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From Colonial Representation to Materiality: Spanish Settlements on the Valdés Peninsula, Patagonian Coast (1779–1810)

ABSTRACT

In recent years the acknowledgment of the importance of peripheral realities, local contexts, and social actors' roles in shaping both colonialism and modern society has contributed toward challenging the conception of colonialism as a monolithic, unilinear process. This article explores this problematic through the historical and archaeological study of the Spanish colonization of Patagonia. It describes the case of Fuerte San José (Valdés Peninsula, Chubut Province, Argentina), a military fort that existed between 1779 and 1810 and is discussed as an example of the way colonization actually operated within a wider colonial context. There, the integration of historical and archaeological evidence provides the means for contrasting the planning and the implementation of colonial projects in order to uncover their complex and multifaceted character.

Introduction

Spanish expansion into the Patagonian region began in the 16th century and continued until the 19th century. It entailed an effective occupation of the territory, a constant pressure on indigenous populations, and the establishment of commercial outposts in strategic areas within the region. However, in the particular case of Patagonia, colonialism not only translated into a complex historical process, but also into an historical master narrative justifying the occupation, domination, and exploitation of colonial territories at large. Such a metanarrative presented the expansion of modern society to the uttermost parts of the earth as a unilinear, biased story—an inevitable process—with racist and evolutionist undertones (Mignolo 2000; Quijano 2000). In Patagonia, this master narrative was, in addition, one of marginality and homogeneity.

Thus, in general terms, the colonial history of Patagonia, often doomed by tragic endings, tends to be poorly understood.

This article focuses on largely ignored questions about colonial populations generally considered secondary, marginal, and irrelevant to the development of modern society. It aims to expand the discussion of the internal diversity of the colonization of the Atlantic coast of Patagonia in the late 18th century, introducing the case study of the Valdés Peninsula (Chubut Province, Argentina), which included two settlements, Fuerte San José and Puesto de la Fuente (1779–1810). Since 2010, we have been working on the Fuerte San José research project, seeking a better understanding of the way in which colonialism took shape on the Valdés Peninsula. We have concentrated our attention on the intersection of colonial and indigenous strategies that result from the historical link between specific social, economic, and political relations arising from the European expansion into the region and over its indigenous peoples (Bianchi Vilelli et al. 2013; Buscaglia and Bianchi Vilelli 2013).

It is worth mentioning that the colonial occupation of the Valdés Peninsula has not yet been studied by historical archaeologists. In our work, we first examine the relation between colonial planning and its implementation on the Valdés Peninsula as seen through the level of integration of historical and archaeological information. Secondly, we discuss the particularities of the colonial settlement on the Valdés Peninsula, comparing them with other settlements inscribed within the same colonization project. Thus, we seek to highlight the social and material variability, ambivalence, and contradictions of the Spanish colonization project in Patagonia.

The Colonization of Patagonia in an Historical Perspective

From the 16th century, the Patagonian coast was simultaneously the object of exploration and occupation of countless sailors, explorers, and settlers. These came from different

European powers, such as Spain, Portugal, England, France, and the Netherlands; and they had different intentions and strategies concerning the exploitation of resources, the appropriation of territories, and control of indigenous populations. Since the arrival of Magellan in 1520, Spain and England were the major powers interested in exploiting and colonizing the territory, over which Spain had already established its hegemony for centuries. Following failed colonization attempts during the 16th century (Sarmiento de Gamboa 1950; Ibañez 1983; Senatore, De Nigris et al. 2009; Zuleta Carrandi 2013), Spain was absent from eastern Patagonia throughout the 17th century as a result of the political and economic climate prevailing in Europe at that time (Lynch 1994).

