



ARTICLE

Britain's Involvement in Chile's Cambiaso Mutiny, 1851–2: A Case of Political Dependency at the Dawn of the Republic

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Abstract

In mid-1851 a civil war erupted in Chile following a presidential election in which Manuel Montt defeated José María de la Cruz. Many of Cruz's supporters were sent to the distant penal colony of Magallanes. In November 1851, Lieutenant Miguel José Cambiaso, who was part of the garrison, was jailed for insubordination and subsequently led a bloody mutiny disguised as a revolt by Cruz's supporters. The mutiny is familiar to historians of the period, but what is less well known is the key role played by the British in suppressing it. Contrary to previous historiography, the Chilean government pleaded for British intervention. Given the poor state of the Chilean navy and the precariousness of communications with the penal colony, the Chilean government had no option but to resort to British naval forces. This incident illustrates a new dimension of Anglo-Chilean relations during the mid-nineteenth century which cannot be defined solely as imperialistic; Chilean authorities actively sought cooperation from the British. It also highlights the fragility of the process of state formation in a republic long praised as an example of successful political transition from colony to republic, as well as the lack of commitment of the Chilean government to shoring up state power in Magallanes.

Keywords: Chile; Civil War 1851; Cambiaso; Britain; Royal Navy

Introduction

Unlike neighbouring Latin American republics, Chile has frequently been praised for achieving political stability after it won independence from Spain in 1817.¹ Apart from the civil war of 1829–1830, there was no major internal political conflict until the outbreak of a new civil war over twenty years later, in 1851, which was short-lived. The Civil War of 1851 placed the recently elected (conservative) president Manuel Montt against the liberals, led by José María de la Cruz, the governor of Concepción. The latter refused to recognise the election results of mid-1851, and the Conservative Party was

¹ Simon Collier, "Chile," in *Spanish America after Independence, c.1820–1870*, ed. Leslie Bethell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 283–313; Simon Collier and William Sater, *Historia de Chile, 1808–1994* (Madrid: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 28–32; Manuel Llorca-Jaña and Juan Navarrete-Montalvo, "The Chilean Economy during the 1810s–1830s and Its Entry into the World Economy," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 36:3 (2017), 354–6; Brian Loveman, *Chile: The Legacy of Hispanic Capitalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 15–7.

accused of controlling the voting results, leading to a military uprising.² The main events of the war took place in the provinces of Coquimbo and Concepción between September and December 1851. Eventually, Montt's forces managed to defeat Cruz's troops, although not without the infliction of major damage.³ A contemporary British witness reported that "the stability of the Central Government of Chili has been fiercely assailed, and . . . this town [Valparaíso] narrowly escaped falling into the power of the Rotos . . . whose object was plunder and destruction."⁴ It was the penultimate time in Chilean history that provinces rose up against the Santiago-Valparaíso axis, and the uprising was as unsuccessful as it had been in 1829–30 and was to be in 1859.⁵

As part of this conflict, there was a rebellion in the distant Chilean penal colony of Magallanes in late 1851, normally described in the historiography as the *Cambiaso* mutiny (*Motín de Cambiaso*), in a reference to its ringleader, Lieutenant Miguel José Cambiaso. Magallanes colony was first established in Bulnes Fort at Port Famine in 1843, and started to receive prisoners from 1847, when a penal settlement was opened there.⁶ From its inception, life there was highly conditioned by its "physical remoteness" from the Chilean metropolis.⁷ Subsequently, the colony (including the penal settlement) was transferred to Punta Arenas in 1848, as it had a better strategic position within the Straits.⁸ By 1851, the total population of the colony, including civilians, soldiers, and inmates, was around seven hundred people. It was perceived by the new Chilean state (as well as by European powers) as a strategic location on account of the increasing number of ships crossing from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Yet, as we shall see, the whole incident shows the lack of actual commitment of the Chilean government to maintaining effective state power in distant Magallanes, despite the beginnings of competition with the Argentinean state to expand and control Patagonia. In the words of Alberto Harambour, poverty and abandonment define this period in Magallanes history.⁹

² Walter T. Durham, *Balie Peyton of Tennessee: Nineteenth Century Politics and Thoroughbreds* (Ohio: Hillsboro Press 2004), 283–5.

³ Joaquín Fernández, "Las Guerras Civiles en Chile," in *Historia política de Chile, 1810–2010. Tomo 1: Prácticas políticas*, ed. Iván Jaksčić and Juan Luis Ossa (Santiago: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2017); Maurice Zeitlin, *The Civil Wars in Chile* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984); Luis Vitale, *Las guerras civiles de 1851 y 1859 en Chile* (Concepción: Universidad de Concepción, 1971); Sergio Grez, *De la "regeneración" del pueblo a la huelga general Génesis y evolución histórica del movimiento popular en Chile (1810–1890)* (Santiago: DIBAM, 1997); Rodrigo Fuenzalida, "El motín de Cambiaso en Punta Arenas 1851," *Revista de Marina* (julio-agosto 1970), 483–90; Armando Braun, *Cambiaso: el último pirata del Estrecho* (Santiago: Editorial Francisco de Aguirre, 1971), 16–8; Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna, *Historia de la jornada del 20 de abril de 1851* (Santiago: Rafael Jover, 1878); Gonzalo Serrano, "Viva Cruz, abajo los godos! El general José María de la Cruz y la revolución de 1851," in *Conflictos y tensiones en el Chile republicano*, ed. Carlos Donoso and Pablo Rubio (Santiago: Universidad Andrés Bello, 2014).

⁴ Moresby to Admiralty, Valparaíso, 2 December 1851. British Foreign Office Correspondence with Chile [hereafter FO] 16/81, The National Archives, Kew, London, United Kingdom [hereafter TNA]. *Roto* is a pejorative term used at the time to describe people from the lower strata of society, usually of urban background.

⁵ Elvira López and Joaquín Fernández, "Presentación: regionalismo versus centralismo: la formación del estado en Chile (1810–1850)," *Illes i Imperis* 20 (2018), 7–17; Fernández, "Guerras Civiles."

⁶ Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna, *Cambiaso: relación de los acontecimientos i de los crímenes de Magallanes en 1851* (Santiago: Imprenta de "El Mercurio," 1877); Mateo Martinic, *Breve Historia de Magallanes* (Punta Arenas: Ediciones de la Universidad de Magallanes, 2002).

⁷ Alberto Harambour, "Borderland Sovereignties: Postcolonial Colonialism and State Making in Patagonia, Argentina and Chile, 1840s–1922" (PhD diss., Stony Brook University, 2012), 5.

⁸ Mateo Martinic, *Historia de la Región Magallánica* (Punta Arenas: Ediciones de la Universidad de Magallanes, 2006); Mateo Martinic, "Magallanes en el ordenamiento territorial de Chile republicano y su expresión cartográfica (1853–1884)," *Magallania* 39:2 (2001), 37–45; Martinic, *Breve Historia*; Braun, *Cambiaso*.

⁹ Harambour, "Borderland Sovereignties," 22. Harambour also discusses the later period, when rivalries with Argentina were more important (i.e., from the 1880s) and sheep farming became significant.

The Cambiaso mutiny has received some attention from Chilean historians, but it has been mainly covered in popular history, while important primary sources have been neglected. The first major work on this incident is that of Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna, which was published in haste, as Vicuña Mackenna himself recognised, and which contains many factual mistakes.¹⁰ Vicuña Mackenna wrote the first history of the 1851 revolt in Magallanes on request, as another mutiny was taking place in the same area while he was writing it: the mutiny of the Magallanes gunners in 1877.¹¹ The next major work dealing in depth with the Cambiaso mutiny was that of Enrique Bunster in 1962, who included a chapter about this incident in a book of popular history.¹² The third and last major work on this revolt was that of Armando Braun, published fifty years ago.¹³ Braun himself was critical of Vicuña Mackenna's pioneering book: "Despite its amenity and literary quality, it lacks documentary information"¹⁴ We cannot but agree. Braun's major contribution was the incorporation of new primary sources, such as those recorded by Appleton and the files related to Cambiaso's trial, both unseen by Vicuña Mackenna.¹⁵ A fourth work is that of Carlos Vega et al., which concentrated on the trial alone.¹⁶ Apart from these four major works dealing exclusively with Cambiaso, the incident is mentioned only in passing in Chile's general or specific histories,¹⁷ or not mentioned at all.¹⁸ Two noticeable exceptions are brief articles published over fifty years ago by Rodrigo Fuenzalida¹⁹ and Sergio Villalobos.²⁰

Despite the importance of these studies, Britain's seminal role in this conflict has either been completely neglected or frankly distorted, which is surprising since the incident took place in the middle of the so-called "British imperial century."²¹ This is unfortunate, since without Britain's support of the Chilean government, there would have been many more deaths, especially of civilians. Although dealing with a later period, Alberto Harambour made the point that the colonisation of Magallanes by the Chilean state "emerged out of the entangled processes of capitalist expansion, imperial explorations, and independent State-building."²² The main aim of this article is to revisit this incident, to offer new evidence, and to provide the first accurate account of the British involvement in this conflict. To the best of our knowledge, we are the first authors to have consulted the British Foreign Office correspondence dealing with the Cambiaso mutiny, as well as important sources of complementary information such as *The Times* of London.

