to flooding during storms.



[Coast of continental Patagonia]

DESCRIPTION OF THE STRAIT OF MAGELLAN

The Indians of this region are much smaller than those of the other. They wear blankets that reach their feet, made of finely dressed sea lion skins, and sandals on their feet and headdresses of ostrich feathers that they bring from the interior. After the ships anchored, many Indians came ashore with their women, carrying bows and arrows, eating pieces of raw sea lions, their bodies painted black and red. This was in the year 1582.

Informative Bibliography on Antoneli’s map and the expedition of Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa (1581-1585)



Is a bibliography really necessary?

Yes, it is. It allows us to know where the information comes from, supports the data presented, and demonstrates serious and reliable research.

To learn more about the Map and the expedition of Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa to the Strait:

1

Barros, José Miguel. 2006. Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa. Avatares de un caballero de Galicia. Santiago de Chile: Editorial Universitaria de Chile.

2

González, Soledad, Víctor Martínez y Simón Urbina. 2019. Puerto del Hambre. Más allá de la leyenda. Descargable aquí: centroestudioshistoricos.ubo.cl/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Puerto-Hambre.pdf

3

Sarmiento de Gamboa, Pedro. 2021. Cartas y relaciones del estrecho de Magallanes. Edición de Joaquín Zuleta. Editorial Universitaria. Santiago de Chile.

4

Urbina, Simón; Prieto, Alfredo; González, Soledad; Adán, Leonor; Valdevenito, Galo y Vásquez, Virginia. 2021. La ciudad de Rey Don Felipe en el estrecho de Magallanes. En Magallanes, territorio sin fronteras: identidad, cultura y desarrollo sustentable. Editorial Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. Santiago de Chile.

5

Zuleta, Joaquín, Christophe Pollet y Alfredo Prieto. 2025. Presentation of Letters, instructions and decrees of His Majesty, and fortifications made by the engineer Bautista Antoneli (1608). Colonial Latin American Review 34(1), p. 25-57.