In the 18th century, Bourbon reforms opened a new era of Spanish colonialism in Patagonia. In this new scenario of European rivalries, Spain sought to consolidate its position once again (Wallerstein 1974), focusing on the administrative reform of the state and the use of colonial resources as the mainstay of royal income (Lynch 1992). Thus, Patagonia took on new significance in the context of scientific, military, and evangelizing expeditions; by the end of the century, the region was the object of colonization projects at that time conceived within the framework of Enlightenment ideology (Lynch 1994; Marcos Martín 2000; Senatore 2005).

On the other hand, by the end of the 18th century the vast Patagonian steppe was dominated by different indigenous factions, mostly Tehuelches, organized in chiefdoms that ruled seminomadic bands, and whose subsistence was based on hunting, gathering, and trade. The introduction of horses into the region resulted in an increase of mobility, exchange, and *mestizaje* with other indigenous groups—Pampas, Puelches, Mapuches, among others—as well as with settlers of colonial establishments. The Spanish colonization of the Patagonian coast also involved the development of a specific policy encouraging the maintenance of peaceful relations with local indigenous populations. During the 18th century the continuity of colonial settlements depended on minimizing potential conflicts and enhancing trade relations with native

groups. Nonetheless, colonial authorities tried to avoid *mestizaje* between settlers and indigenous people, with poor results in practice (Nacuzzi 1999, 2005; Luiz 2006a, 2006b; Buscaglia 2012, 2015).

Late-Eighteenth-Century Spanish Colonies in the Far South

Just as the advances of Portugal became one of the main reasons for the foundation of the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata (1776), the crisis in Spanish-British relations resulted in the Spanish plan to defend and colonize the Patagonian Atlantic coast. The publication of the *Description of Patagonia*, written in 1774 by English former-Jesuit Thomas Falkner, was considered to be an incitement to the British to take over Patagonia. Thus, at the end of the 18th century, Buenos Aires was established as the head of the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata—the southern extreme of South America—and the Atlantic as a realm of Spanish trade (Chiaramonte 1986; Lynch 1992). In 1778, by royal decrees, a system of colonies and forts was created along the Atlantic coast of the southern end of the American continent—today the Republic of Argentina—with the purpose of reinforcing Spanish domination in its overseas possessions and encouraging their economy (Archivo General de Indias 1778).

Fuerte San José was the first settlement, created in January 1779 on the southeast coast of the Gulf of San José on the Valdés Peninsula, Chubut Province. Fuerte Nuestra Señora del Carmen was established in April that year, at the site of today's Carmen de Patagones City, Buenos Aires Province. Finally, the Nueva Colonia y Fuerte de Floridablanca was created in November 1780 and was the southernmost colony, located inland at the Bay of San Julián, Santa Cruz Province (Figure 1).

The reasons for the creation of this system of colonies along the Atlantic coast of Patagonia were not only defensive, but also ideological, productive, and commercial. The settlements would have ports that could be included in the colonial trade system and would be designed as novel social projects inspired by the ideals of the Spanish Enlightenment. The core concepts