¹⁰ Vicuña Mackenna, *Cambiaso*.

¹¹ Alberto Harambour, "Soberanía y corrupción. La construcción del Estado y la propiedad en Patagonia austral," *Historia* 50:2 (December 2017), 570–81.

¹² Enrique Bunster, *Motín en Punta Arenas y otros procesos célebres* (Santiago: Editorial Ercilla, 1962), 35–107.

¹³ Braun, *Cambiaso*, 2–9.

¹⁴ "Lo que sobra en amenidad y calidad literaria le falta en información documental," Braun, *Cambiaso*, x. All translations by the authors.

¹⁵ Elizabeth Haven Appleton, *Insurrection at Magellan: Narrative of the Imprisonment and Escape of Captain Charles H. Brown, from the Chilean Convicts* (Whitefish, Mont.: Kessinger Publishing LLC, 1854).

¹⁶ Carlos Vega, Carlos Delgado, and Alejandro Vega, *El juicio de Cambiaso* (Punta Arenas: Editorial Taller Atelí, 2004).

¹⁷ Collier and Sater, *Historia de Chile*; Diego Barros Arana, *Historia Jeneral de Chile, 1884–1902* (Santiago: Centro de Investigaciones Diego Barros Arana, 2000); Alberto Edwards, *El gobierno de don Manuel Montt* (Santiago: Nascimento, 1932); Vitale, *Guerras Civiles*.

¹⁸ Loveman, *Chile*.

¹⁹ Fuenzalida, "Motín de Cambiaso," 487.

²⁰ Sergio Villalobos, "Chile en 1852 según el diario del marino sueco C. Skogman," *Boletín de la Academia Chilena de la Historia* 25 (1958), 19–49.

²¹ Timothy H. Parsons, *The British Imperial Century, 1815–1914* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999).

²² Harambour, "Borderland Sovereignties," 1.

This article helps to provide a better understanding of Anglo-Chilean political relations during this period. While there was British military intervention, it was requested directly by Chilean authorities, and both parties benefitted. Although this situation could be characterised as international cooperation, there was a clear power imbalance in favour of Britain, as we shall see. Despite the new Chilean government's pride in being an independent nation from the late 1810s, its fragility was highlighted when it tried to expand beyond the geographical limits operating in the 1810s, in particular in distant Magallanes, where there were no proper institutions in place to ensure effective sovereignty over the territories it claimed.²³ This was due not only to lack of financial resources, but also to lack of commitment. At the height of the Cambiasso mutiny, according to the British consul general in Chile, "the Chilean Government seem to be rather disposed to abandon, altogether, their colony at Magallanes, a settlement which has always been very expensive and difficult to keep up, and without any counterbalancing advantage."²⁴ According to Harambour, the "temptation of abandoning the colony was probably dismissed by [Chile] considering not their own state interests but the neighbour's [Argentina] 'ambitions.'"²⁵ The lack of proper means of transport and communications along with a weak Chilean navy were responsible for the instability that forced the Chilean government regularly to seek support from foreign developed nations, oscillating between independence and dependency.²⁶

This episode provides additional evidence with which to argue against D. C. M. Platt's view of a supposedly noninterventionist British government throughout the early nineteenth century in Latin America.²⁷ Other authors (e.g., Rory Miller,²⁸ Barrie Gough,²⁹ Celia Wu,³⁰ Jorge Ortiz-Sotelo,³¹ R. A. Humphreys and Gerald Graham³²) have shown that before the arrival of cable communications in South America (during the 1870s), British diplomats, consuls, and naval officers on the west coast of South America enjoyed considerable autonomy, taking decisions quickly without referring to London, and reporting to the Foreign Office and Admiralty after the fact (any dispatch from Chile to London would have taken some 120–180 days by sail and 75–80 days via a combination of several steam packets.³³ Although it is clear that British international policies were, in general,

²³ Harambour, "Borderland Sovereignties"; Alberto Harambour, "Monopolizar la violencia en una frontera colonial. Policías y militares en la Patagonia austral (Argentina y Chile, 1870–1922)," *Quinto Sol. Revista de Historia* 20:1 (2016), 1–27; Rodrigo Rivero-Cantillano and Manuel Llorca-Jaña, "Colonización, Estado y violencia en la Patagonia chilena, Magallanes c. 1880–1910," *Magallania*, (2022), 1–28; Andrés Estefane, "Viajeros y burócratas en la historia de la exploración de la República de Chile," *Revista de Historia y Geografía* 32 (2015), 133–43; Harambour, "Soberanía y corrupción," 555–96.

²⁴ Consul Sullivan to Viscount Palmerston, Santiago, 20 January 1852, FO 16/77, TNA.

²⁵ Harambour, "Borderland Sovereignties," 6. This said, the Chileans may have neglected the Magallanes settlement in the late 1840s partially because Argentine governor Juan Manuel de Rosas's power was weakening. The threat in the 1880s from a more united Argentina following Roca's Conquest of the Desert was not present in 1851.

²⁶ In a related topic, Harambour ("Borderland Sovereignties," 49–50), also stressed the importance of hydrographic surveys and charts drawn by British officers for Chilean admirals in the colonisation of Patagonia.

²⁷ D. C. M. Platt, *Latin America and British Trade, 1806–1914* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972); D. C. M. Platt, "The Imperialism of Free Trade: Some Reservations," *Economic History Review* 21:2 (1964), 296–306.

²⁸ Rory Miller, *Britain and Latin America in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: Longman, 1993).

²⁹ B. M. Gough, "Specie Conveyance from the West Coast of Mexico in British Warships c.1820–1870: An Aspect of the Pax Britannica," *Mariner's Mirror* 69:4 (1983), 419–33.

³⁰ Celia Wu, *Generals and Diplomats: Great Britain and Peru, 1820–1840* (Cambridge: Centre of Latin American Studies, 1991).

³¹ Jorge Ortiz-Sotelo, "Peru and the British Naval Station, 1808–1830" (PhD diss., University of St. Andrews, 1998).

³² R. A. Humphreys and Gerald S. Graham, *The Navy and South America* (London: Navy Records Society, 1962).

³³ Manuel Llorca-Jaña, *The British Textile Trade in South America in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

planned and directed from London, in an emergency such as the Cambiaso mutiny, it took too long to wait for authorisation. There are several other examples of local British representatives acting independently (for example Gore Ouseley in the River Plate in the 1840s).³⁴ We could expect that the longer the delay in communications, the greater the degree of autonomy in decision making.

However, there were some general principles, known to all parties, guiding any strategic decision made by any official representative of the British government, whether civilian or military: (a) to ensure freedom of navigation over maritime routes and major rivers (the Straits of Magellan fit into this category); (b) prompt action against piracy on the high seas (which is also relevant here); and (c) action against the illegal slave trade. The main requirement for consuls and navy officers was to frame their reports in terms that the Foreign Office and the Admiralty would accept.³⁵ This, of course, did not guarantee that all of their actions would necessarily receive official support.

The Cambiaso Mutiny and Its Links to the 1851 Civil War

As part of the resolution of the 1851 Civil War, most of those imprisoned by Montt's regime were sent to either the Punta Arenas or Juan Fernández penal settlements (the two maritime jails of Chile at that time) to serve their sentences.³⁶ This would not have been a matter of concern for the Chilean authorities had they maintained proper vigilance and effective isolation. But this was not the case. The penal settlements suffered from a chronic shortage of personnel and were also extremely isolated, as they had only maritime communication with the rest of Chile. The Magallanes garrison at Punta Arenas was composed of only seventy soldiers to look after some four hundred prisoners, while only two official supply vessels per year arrived in the colony from Valparaíso.³⁷ Most prisoners were former soldiers sent there for bad conduct or because they were political prisoners. Due to the shortage of labour, inmates were given many privileges, such as being allowed to work and in many cases to walk freely within the colony.