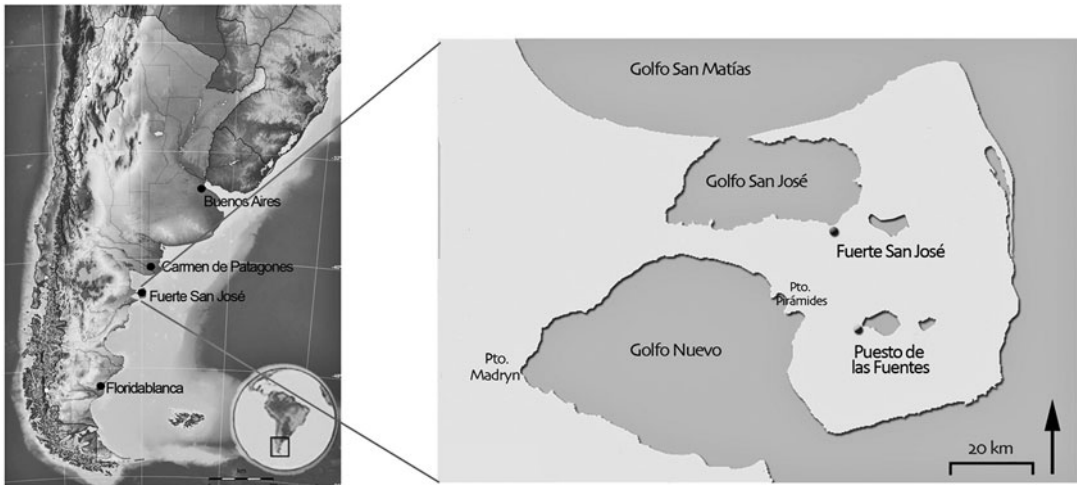


FIGURE 1. *Left*: location of the Spanish settlements in Patagonia. *Right*: location of Fuerte San José and Puesto de la Fuente, Valdés Peninsula, Chubut Province, Argentina. (Maps by authors, 2014.)

were equality; the notion of agriculture as a chief basis for development; the idea of the patriarchal, nuclear family as a mainstay of social structure; and the principle of utility as the glorification of work (Sarrailh 1992; Senatore 2007a, 2007b). These ideas were the basis for several reform projects, among which were the colonization of peninsular Spain, Alta California, Colombia, and South America, through the concentration, the relocation, or the creation of towns to which families of Spanish laborers were moved (Apolant 1970; Navarro García 1994). These social projects were intended as a means to solve the structural problems affecting Spain at that time: privileges and land ownership were considered the main factors in the backwardness of the nation (Chiaramonte 1986; Lynch 1994; Marcos Martín 2000; Senatore 2005; Luiz 2006b).

The Nueva Colonia y Fuerte de Floridablanca was mainly an agricultural settlement and the paradigmatic implementation of the social Enlightenment project par excellence. It has been studied in depth through historical archaeology, with emphasis on analyzing the social character of the settlement plan, daily life in the colony, and interethnic relations. Through these studies it has been possible to identify, at the level of everyday practice, reformulations of the model of social order associated with the Enlightenment ideals

that the colonial project sought to promote (Senatore 2005, 2007a, 2007b; Bianchi Villelli 2007, 2009, 2011; Buscaglia 2008, 2012; Buscaglia et al. 2008; Senatore, Marschoff et al. 2008).

Fuerte Nuestra Señora del Carmen was established not only as an agricultural and livestock colony, but also as a center of trade and diplomatic relations in the context of interethnic contacts in Patagonia during the 18th and 19th centuries. Later urban developments on the site do not seem to have left any archaeological traces of its first occupation, for which the characteristics of the fort and the interethnic relationships associated with it have mainly been approached by historians and ethnohistorians (Gorla 1983, 1984; Nacuzzi 1999, 2005, 2008, 2011; Iruetia 2002; Luiz 2006a, 2006b; Davies 2009).

Fuerte San José was originally planned as a permanent settlement, but after a few months the lack of water forced the population to move to Fuerte Nuestra Señora del Carmen, with San José remaining as a military subsidiary outpost. Even though, in early 1783, Viceroy Vértiz had decided that the Patagonian settlements should be abandoned because they were too expensive for the royal treasury (Vértiz 1969), the three settlements continued on for differing periods of time: Floridablanca—the only one that actually complied

with the royal order—lasted only four years and was abandoned in 1784; Fuerte Nuestra Señora del Carmen developed over time and flourished well into the 19th century, thanks to the favorable conditions for farming, livestock raising, and the proximity to the capital of the viceroyalty; and San José remained as a secondary post until 1810, when it was destroyed by an unexpected indigenous attack.

Spanish Colonization of the Valdés Peninsula: Fuerte San José

In early 1779 an expedition, commanded by Juan de la Piedra, arrived at the Valdés Peninsula and disembarked at the Gulf of San José, of which they took possession (de la Piedra 1779). This initial presence of Spaniards on the Valdés Peninsula in the late 18th century included the establishment of the fort on the coast of the Gulf of San José, and a few years later a subsidiary settlement, Puesto de la Fuente, near the springs at the salt pan named Salina Grande, about 30 km from the coast, discovered by the Spanish pilot Basilio Villarino in 1779 (Figure 1).

In contrast to Fuerte Nuestra Señora del Carmen and Floridablanca, the population at Fuerte San José was primarily administrative, military, and male; in addition to the troops, there were Crown officers, chaplains, surgeons, maintenance staff, and prisoners. The population on the peninsula varied in number over time, from a few to about a hundred persons, and was ruled by a system of tribute, usually once a year, although the terms were rarely fulfilled.

The administration and economy of Fuerte San José depended on Fuerte Nuestra Señora del Carmen, often making it extremely vulnerable, particularly due to frequent shortages. During the first months, authority at Puerto San José was held by a succession of superintendent commissaries from the 1779 expedition. In September that year, a scurvy epidemic devastated the population and gave rise to a confrontation with the troops. As a result, only Pedro García, lieutenant of the infantry regiment, and eight other men remained in charge (Viedma 1969). From then on, a succession of different officers took command of the site and the population

increased (De Paula 1984; Destéfani 1984; Barba Ruiz 2009).

For 31 years, life at the Spanish settlements on the Valdés Peninsula followed the usual fluctuations of many colonial enterprises, marked by disease, shortages, and episodes of hostility against indigenous people alternating with periods of prosperity and calm. The population of Fuerte San José managed to survive despite the royal order of 1 August 1783 that required all Patagonian settlements to be abandoned. In 1810, a few months after the revolution against Spanish domination began, the Primera Junta de Gobierno (First Government Assembly) ordered the garrison to move to Fuerte Nuestra Señora del Carmen. However, between 7 and 8 August that year, both the fort on the shore and the settlement near the salt pan were attacked, allegedly by indigenous people: Tehuelches and Pampas, according to historiography; the ethnic affiliation of the group leading the attack is not mentioned by primary historical sources, however. As a result of the attack, most of the inhabitants died, as reported by one of the five survivors who reached Fuerte Nuestra Señora del Carmen seeking help (Aragón 1810).¹ Due to the existence of different and contradictory historical versions, the causes and identities of the authors of the aggression are still an enigma, with new lines of both historical and archaeological evidence needed (Buscaglia 2013).

From Representation to Materiality on the Colonial Valdés Peninsula

During the 20th century, traditional historiography has created a single narrative that stressed defense against foreign powers as the only explanation for the creation of the settlements (Bianchi Vilelli 2013). This argument has also emphasized the epic character of the colonizing enterprise at Fuerte San José in a twofold dimension: by highlighting the dates of foundation and ending, ignoring that the settlement lasted 31 years; and by defining the fort in terms of its architectural magnificence, an impression that is, in fact, based on an erroneous identification of maps by historians (Bianchi Vilelli et al. 2013). Moreover, this historical narrative has been indifferent to

many other features, such as the actual location of the sites, their infrastructure, and the vulnerability to indigenous attacks. Finally, interethnic relations have been described in a negative way, incurring a strong ethnocentric bias that naturalizes the “savageness” of the natives and ignores the long-lasting relations with the settlers to focus on the episode of the final attack (Buscaglia 2013, 2015).

Our perspective on Fuerte San José, integrating primary historical sources and archaeological evidence, provides results that differ in some aspects from the versions known to date, posing new questions on the history of the colonial settlements (Buscaglia et al. 2012; Bianchi Villelli et al. 2013; Buscaglia and Bianchi Villelli 2013). The starting point is to discuss the materiality and functionality of the settlements from a comparative perspective, considering the scope of the colonial planning and the way it was actually implemented. We will report the results of an exhaustive analysis of the historical documentation² and the initial results of the archaeological research on both sites. Integrating both lines of evidence has led to new information on the pattern of settlement, architectural organization, building sequence, and interethnic relations with indigenous populations.