The shortage of soldiers meant that the Punta Arenas' garrison was among the lowest ranked Chilean military units, its soldiers those who would not have been admitted to serve elsewhere. Chilean authorities found it difficult to find voluntary soldiers to serve there.³⁸ It was not only distant, isolated, and extremely cold in winter, but half of its population was made up of prisoners, which was not appealing to most families. This meant that any soldier or ex-soldier who was willing to serve in Punta Arenas was admitted or readmitted. Amongst them was Lieutenant Miguel José Cambiaso, who had been expelled from the Chilean army in 1850 for bad conduct. Thanks to the shortage of personnel in Punta Arenas, he was readmitted in 1851, and sent to Magallanes.³⁹

Cambiaso had entered the Chilean army aged 18, in 1842, a few months after running away to Santiago from Petorca with a young woman, an incident labelled by Vicuña Mackenna as Cambiaso's first known crime.⁴⁰ There he was found by the father of the

³⁴ David Mclean, "Trade, Politics and the Navy in Latin America: The British in the Paraná, 1845–46," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 35:3 (2007), 351–70.

³⁵ Miller, *Britain and Latin America*.

³⁶ Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna, *Juan Fernández: historia verdadera de la isla de Robinson Crusoe* (Santiago: Rafael Jover, 1883); Vicuña Mackenna, *Cambiaso*.

³⁷ Bunster, *Motín*, 36–8. This level of precariousness must be taken as lack of commitment on the part of the state to ensure proper dominion over Magallanes.

³⁸ Vicuña Mackenna, *Cambiaso*, 11–3.

³⁹ Braun, *Cambiaso*, 108.

⁴⁰ Vicuña Mackenna, *Cambiaso*, 55–6.

woman, who gave Cambiaso a brutal beating.⁴¹ After a few years serving in Santiago, Cambiaso was transferred to Chiloé in 1844, where he married a local. Cambiaso was subsequently sent to Valdivia in 1847 as a lieutenant, where there were reports of several incidents of domestic violence, including an attempt by Cambiaso to poison his wife.⁴² Many other serious incidents, fuelled by alcoholism, meant that Cambiaso was forced to retire from the army in 1850.⁴³

The severe shortage of military personnel to fill positions in Magallanes gave Cambiaso a chance to rejoin the Chilean army, which was destined for the Straits. Soon after arriving in Punta Arenas, Cambiaso entered into serious conflict with Captain Gabriel Salas, his military superior in the penal garrison.⁴⁴ Apart from the military authorities in Punta Arenas, there was a civilian administration, headed by a recently appointed governor, Benjamín Muñoz Gamero. Muñoz Gamero had previously served in the Chilean navy, under the command of Manuel Blanco Encalada.⁴⁵ His training included a two-year posting to the British frigate *Carysfort* between 1842 and 1844,⁴⁶ so he was close to British naval culture.

In mid-November 1851, an incident occurred that would be the catalyst for mutiny. Lieutenant Cambiaso, seriously drunk, had an argument with Captain Salas, which led the former to unsheathe his sword and insult his captain. Salas had no option but to send Cambiaso to jail.⁴⁷ While in jail, Cambiaso met several Cruz supporters from the 1851 Civil War, including seven ex-sergeants who had recently arrived in the ship *Tres Amigos* together with another twenty-two political prisoners. Trying to make the most of this situation, and to take revenge on Salas, on 21 November 1851 Cambiaso led a mutiny he passed off as a politically motivated uprising of Cruz supporters against Montt in the midst of the ongoing civil war.

Cambiaso managed to take control of the colony within a few hours, proclaiming Cruz as Chilean president.⁴⁸ He was “joined by most of the convicts and prisoners,”⁴⁹ thus able “to overpower the garrison, displace the governor, and liberate the convicts; he was completely successful, he imprisoned the military officers and civil authorities.”⁵⁰ According to Vicuña Mackenna, the incident “opened the door of the prosperous Punta Arenas colony to all crime’s devils.”⁵¹ Or, in the words of a British official, “every crime which stains the catalogue of human wickedness appears to have been committed at Sandy Point” [Punta Arenas].⁵² Cambiaso’s first victim was Sergeant José Antonio González, who was killed for accepting a bottle of wine from Captain Salas.

On 26 November, the American merchant ship *Florida* (from New Orleans) arrived in Punta Arenas, bringing with her some eighty political prisoners implicated in the 1851 rebellion, also supporters of Cruz, who had been imprisoned in Valparaíso since 28 October 1851. The *Florida* was in ballast (empty) from Valparaíso to Brazil to be loaded there before heading to New Orleans. To convey the prisoners the American vessel had

⁴¹ Ibid., 56.

⁴² Bunster, *Motín*, 43; Braun, *Cambiaso*, 49–51.

⁴³ Vicuña Mackenna, *Cambiaso*, 65.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 64–6.

⁴⁵ Braun, *Cambiaso*, 10.

⁴⁶ Vicuña Mackenna, *Cambiaso*, 36–8.

⁴⁷ Braun, *Cambiaso*, 60; Bunster, *Motín*, 73; Vicuña Mackenna, *Cambiaso*, 69–70.

⁴⁸ Fuenzalida, “Motín de Cambiaso,” 489.

⁴⁹ Appleton, *Insurrection at Magellan*, 33.

⁵⁰ Moresby to Admiralty, Valparaíso, 21 January 1852, FO 16/81, TNA.

⁵¹ “Abrió de par en par las puertas de la próspera colonia de Punta Arenas a todos los demonios del crimen”, Vicuña Mackenna, *Cambiaso*, 77.

⁵² Stewart to Moresby, Valparaíso, 23 February 1852, FO 16/81, TNA.

been hired by the Chilean government, which shows the extreme dependence of the Chilean government on foreign powers to maintain the penal colony in Magallanes and more generally to communicate with its distant maritime settlements.⁵³ This is confirmed by the U.S. consul in Chile at that time: the *Florida* “left this place on the 31st of October last, with prisoners, having been chartered by the Chilean government.”⁵⁴ These government’s actions evidence the sheer absurdity of overcrowding Punta Arenas with political prisoners guarded by a small garrison, and is also another indication of lack of commitment on the part of the Chilean authorities to ensure effective control of distant Magallanes.

As no one suspected that a revolt had taken place, the *Florida* was easy prey for the mutineers, and the ship was quickly taken by Cambiaso’s men. A few days later another merchant ship anchored at Punta Arenas. This time it was British: the *Eliza Cornish* of Liverpool, with a cargo of guano, Peruvian bark (the source of quinine), silver ores (belonging to none other than Agustin Edwards, the founder of Chile’s mightiest business group of the time), and cacao, but more importantly, with bullion valued at some eighty thousand U.S. dollars.⁵⁵ The *Eliza Cornish* had been forced to stop at Punta Arenas to undertake repairs to replace her fore-topmast.⁵⁶ When Cambiaso learnt about the treasure, he decided to take possession of this ship as well, and matters became more complicated.

On 2 December 1851, Cambiaso gave the order to kill the owner of the *Florida*, Benjamin Shaw, the captain of the *Eliza Cornish*, John Talbott, and the son of her owner (Mr. Dean), and all this “without any provocation.”⁵⁷ After the three were shot, they were thrown on a bonfire.⁵⁸ Furthermore, “one of the soldiers was attracted by the glitter of a diamond ring on Mr. Shaw’s finger, and as soon as he was shot, the soldier went up to him, trying to remove it; but finding that difficult, he cut off the finger with his cutlass.”⁵⁹ The bonfire claimed the governor (Muñoz Gamero) and the colony’s priest (Father Acuña), who were shot first: “Cambiaso wanted, as Neron did, to indulge himself by burning alive his enemies”.⁶⁰ The governor had previously escaped with a party of men, but was forced to return to the colony. The mate of the *Eliza Cornish*, then in jail, declared that “I was called out to go on the platform, to see the body of the governor burnt, and saw the body thrown into the fire.”⁶¹ Meanwhile, the rebels were “dancing and singing the national hymn around the fire.”⁶²

Twenty-four hours after the murder of the governor, a third ship touched upon Punta Arenas.⁶³ This time it was not a merchant vessel but a British man-of-war, the *Virago*, captained by Commander Stewart. It had left England on 11 September 1851 to replace the

⁵³ Appleton, *Insurrection at Magellan*, 18.

⁵⁴ William Duer to Daniel Webster, Santiago, 25 January 1852, Despatches from United States Consuls in Valparaíso, 1812–1906 (M146), Roll 5, The National Archives, Washington, D.C. [TNAW hereafter].

⁵⁵ Moresby to the Admiralty, Valparaíso, 24 February 1852, FO 16/81, TNA.

⁵⁶ English Reports Citation [ERC hereafter]: 1853, 164 E.R. 22, High Court of Admiralty, “Segredo,” Otherwise “*Eliza Cornish*,” in particular; Owners of the *Eliza Cornish* to the Earl of Malmesbury, Liverpool, 8 June 1852, FO 16/81, TNA.

⁵⁷ “A Penal Settlement,” *The Times*, 17 April 1852; see also ERC: 1853, 164 E.R. 22, High Court of Admiralty, “Segredo,” Otherwise “*Eliza Cornish*,” in particular.

⁵⁸ Braun, *Cambiaso*, 127–30.

⁵⁹ Appleton, *Insurrection at Magellan*, 61.

⁶⁰ “Cambiaso quiso, como Nerón, darse el placer de asar vivos a sus enemigos,” Vicuña Mackenna, *Cambiaso*, 116.

⁶¹ Deposition of John William Smith, mate of the “*Eliza Cornish*,” Puerto Bueno, 10 February 1852, FO 16/81, TNA.

⁶² “A Penal Settlement,” *The Times*, 17 April 1852.

⁶³ Moresby to Admiralty, Valparaíso, 21 January 1852, FO 16/81, TNA.

Gorgon at the British Royal Navy's Pacific station.⁶⁴ Once again, Cambiaso intended to take over the ship. He invited Commander Stewart on shore, telling him that he was in charge of the colony because the governor was ill, resting in bed.⁶⁵ Cambiaso's real intention was to kill the main officers of the *Virago*, and then take control of the man-of-war. According to *The Times*, "when the *Virago* passed through the Straits . . . Cambiaso formed the plan of taking her . . . giving . . . poisoned drinks. . . . Fortunately, the apothecary of the colony . . . positively refused to be a party to such an infamous affair."⁶⁶ This plan had been voted on in Cambiaso's war council, where only his closest allies were allowed to vote, and rejected.⁶⁷ Cambiaso's men perceived the enterprise as too dangerous since the crew of the *Virago* was heavily armed, and they were probably right.

Thus, the *Virago* left Punta Arenas without suspecting that anything untoward was happening there. Commander Stewart confessed a few weeks later that "not a shadow of suspicion ever crossed one of our minds."⁶⁸ Meanwhile, the *Tres Amigos*, the same ship that had recently transferred political prisoners to Punta Arenas, was on her way back to Valparaíso when she came upon three of the governor's men at a distance up the coast. They managed to tell the whole truth to the *Tres Amigos*'s crew, who headed to Chiloé to alert local authorities.

Another of Cambiaso's atrocities was the seemingly motiveless killing of four *yanacunas* (natives of Patagonia).⁶⁹ They had been living at the colony for some time, before being brutally executed. "Apparently with the design of intimidating the Indians, [Cambiaso] had ordered them to be conveyed to a point . . . where the Indians were accustomed to pass. . . . There they were hung by the neck to the trees, and lanced to death, their cheeks and noses being cut off."⁷⁰ Eventually, after setting fire to most of the colony, on 2 January 1852 Cambiaso decided that it was time to go. The entire colony boarded the two merchant vessels, the *Florida* and the *Eliza Cornish*. It is still unclear what Cambiaso's actual plan was, but both ships headed in caravan to the Pacific. The *Eliza Cornish* was led by Sergeant Briones (one of Cambiaso's closest officers), and the majority of passengers were civilians. Cambiaso boarded the *Florida*, with the rest of his men, some civilians, and the treasure previously found in the *Eliza Cornish*.

A few days later the steamer *Lima*, property of the Pacific Steam Navigation Company, touched at Punta Arenas on her way from Southampton to Callao in Peru. A few survivors told the crew the whole story behind Cambiaso's mutiny. On board was George Bynon, a British captain who had been working for the Chilean navy since 1817.⁷¹ He was also a close friend of the recently assassinated governor. Bynon took the matter personally and asked the captain of the *Lima* to sail nonstop to Valparaíso, where they landed after only seven days.⁷²

⁶⁴ Vicuña Mackenna, *Cambiaso*, 101.

⁶⁵ Villalobos, "Chile en 1852," 43.

⁶⁶ "The Magellan Pirates," *The Times*, 20 April 1852.

⁶⁷ Braun, *Cambiaso*, 145–7; Vicuña Mackenna, *Cambiaso*, 160–2.

⁶⁸ Account by Commander Stewart, February 1852, FO 16/81, TNA.

⁶⁹ The new settlements of southern Patagonia, to which Punta Arenas belongs, were rightly labelled by Harambour ("Borderland Sovereignties," 4) as having a "triple frontier": with the natives, with Chile, and with Argentina.

⁷⁰ Appleton, *Insurrection at Magellan*, 90.

⁷¹ On the relations between Britons and Chileans in the conformation of the Chilean Navy, see Andrés Baeza, *Contacts, Collisions and Relationships: Britons and Chileans in the Independence Era, 1806–1831* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019).

⁷² Consul Rouse to the Senior Officer of HM Navy at Valparaíso, Valparaíso, 12 January 1852, FO 16/81, TNA. Incidentally, amongst the passengers on the *Lima* was Alberto Blest Gana, the famous Chilean novelist, who lived in Paris but was on his way back to Chile after his mother's death.

The assassination of governor Muñoz Gamero was one of the rare murders of a member of the elite in Chile (apart from the killing of Diego Portales in 1837 and General Juan Vidaurre-Leal during the civil war of 1859) until the outbreak of the 1891 civil war. Few high-ranking officers (either civilian or military) appear to have been killed while on duty until the 1970s. Yet, despite its importance, it was not until the *Lima* brought the news that the Chilean authorities at Valparaíso and Santiago learned about the mutiny, fifty-two days after it had started. This fact attests to the fragmentation of the Chilean territory and the precariousness of the maritime penal settlement and distant colonies, as well as the slowness of the day's sailing ships compared with the greater speed and reliability of the steamships just beginning to appear on the west coast. At this point, Britain became involved, an involvement which proved crucial.

Britain's Role in the Cambiaso Mutiny

Britain appointed her first consular agents to Chile in 1823, in strategic locations such as Valparaíso, Coquimbo, and Concepción. Their mission was to protect and promote British commercial interests in the area, paying particular attention to the state of trade between Chile and Britain, and to securing British property. Consuls reported directly to the Foreign Office on a wide range of topics, corresponding regularly with London. The British Royal Navy also maintained a permanent presence on the west coast of South America after independence from Spain. As had happened before on the Atlantic coast, when Britain first established a South American naval station based in Rio de Janeiro, the government deployed a new squadron, this time in the Pacific, soon after independence. Until 1837 it was part of the South American station, when it was elevated to the status of a separate body, dubbed the Pacific Station, which operated in the area until the early twentieth century.⁷³

The main duty of this naval presence was to protect British commercial interests (including freeing up international commercial routes, such as the Straits of Magellan) but also British lives, as well as to fight the slave trade and piracy, even providing regular services such as post and the conveyance of bullion and specie from the west coast to Britain.⁷⁴ British naval officers corresponded regularly with London, but directly with the Admiralty rather than with the Foreign Office, although in the Pacific they were normally in close contact with the consuls, consulting one another when facing any delicate situation.

Before the news of the revolt had reached Valparaíso, several incidents during the 1851 Civil War had already attracted British attention and direct action. The most important were the seizure, by Cruz's insurgents in northern Chile, of the steamboat *Firefly*, which was the property of Charles Lambert, a famous Anglo-French entrepreneur resident in Chile; although Lambert was born in Alsace, in France, his enterprises were backed by British capitalists.⁷⁵ The vessel was mainly used to transport minerals between Chilean ports. The second incident was similar: the seizure by insurgents in the south of the *Arauco*, a steamer used for postal services, and the property of Nicomedes Cornelio Ossa (vice president of the Chamber of Deputies). Although it belonged to a Chilean firm (Télliz, Ossa & Hermanos), the *Arauco's* crew was British, it was insured in Britain, and the underwriters were all British.⁷⁶

⁷³ Ortiz-Sotelo, "Peru and the British."

⁷⁴ On the incipient international maritime law on piracy, see Michael Kempe, "Even in the Remotest Corners of the World": Globalized Piracy and International Law, 1500–1900," *Journal of Global History* 5:3 (2010), 353–72.

⁷⁵ Fuenzalida, "Motín de Cambiaso," 483–9.

⁷⁶ Memorandum upon Chilian Affairs, London, 1 January 1852, FO 16/81, TNA; British Underwriters of the "Arauco" to Earl Granville, Liverpool, 30 January 1852, FO 16/81, TNA.