Historical Archaeology on the Valdés Peninsula

The Valdés Peninsula is on the Atlantic coast of Argentina, in the northeastern part of Chubut Province. Its surface area is about 4000 km², and it is joined to the mainland by the Carlos Ameghino Isthmus. The latter has a maximum width of 8 km and enables both animals and people to move between the peninsula and the mainland. Overall, the Valdés Peninsula is one of the largest conservation units of arid lands in Argentina; it is a steppe environment with shrub steppe vegetation, pastures, and plentiful firewood. Terrestrial fauna is typically Patagonian, and includes guanaco, Darwin’s rhea, Patagonian *mara*, fox, and puma. Marine fauna is plentiful and diverse, represented mainly by cetaceans, such as the Southern right whale and dolphins, pinnipeds, a wide variety of crustaceans, mollusks, and bird species. The

only permanent sources of fresh water are in the salt pans in the interior of the peninsula, and they provide an atypical supply for these arid regions (Gómez Otero et al. 1999). The Valdés Peninsula was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO and a Protected Natural Area by provincial law in 1999, due to its beauty and well-preserved biodiversity (Gómez Otero et al. 1999; Gómez Otero 2003, 2007).

Both archaeological sites are within the peninsula: Fuerte San José was set at the northern gulf, while Puesto de la Fuente was established inland, next to a salt pan for water availability. The sites are in a critical state of conservation due to the erosive environment. Water erosion constantly carves canyons and gullies that cut across the archaeological area, while wind erosion continually exposes archaeological materials and destroys the scarce remains of adobe walls. In addition, since the beginnings of 20th century, the area has been exposed to sheep grazing and cattle farming, which have led to a severe desertification of the environment (Gómez Otero 2007). The peopling of the Valdés Peninsula, the expansion of extensive livestock farming, and tourism also suggest the looting of both archaeological sites. This cultural and environmental dynamic has defined the research goals in terms of an active intervention through surface recollection, excavation, and heritage protection of the sites—which are located on private properties in a Protected Natural Area.

The following sections deal with the tension between the homogeneity of colonial order and the effective development of particular settlements in practice. The features and functionality of Valdés Peninsula settlements will be presented, with attention paid to the relationship between the general planning and implementation of the complex settlements.

To achieve this goal, the analysis will begin by focusing on the way the locations and configurations of Fuerte San José and Puesto de la Fuente were incorporated into 18th-century maps, given that cartography is a means to build a technology of “knowledge-power” over new territories (Harley 2001). Second, attending to subsistence practices, we will briefly discuss whether productive activities in the Valdés Peninsula were planned in

advance or developed in practice as knowledge of the environment and resources progressed. Third, paying attention to the resources actually invested by the Spanish Crown in the Patagonian colonies, we will build upon archaeological data to evaluate the location and architectural features of both sites. Finally, assuming that interethnic relations played a fundamental role in the continuity or failure of the Patagonian colonies, we will discuss the structuring of interethnic relations on the Valdés Peninsula as compared with the Fuerte Nuestra Señora del Carmen and Floridablanca colonies.

Fuerte San José

Unlike the settlements of Floridablanca and Nuestra Señora del Carmen, the historical cartographic representation of Fuerte San José is vague. Between 1779 and 1782,³ the Crown conducted the first systematic surveys of the coast, charting not only the coastline, but also the mouths of the major north Patagonian rivers, such as the Colorado and the Negro. Maps of that time focus mainly on

physical features—the coastal landforms, the depth of the sea, the location of the river mouths, the natural ports, and the conditions of navigability.