By this stage, the Chilean navy was in a calamitous state: it had only two men-of-war, the *Meteoro* and the *Infatigable*, so the Chilean government relied on the British to retake both privately owned steamers, a mission successfully accomplished by the Royal naval unit stationed at Valparaíso.⁷⁷ According to a report sent by the British consulate following the election of Manuel Montt as president in mid-1851:

A revolution broke out in the provinces of Coquimbo & Concepcion, and the Chilean government, having learnt that the British steamer “Firefly,” belonging to a British subject named Lambert, had been seized upon by the insurgents at Coquimbo . . . requested her [British] Majesty Chargé d’Affairs at Santiago, 1st that orders might be sent to one of HM’s Steam vessels to warn the mail steamer . . . not to enter the port of Coquimbo . . . and 2nd, that this “Firefly” might, if possible, be recaptured and brought to the port of Valparaiso.⁷⁸

Following the instructions of Fairfax Moresby, the British commander in chief of the Royal Navy Pacific Station,⁷⁹ both the *Firefly* and the *Arauco* were successfully retaken by the British navy upon Montt’s request.⁸⁰ The British Foreign Office and the Royal Navy fully supported both actions. A Foreign Office clerk commented that “Mr Sullivan’s proceedings . . . have been approved by Lord Palmerston,”⁸¹ while the Admiralty “instructed the Commander in Chief in the Pacific to deliver up the steamers “Firefly” and “Arauco” to their respective owners, or their accredited agents.”⁸² The Chilean government was very grateful for these actions, as is shown in a letter sent by the Chilean vice admiral to the British commander in chief: “I have the honor of expressing to your Excellency my thanks for the demonstration made by the forces under your command for the protection of the National Interests.”⁸³ The Chilean government even authorised the British navy to blockade the port at Coquimbo until the *Firefly* had been recaptured.⁸⁴

British assistance to Montt’s government was not limited to intervention when British property was under threat. On the contrary, the Chilean government also asked for help in communicating by sea with the southern provinces during the civil war. Railways had not yet arrived in the country, while internal roads were disastrous.⁸⁵ Thus, lacking steamers, Chilean authorities resorted to the British when facing an emergency, as evinced by Moresby when Cruz’s forces were advancing towards the south: “I was solicited [by the Chilean government] to send a steamer along the coast to warn the inhabitants . . . as the Central Government had no means.”⁸⁶

This is quite different from what had happened in the previous Chilean civil war. According to Baeza, in 1829 the “Royal Navy officers presented themselves as neutral

⁷⁷ Braun, *Cambiazó*, 33; Fuenzalida, “Motín de Cambiazó,” 483–9. The British had, on average, twelve men-of-war operating in the South American Pacific Station, mainly in Peru and Chile. Ortiz-Sotelo, “Peru and the British,” 261.

⁷⁸ Memorandum upon Chilean Affairs, London, 1 January 1852, FO 16/81, TNA.

⁷⁹ Moresby held the position from August 1850 to August 1853. Ortiz-Sotelo, “Peru and the British”, 296.

⁸⁰ “Insurrection in Chili,” *The Times*, 19 January 1852.

⁸¹ Memorandum upon Chilean Affairs, London, 1 January 1852, FO 16/81, TNA.

⁸² Admiralty to Lord Stanley Alderley, London, 22 January 1852, FO 16/81, TNA.

⁸³ Manuel Blanco Encalada to Moresby, Valparaíso, 29 October 1851, FO 16/81, TNA.

⁸⁴ Durham, *Balie Peyton*, 145–7.

⁸⁵ Manuel Llorca-Jaña and Juan Navarrete-Montalvo, “Entre la independencia y la guerra del salitre, c.1810–1879”; and Guillermo Guajardo, “Las infraestructuras y los transportes,” in *Historia Económica de Chile desde la independencia*, ed. Manuel Llorca-Jaña and Rory Miller (Santiago: RIL Editores, 2021).

⁸⁶ Moresby to the Admiralty, Valparaíso, 25 December 1851, FO 16/81, TNA.

actors . . . without interfering in local conflicts.”⁸⁷ This time, though, in response to open British support for Montt’s forces, Chilean insurgents attacked British official property, including the house of the British consul at Coquimbo, which was “destroyed by fire” by the insurgents.⁸⁸

More important for the purposes of this article, these were not isolated examples of Chilean authorities asking the British for help. According to Fuenzalida, when the news of the *Cambiaso* mutiny arrived in Valparaíso the only available Chilean man-of-war was the *Meteoro*, but it had been first sent to the north by Montt to fight Cruz’s insurgents and later to the south, and was then at Talcahuano.⁸⁹ The rest of the warships were being repaired, while the *Infatigable* could not be classified as a man-of-war.

Chilean historiography has provided its own explanation of British involvement in this incident. According to Bunster, when president Montt heard about the mutiny in Magallanes, he “rented” the *Virago* to search for *Cambiaso*.⁹⁰ It is difficult to think that the most powerful global naval and economic power at that time would “rent” one of her men-of-war to a developing nation. According to Braun, Moresby gently and spontaneously offered the Chilean authorities the *Virago* to search for *Cambiaso*, an offer immediately accepted by Montt.⁹¹ Vicuña Mackenna provided a similar account: the *Virago* was handed over to Chilean authorities.⁹²

However, on the basis of the new evidence we have gathered from the correspondence between the Chilean government and British representatives it is clear that the Chilean government sought immediate support from the British navy, as Chilean authorities were unable to deal urgently with this matter, showing a clear dependency on British naval power. The British navy happened to have two men-of-war at their disposal at Valparaíso at that time, the *Virago* and the *Vulcan*, while a third steamer, the *Thetis*, was due to arrive.⁹³ The British consul in Santiago reported to London that:

the convicts and prisoners detained in the Chilean colony of Magallanes have revolted, have murdered the governor and have seized two merchant vessels. . . . The Chilean government have addressed to me . . . requesting that one of Her Majesty’s steam vessels may be sent to ward the population.⁹⁴

Confirming this request, Antonio Varas, Chilean foreign affairs minister, wrote to the British chargé d’affaires in Chile begging for help:

Having had the honor to acquaint you, verbally, with the mutiny which has broken out in the colony of Magallanes . . . I deem it superfluous to submit for your consideration the disadvantages and contingences that may arise therefrom. . . . The present communication has, however, still a second object, which is: to request of you (as I am now doing by order of the [Chilean] President) that you will employ your influence with the Commander of Her Majesty’s naval forces. . . . The government have no ships at their disposal in Valparaiso.⁹⁵

⁸⁷ Baeza, *Contacts*, 154. A similar situation was observed in Peru, at least until the mid-1830s. Ortiz-Sotelo, “Peru and the British.”

⁸⁸ Consul Ross to Moresby, Coquimbo, 29 November 1851, FO 16/81, TNA.

⁸⁹ Fuenzalida, “Motín de *Cambiaso*,” 488–9.

⁹⁰ Bunster, *Motín*, 98.

⁹¹ Braun, *Cambiaso*, 200–1.

⁹² Vicuña Mackenna, *Cambiaso*, 210.

⁹³ Consul Sullivan to Commander Prevost, Santiago, 12 January 1852, FO 16/77, TNA.

⁹⁴ Consul Sullivan to Viscount Palmerston, Santiago, 20 January 1852, FO 16/77, TNA.

⁹⁵ Antonio Varas to British Charge d’Affairs, Santiago, 12 January 1852, FO 16/77, TNA.

In a second letter, dated the same day, Varas added,

I am directed by the government to bring this to your notice to the effect that the [British] Commander of Her Majesty's naval forces . . . may be good enough to take such measures as he may consider himself authorised for.⁹⁶

Varas astutely highlighted the dangers of piracy and the need to protect British commercial interests in the area, priorities for both the consuls and the navy. By this stage Britain was already claiming the right to suppress maritime piracy.⁹⁷

Thus it is clear that the British military interventions during 1851–52 were requested by Chilean authorities. These actions may be framed as international cooperation, since they were beneficial to both parties: to the British because they further ensured that British trade and properties were in safe havens, and to the Chilean government because, paradoxically (despite foreign intervention), they ensured Chilean sovereignty over its distant territories.⁹⁸ There was, however, a power imbalance, as a quibble over the *Eliza Cornish* treasure illustrates (see below). As Luis Ortega points out, by this stage it was evident that the Chilean government did not have the capacity to effectively control some of its isolated settlements.⁹⁹

Support was also sought from Americans after the seizure of the *Florida*. Varas wrote directly to Balie Peyton, the U.S. minister plenipotentiary to Chile, but, as Peyton confessed to Moresby, when the news of the mutiny arrived in Valparaíso, there was “no American man-of-war in these waters,” so not only Chilean authorities were grateful to the British, but also the Americans.¹⁰⁰ The U.S. consul reported that “at the time this news was received there was no U.S. vessel of war, nor has there since been, here or at any port in Chile.”¹⁰¹ U.S. naval resources in the Pacific were more limited than those of Britain, despite the fact that the Monroe Doctrine had been articulated nearly three decades earlier, and despite the active presence of U.S. whalers and traders since the colonial period. The Pacific became more interesting to the U.S. from the 1850s onwards, following its territorial expansion and the construction of the first transcontinental railroad. At the time of these negotiations, Mexico had only recently ceded its claim to California to the U.S., and it was only two years since the Gold Rush had begun.

On 16 January 1852 the *Virago* left Valparaíso in search of Cambiazo.¹⁰² It was joined by the *Infatigable* at Talcahuano and by the *Meteoro* in Valdivia. It was given clear instructions by the rear admiral:

You are hereby required & directed to proceed forthwith in HM the sloop *Virago* under your command to Point Arena [Punta Arenas]. . . . You are to use your best endeavours to re-capture the two vessels . . . bring them to this port. You are also to re-capture any other vessels that may have been seized by the convicts.¹⁰³

⁹⁶ Antonio Varas to British Charge d’Affairs, Santiago, 12 January 1852, FO 16/77, TNA.

⁹⁷ Kempe, “Even in the Remotest Corners,” 353–5.

⁹⁸ Our research also fits with the idea that the British navy was more active in the Pacific than previously thought, as Ortiz-Sotelo has noted with reference to Peru in “Peru and the British.”

⁹⁹ Luis Ortega, “La política, las finanzas públicas y la construcción territorial. Chile 1830–1887. Ensayo de interpretación,” *Universum* 25:1 (2010), 141–50.

¹⁰⁰ Peyton to Moresby, Santiago, 15 January 1852, FO 16/81, TNA; see also Durham, *Balie Peyton*, 128–30.

¹⁰¹ Consul Duer to Daniel Webster, Santiago, 25 January 1852, Despatches from United States Consuls in Valparaíso, 1812–1906 (M146), Roll 5, TNAW.

¹⁰² Braun, *Cambiazo*, 128; Fuenzalida, “Motín de Cambiazo.” 486–90; Bunster, *Motín*, 101.

¹⁰³ Moresby to Stewart, Valparaíso, 15 January 1852, FO 16/81, TNA.

Moresby sent the *Thetis* to Valdivia to further support the rescue operation.¹⁰⁴ The captain was given similar instructions to those issued to the captain of the *Virago*.¹⁰⁵

The British navy was not acting only in response to the request of the Chilean authorities, but also responding to British commercial interests in the region. Less than twenty-four hours after the news of the mutiny had arrived in Valparaíso, the British consul was quick to write to his naval officers:

I understand that another British merchant steam ship called the “Quito,” and probably other British merchant vessels would shortly pass through the Straits, and as they might be exposed to danger by touching at the Chilian settlements in question, I think it my duty to solicit your attention to the circumstance, and to the expediency of taking all proper measures for the security of British commerce.¹⁰⁶

British merchants in Valparaíso wrote to the British rear admiral begging him “to take such measures as your good judgement may dictate for the protection of British interest in that quarter, as well as on the coasts of Chili generally.”¹⁰⁷ The main point of having a navy stationed in the Pacific was to protect British commercial interests in the area.¹⁰⁸

Days after leaving Valparaíso, and almost by chance, the *Virago* found the *Eliza Cornish* with 170 people on board. She was struggling in the Straits trying to reach the Pacific. A few days later the *Virago* found and rescued some forty-five stranded civilians, passengers from the *Eliza Cornish*. The *Eliza Cornish* was first discovered at Playa Parda, near Puerto Solano (Wood’s Bay).¹⁰⁹ To explain this situation we need to go back to the day Cambiaso ordered the evacuation of the entire colony in early January 1852. Cambiaso had asked most civilians to board the *Eliza Cornish*, while he, his closest collaborators, and a few other civilians boarded the *Florida*. Following Cambiaso’s instructions, both ships headed to the Pacific, supposedly on their way to Chiloé or Arauco to join Cruz’s forces.

A few days later they anchored at Wood’s Bay, where a French vessel (the *Garonne*) had been wrecked a few months earlier, still loaded with wine and brandy, on its way from Bordeaux to San Francisco.¹¹⁰ In the ensuing days the crew drank as much wine as possible, while Cambiaso ordered some forty-five to fifty passengers from the *Florida* to go ashore.¹¹¹ They could not have imagined Cambiaso’s real intentions: “the men landed at Wood’s Bay were to be left behind to starve or fall a prey to the Indians.”¹¹² On 12 January 1852, Cambiaso ordered the *Eliza Cornish* to go north, on her own, knowing that the ship had suffered some damage, while those on shore were abandoned.

Both the crew of the *Eliza Cornish* and those on shore were extremely lucky that the *Virago* found them before they were attacked by local natives or starved to death.¹¹³ On

¹⁰⁴ Moresby to the Admiralty, Valparaíso, 21 January 1852; *The Times*, “A Penal Settlement,” 17 April 1852, FO 16/81, TNA.

¹⁰⁵ Moresby to Captain Kuper, Valparaíso, 15 January 1852, FO 16/81, TNA.

¹⁰⁶ Consul Rouse to the Senior Officer of HM Navy, Valparaíso, 12 January 1852, FO 16/81, TNA. The information about the *Quito* probably arrived from Buenos Aires via an overland postal service, which covered the route in about 15–20 days, depending on weather conditions, and 2–3 times per month. Ernesto Greve, *Historia de la Ingeniería en Chile* (Santiago: Imprenta Universitaria, 1938).

¹⁰⁷ British Merchants at Valparaíso to Moresby, Valparaíso, 14 January 1852, FO 16/81, TNA.

¹⁰⁸ Baeza, *Contacts*, 169–70.

¹⁰⁹ Braun, *Cambiaso*, 184–5; Bunster, *Motín*, 100–4; Fuenzalida, “Motín de Cambiaso,” 485–9.

¹¹⁰ “The Markets,” *The Morning Advertiser* [London], October 11, 1851.

¹¹¹ Appleton, *Insurrection at Magellan*, 145–8.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 154.

¹¹³ On stranded sailors and natives and indigenous violence in this area, see Manuel Llorca-Jaña, “Of ‘Savages,’ Shipwrecks and Seamen: British Consular Contacts with the Native People of Southern South America during the 1820s and 1830s,” *International Journal of Maritime History* 24:2 (2012), 127–54.

20 January the *Eliza Cornish* was finally taken by Commander Stewart.¹¹⁴ According to Stewart,

I took possession of this vessel . . . having found her working out of the part of the Straits called Long Beach . . . with 128 men, 24 women & 18 children on board, besides the English mate and crew . . . & I believe the majority of them desperate ruffians.¹¹⁵

The pugnacious Sergeant Briones was chained and taken on board the *Virago*. One of the closest allies of Cambiaso was now in irons and in British custody.

Showing no mercy either to those stranded on shore or to the crew of the *Eliza Cornish*, Cambiaso ordered the captain of the *Florida* to return to the Straits and thence to the Atlantic. By this stage, though, the *Florida's* passengers were highly suspicious of Cambiaso's intentions. Many thought that they would face the same fate as those left to die in Wood's Bay, and a counter-revolution started to gather momentum.¹¹⁶ There was a rumour that Cambiaso wanted to run away to Europe or Brazil, but that before that he would either abandon or kill most of the crew in order to avoid sharing the treasure.¹¹⁷

On 28 January 1852 the revolt succeeded, to Cambiaso's surprise. Who the ringleaders were is still a matter of debate. According to the American captain of the *Florida*, Mr. Brown, he alone orchestrated the whole operation.¹¹⁸ According to Vicuña Mackenna, the ringleaders were Lieutenant Luis Villegas and Sergeant Manuel Prieto, supported by Captain Avalos, the secretary of the colony, and Mr. Dunn, with Captain Brown relegated to a secondary role.¹¹⁹ It was almost certainly a collaborative effort. Cambiaso was put in irons as along with his closest allies. Whoever was actually in charge, they decided to go to Chiloé to deliver the prisoners, the treasure, and the ship to Chilean authorities.

Meanwhile, after the *Virago* had rescued the *Eliza Cornish*, Commander Stewart left all the passengers in a safe haven at Playa Parda, in order to continue the search for the *Florida*, where they now knew Cambiaso was hiding. The *Virago* headed to the Straits once again, but without success. Upon arrival in Punta Arenas, the *Virago* was lucky enough to find a Swedish vessel, the *Eugene*, coming from the Atlantic.¹²⁰ The information provided by the captain of the Nordic ship, which confirmed that no craft had been seen coming from the Pacific, convinced Stewart that it was impossible to reach the *Florida* if they crossed to the Atlantic: "I thought it useless to remain any longer in the dreary and tempestuous region."¹²¹ Stewart decided to return to the Pacific and to tow the *Eliza Cornish* to Valparaíso.