The map in Figure 2 is from one of the earliest reports on Fuerte San José. It is evidently the result of initial surveying efforts: it is drawn facing south, in accordance with the survey's direction; it shows details of the first camps—later abandoned because of the lack of fresh water; and it presents strategic resources—salt pans and springs—without giving exact references or distances. Fuerte San José is sketched as a mere concentration of discrete quadrangular structures, isolated from one another, and lacks details with regard to the size and nature of internal features—all of which seems in accordance with a settlement in its initial stage. It is important to notice its location: in a good port, but far from freshwater springs and without a clear view of the gulf mouth or open seas.

This scheme has been used repeatedly on the detailed maps of the Valdés Peninsula until the mid-19th century; it was also

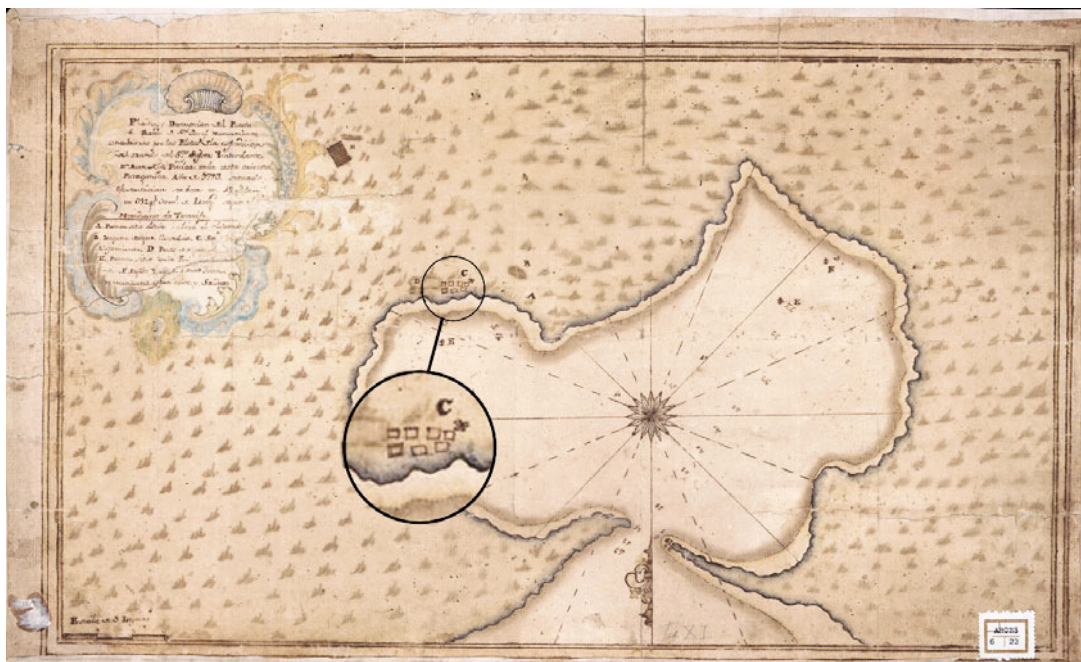


FIGURE 2. Plan of San José port with details of the buildings of Fuerte San José, 1779: (A) initial camps; (B) and (D) water wells; (C) Fuerte San José; (E) port; and (H) salt pan and springs (Fundação Biblioteca Nacional 1779).

reused on larger-scale maps, including the area between the coast of the Colorado River and the Nuevo Gulf. While there are no later surveys or plans drawn specifically for San José and Puesto de la Fuente, there were highly detailed plans of the projected and constructed forts of Nuestra Señora del Carmen and Floridablanca. They were both mapped in the early days of the settlements and only their forts were shown. They were the centers of the official and military power, and the location in which the entire population initially lived.

The differences among the three settlements account for variability in the degree of planning and the uncertainty in their development. As for the Valdés Peninsula, no further efforts at survey were made, but it is worth noting that these precarious sites were definitively incorporated in the cartographic corpus of Patagonia.