A proud Commander Stewart reported back to Valparaíso with good reason to be pleased:

I have executed your orders in clearing the Straits for commercial purposes, having retaken the . . . *Eliza Cornish* with 150 . . . Pirates on board, and some others I have picked up in different localities, her mate and crew being on board, the Captain and owner, together with the owner of the Barque having been previously murdered.

¹¹⁴ Consul Sullivan to Lord Palmerston, Santiago, 24 February 1852, FO 16/77, TNA.

¹¹⁵ Stewart to Moresby, Valparaíso, 23 February 1852, FO 16/81, TNA.

¹¹⁶ Bunster, *Motín*, 99–102.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 100–2.

¹¹⁸ Appleton, *Insurrection at Magellan*, 1–5.

¹¹⁹ Bunster, *Motín*, 100–7.

¹²⁰ Villalobos, "Chile en 1852," 45.

¹²¹ Stewart to Moresby, Valparaíso, 23 February 1852, FO 16/81, TNA.

I regret to say that the American Barque Florida (with Cambiaso Garcia and about 150 more of the mutineers, and about 90.000 dollars on board) passed to the eastern entrance of the straits on the 12th of last month.¹²²

They returned to Wood's Bay, and from there decided to go to Ancud (Chiloé), where they arrived on 15 February. To their surprise, the *Florida* had anchored at Ancud the night before. Stewart immediately took control of the *Florida*, taking the most dangerous prisoners on board the *Virago*, including Cambiaso and García, as well as the treasure.¹²³ According to Stewart, after his arrival in Chiloé and discovery of the *Florida*,

[he] put an officer & guard on board, for the double security of the prisoners. . . . The Intendente begged me to take Cambiaso, García & the Ring Leaders on board my ship, as he had not the means of securing them properly. With this request I immediately complied. . . . I found that the machinery of the government at Chiloé was a very clumsy affair. . . . I therefore transferred all the male prisoners. . . . to the *Virago*. . . . I secured them on board for the night. . . & the next day transferred them to the Chilian vessels of war. . . . The Chilian authorities declared their inability to receive the barque.¹²⁴

The fragility of this situation was underlined by the captain of the *Florida*, Mr. Brown, who confessed that "I doubted our ability to keep the prisoners under for many days longer, there having been already two attempts to rise among them, only kept down by our prompt watchfulness," further adding that Chilean authorities at Chiloé "all seemed to stand somewhat in awe of captain Stewart; or, to speak more properly, of the British lion, whose might he represented."¹²⁵

Eventually, in late February the whole fleet arrived in Valparaíso, including the *Virago*, the *Meteoro*, the *Infatigable*, the *Florida*, and the *Eliza Cornish*. A crowd of around ten thousand waited for them at the dock.¹²⁶ The British naval officers were still in charge of the rescue operations. Moresby reported that upon the arrival of the fleet, "I have given directions for the prisoners both on board the *Florida* and the *Eliza Cornish* to be delivered to the Chilian authorities."¹²⁷ According to *The Times*, out of the arrivals, "the number of persons to be considered pirates was 334."¹²⁸ Chilean authorities, were, at that time, very pleased and grateful: "Immediately after the arrival of the captured band of pirates at Valparaiso I received the thanks of the President & his Ministers for the efficient assistance rendered & their congratulations upon the happy rescue."¹²⁹

Cambiaso's trial lasted thirty days: he was stripped of his rank before being sentenced to death and dismemberment. Six other mutineers were also executed.¹³⁰ On 4 April 1852, in front of a crowd of twenty thousand people, Cambiaso was shot. No one from the army or the judiciary wanted to dismember him, so the job was offered to a prisoner in exchange for his liberty. The inmate was given an axe and a knife, and he was "more than three hours sawing and dismembering the bloodstained body"¹³¹ in front of the

¹²² Commander Stewart to Moresby, Port Famine, 2 February 1852, FO 16/77, TNA.

¹²³ "Admiralty Court," *The Times*, 31 May 1853.

¹²⁴ Stewart to Moresby, Valparaíso, 23 February 1852, FO 16/81, TNA.

¹²⁵ Appleton, *Insurrection at Magellan*, 193 and 202.

¹²⁶ Bunster, *Motín*, 55–7.

¹²⁷ Moresby to Consul Sullivan, Valparaíso, 24 February 1852, FO 16/77, TNA.

¹²⁸ "The Magellan Pirates," *The Times*, 27 July 1853.

¹²⁹ Moresby to Admiralty, Callao, 9 April 1852, FO 16/81, TNA.

¹³⁰ Collier and Sater, *Historia de Chile*.

¹³¹ "Más de tres horas aserrando los miembros del ensangrentado cadáver," Bunster, *Motín*, 227.

public, at a time when extreme interpersonal violence was perceived as an acceptable feature of everyday life.¹³²

Requests for assistance by Chilean authorities to the British navy were not restricted to the Cambiaso mutiny or the recapture of the *Firefly* and the *Arauco* during the 1851 Civil War. When a similar revolt erupted in the penal colony Juan Fernández, Chilean authorities again sought British help. A correspondent for *The Times* reported that after Cambiaso's mutiny, "a similar outbreak has recently occurred at the island of Juan Fernandez. . . . This island is at present one of the depots for Chili prisoners,"¹³³ further adding that "their intention was to kill the Governor, and make themselves masters of the island."¹³⁴ Without even knowing about the Punta Arenas mutiny, on 5 January 1852, the convicts at Juan Fernández took possession of a ship.¹³⁵ As reported by the U.S. consul in Chile, "More recently there has been an insurrection of the prisoners at the island of Juan Fernandez, and it is reported that they have seized the American Bark Eliza of San Francisco."¹³⁶ Once again, British Rear Admiral Moresby came to the rescue:

Intelligence was received that the convicts had possessed themselves of a Chilian vessel & had plundered the poor colonists & had effected their escape to Cobija. . . . Previous to quitting Valparaiso I thought it advisable to see the President & Ministers at Santiago. . . . I found about 100 persons at Juan Fernandez. . . they were wretchedly poor & failing the necessaries of life, the convicts having carried off their provisions and property. For three weeks they had been without bread or any substitute. I supplied them with sufficient to last until provisions could be sent.¹³⁷

It is worth noting that a dispute then arose between the British naval officers and Chilean authorities. The Chilean government's first reaction to Stewart's endeavours was to thank the British for their invaluable support in suppressing the revolt. However, the way Commander Stewart had handled the recovery of the *Eliza Cornish's* treasure led to some bitter exchanges. The Chilean government requested the restitution of the treasure.¹³⁸ According to Stewart, when he arrived at Chiloé he proceeded immediately on board the *Florida*,

finding all in confusion and disorder. I at once placed an officer with a guard in charge of the vessel and persons on board of her. . . no measures having been taken by the [Chiloé] Intendent or Commander of the "Indefatigable." . . Only five

¹³² Rivero-Cantillano and Llorca-Jaña, "Colonización," 3–5; Gonzalo Serrano, *¿Quién mató a Diego Portales?* (Santiago: RIL, 2022). For the history of crime in Chile at this time, see Daniel Palma, *Ladrones. Historia social y cultura del robo en Chile, 1870–1920* (Santiago: LOM, 2011); Daniel Palma, "Ladrones, policías y orden callejero en Santiago de Chile, 1896–1924," *Anuario Colombiano de Historia Social y de la Cultura*, 46:2 (2019), 59–86; Juan G. Estay and Alessandro Monteverde, "La criminalidad como tema historiográfico: Chile en el siglo XIX," *Revista Espiga* 16:33 (2017), 131–47; Marco A. León, "Los dilemas de una sociedad cambiante: criminología, criminalidad y justicia en Chile contemporáneo, 1911–1965," *Revista Chilena de Historia del Derecho* 19:1 (2003), 223–77; Alessandro R. Monteverde, *Crimen y Delincuencia en Aconcagua 1800–1850* (Valparaíso: Ediciones de la Facultad de Humanidades de la Universidad de Playa Ancha, 2008). All this literature agrees on one fact: the levels of interpersonal violence in Chile at this time were extremely high, comparable to medieval Europe.

¹³³ "America," *The Times*, 24 March 1852.

¹³⁴ "America," *The Times*, 1 April 1853.

¹³⁵ Vicuña Mackenna, *Juan Fernández*, 158–60.

¹³⁶ Consul Duer to Daniel Webster, Santiago, 25 January 1852. Despatches from United States Consuls in Valparaíso, 1812–1906 (M146), Roll 5, TNAW.

¹³⁷ Moresby to Admiralty, Valparaíso, 21 February 1852, FO 16/81, TNA.

¹³⁸ Antonio Varas to Consul Sullivan, Santiago, 16 March 1852, FO 16/77, TNA.

of the prisoners were in confinement, the rest . . . being free . . . to do whatever they pleased. . . . Having placed all in security and taken upon myself the charge of the *Florida*'s prisoners and property, I proceeded onshore to wait on the Intendente accompanied by Captain Bynon. To this authority I stated the measures I had taken . . . for which he said he thanked me sincerely.¹³⁹

Yet, the view of the Chilean government, now behaving as an “independent” government, and based on a report produced by Captain Bynon, was that when Stewart took control of the *Florida* off Chiloé it had already surrendered to the Chilean vessel of war *Infatigable*, so the treasure taken from the *Florida* had to be returned to Chile until it could be proven that it was actually British property.¹⁴⁰ Minister Varas added that the *Florida*,

had surrendered herself to the national authorities in the island of Chiloé, the day before the arrival of the . . . *Virago* . . . the *Florida* was under Chilian control and authority when Commander Stewart went on board of her, and it hence follows that . . . the classification of re-capture, cannot but be looked upon but as an act devoid of regularity.¹⁴¹

In response, Sullivan reported that:

although it may be said that the *Florida* was under the guard of the Chilean vessel of war, yet it is more than probable that the presence of the *Virago* was absolutely necessary to . . . prevent Sr Cambiasso and his accomplices from committing further outrages, for it is clear that the Chilean man-of-war and the Chilian authorities were too weak.¹⁴²

In a strong letter sent by Stewart to Bynon, the British commander reminded the Chilean captain that both Bynon and the Intendente asked him “to take charge of the vessel . . . the prisoners and property on board” as they “had not the means of securing them properly.”¹⁴³ After some exchanges, the British authorities, both the Admiralty and the Foreign Office, fully backed Stewart's version, as is seen in this letter:

There is undoubtedly much difference between the report of Commander Stewart and the report addressed by Captain Bynon. . . . By that report . . . your lordship will perceive . . . [the] insincerity which forms the foundation of the Chilian character. To judge from that report, it might be supposed that Captain Bynon was placed in a position superior to that of Commander Stewart. . . . Whereas Captain Bynon was a simple passenger on board the *Virago*. . . . Before concluding this dispatch, I cannot but draw the attention of your Lordship to the . . . tone of injustice and ingratitude which pervades the note of the Chilian minister, and it is the more extraordinary when it is to be remembered that the Chilian government have good reason to be grateful to the officers of Her Majesty Naval service . . . and that it is thanks to the exertions of Commander Stewart that the Chilian waters have been disencumbered of such dangerous pirates as Cambiasso and his accomplices.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁹ Stewart to Captain Wellesley, 22 March 1852, FO 16/77, TNA.

¹⁴⁰ Consul Sullivan to Earl Granville, Santiago, 28 April 1852, FO 16/77, TNA.

¹⁴¹ Antonio Varas to Consul Sullivan, Santiago, 16 March 1852, FO 16/77, TNA.

¹⁴² Consul Sullivan to Earl Granville, Santiago, 28 April 1852, FO 16/77, TNA.

¹⁴³ Stewart to Bynon, Valparaíso, 26 February 1852, FO 16/77, TNA.

¹⁴⁴ Consul Sullivan to Earl Granville, Santiago, 28 April 1852, FO 16/77, TNA.

Further endorsing Stewart's version, the surviving crew of the *Florida* declared that "we did not consider our lives nor the English property on board the *Florida* at Chiloé safe, until Captain Stewart took charge of it."¹⁴⁵ In reference to Bynon's version in particular, the British consul in Chile went as far as to declare that "there are persons who are unwilling to show themselves when danger or difficulty arises, but who, when the difficulty has been surmounted by others, are ready enough to take credit for what has been done."¹⁴⁶

Despite this controversy, the *Eliza Cornish* was sent back to Liverpool in March 1852, "together with the treasure."¹⁴⁷ The *Eliza Cornish* sailed under the command of officers and men of the *Virago*.¹⁴⁸ Some other issues related to repairs undertaken in the island of Fayal in the Azores on her way to Britain arose, but they are beyond the scope and ambitions of this paper, and can be seen in the records of the High Court of Admiralty.¹⁴⁹ What is clear is that the treasure remained in Britain, somehow a result of the imbalance of power in favour of London.

Conclusions

As we have shown, contrary to the prevailing Chilean historiography, British involvement in the Cambiaso mutiny was of crucial importance in overpowering the mutineers, in ensuring Chilean sovereignty over Punta Arenas (and even Chiloé), and in saving many lives. Without the fast and effective intervention of the British naval forces in the Pacific, those left in Wood's Bay would probably have died, while Cambiaso might have led another attempt at insubordination while anchored at Chiloé. We have provided sound evidence to prove that the British navy acted upon the express request of the Chilean government, with official authorisation from local authorities. The whole incident makes it clear that Chile's relations with mighty Britain oscillated between independence and dependency. Chilean authorities asked for British intervention, thus obtaining immediate benefits (i.e., internal political stability and territorial control over a distant place) from the actions of an "imperial" power. But the British intervention in this incident also suggests that mature relations between both British and Chilean authorities had developed, even at this early stage before the nitrate era, based on trust built during the previous decades.

We have thus added a new dimension to Anglo-Chilean political relations after the institution of the Portalian period. While Andrés Baeza has covered the previous period well, the literature for the 1830s–1850s has concentrated primarily on commercial relations.¹⁵⁰ But we have added more evidence to support those who argue that poor communications during the first half of the nineteenth century gave British consuls and Britain's naval officers in the Pacific considerable autonomy to act on their own judgement, although there may have been constraints on what the Foreign Office and the Admiralty would consider acceptable. Due to the urgency of the Cambiaso situation, Commander Moresby agreed to help Chilean authorities without having formal authorisation from either the British navy or the Foreign Office back in London: approval and support were given retrospectively.

¹⁴⁵ Surviving Crew of the *Florida* to Captain Wellesley, Valparaíso, 25 February 1852, FO 16/77, TNA.

¹⁴⁶ Consul Sullivan to Antonio Varas, Santiago, 19 April 1852, FO 16/77, TNA.

¹⁴⁷ Consul Sullivan to Earl Granville, Santiago, 28 April 1852, FO 16/77, TNA; ERC: 1853, 164 E.R. 22, High Court of Admiralty, "Segredo," Otherwise "Eliza Cornish."

¹⁴⁸ Captain Wellesley to Consul Sullivan, Valparaíso, 24 March 1852, FO 16/77, TNA.

¹⁴⁹ ERC: 1853, 164 E.R. 22, High Court of Admiralty, "Segredo," Otherwise "Eliza Cornish," in particular.

¹⁵⁰ Llorca-Jaña, *The British Textile Trade*; Eduardo Cavieres, *Comercio chileno y comerciantes ingleses, 1820–1880* (Valparaíso: Universidad Católica de Valparaíso, 1988).

The whole incident also shows the fragility of the process of Chilean state formation in distant Magallanes, the insufficient resources allocated to it, the poor state of transport and communications, and the miserable condition of the Chilean navy. The new state did not have enough resources to ensure sovereignty over all the territories claimed by the Chilean constitution of 1833. Simon Collier and William Sater note that before the mid-nineteenth century, Chile was unable to consolidate a republican state.¹⁵¹ But we also believe that by this stage there was a lack of real commitment to exert effective control over distant Magallanes, due lack of interest, budget restrictions, and despite perceived threats from neighbouring Argentina. Furthermore, historians have claimed that one of the secrets of Chilean political stability during our period of study was that Santiago-Valparaíso managed to agree terms with Concepción and Atacama, but they have said little about Magallanes. The Cambiaso mutiny reminds us that more attention needs to be paid to the remainder of the territory. And indeed, the process of state formation in distant Magallanes was different to the rest of country: it needed support from the British.

These issues forced the Chilean government to rely on the British navy, who restored peace and order when requested by Chilean authorities, while the U.S. naval presence in Chilean coasts was less reliable. The attitude of Britain towards Chile's internal politics seems to have changed from neutrality in the 1820s to (requested) intervention. That said, it is also the case that the British naval actions were unplanned, not directed from London; they were a spontaneous response by naval and consular officials to a specific request made by the Chilean government, and to a lesser extent by British merchants at Valparaíso. As Harambour noted in reference to Patagonia's colonisation, there was an "intermixing of international power relations and multi-ethnic peoples, all of them newcomers."¹⁵²

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¹⁵¹ Collier and Sater, *Historia de Chile*, 128.

¹⁵² Harambour, "Borderland Sovereignties," 14.

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