Among the documentary sources, there are accounts written by officers who were sent by the viceroyalty to assess the condition of the settlement in its early stages. The most significant is the first report by Lieutenant Manuel Soler in 1779, which reads:

[T]hey showed me, of course, the first storehouse for victuals and other various effects which is located on the Beach, ... having welcomed me cheerfully and with inexplicable joy; having finished that errand, we walked to the camp and rooms located a short stretch away between two low hills, as shown on the plan, and it consists of a small square [*plazuela*] surrounded by four facades, one of which is a large storehouse for victuals and supplies, another one, [corresponds to] military quarters, and the other two are rooms and a Chapel. Outside, there are two Hospitals, kitchens and on one of the small hills the foundations of a square fort enclosed by the poorly shaped ditch constructed for this purpose, but not defensive, and apart from this there is a Store of Gunpowder [translation by authors]. (Soler and Garcia 1779)

In contrast to Nuestra Señora del Carmen and Floridablanca, no regular official reports sent from Fuerte San José have been found, only epistolary exchanges with Fuerte Nuestra del Carmen providing an account of the state of the settlement, troop reviews, requests for supplies, notifications of the presence of foreign ships, and contact with indigenous groups, among other matters. Many of the letters analyzed ask for food,

goods, and supplies to improve the meager living conditions at the fort; it is important to mention the use of leather tents and the request for adobe until the beginning of the 19th century.⁴ This indicates that the precariousness of living spaces at Fuerte San José was part of the everyday conditions faced by the inhabitants.

It should be noted that, for more than 35 years, local historians associated Fuerte San José with a series of architectural plans from 1797 (Lanöel et al. 1974:17; Destéfani 1984:192; Barba Ruiz 2000:11, 2009:57), depicting buildings that were larger and better built than those at Floridablanca and Nuestra Señora del Carmen. During the collation of documents, digital copies were obtained from the General Military Archive of Madrid (Spain), as they are not available in local archives. Given the marked contrast between cartography, historical information, and the archaeological record, we have cast doubt on whether these plans really correspond to Fuerte San José on the Valdés Peninsula (Bianchi Villelli et al. 2013).

The search revealed some surprising facts: in both plans there were no references to Patagonia, and the author, José María Martínez Cáceres, did not appear on any document related to Fuerte San José on the Valdés Peninsula or to the Patagonian colonies. Furthermore, none of the revised documents mention a plan requested by, prepared for, or sent to the region. The plan shows a constructed area of 1747.2 m² and a highly complex construction: a two-story building with a domed roof and a colonial balcony with an iron railing. Lastly, the date 1797 would have been too late for drawing up the maps, as the plans for Floridablanca and Nuestra Señora del Carmen were ready at the time they were founded.

These features are not consistent with the abovementioned historical depictions or with the Crown's intentions for these marginal regions. Above all, they are not consistent with the findings at the archaeological site, as will be seen below. In sum, our research has found that these maps were erroneously assigned: they were, in fact, drawn for another fort of the same name in Montevideo, Uruguay, far from the Valdés Peninsula.

The confusion was a result of the methods of classification followed by the Spanish archive—the General Military Archive of Madrid—where the plans of Montevideo remained in the Argentinean section and were not transferred to the Uruguayan section, because Buenos Aires was the administrative headquarters of the viceroyalty at the time.

Archaeological research at Fuerte San José confirmed its location as recorded in cartographical and written sources: 200 m away from the coast, between low hills on the present-day Playa Fracasso. The analysis of this location focuses on several features: its final position was defined by the hypothetical presence of fresh water, which eventually turned out to be at a distance of 30 km; proximity to a safe and accessible port; and the availability of natural food sources, although with limited wood supplies. While the fort has a good view of the steppe extending southward and of the Gulf of San José, it is far from the mouth of the gulf, with no view to the open sea. Finally, this location was also far from the isthmus connecting the peninsula to the mainland and from Fuerte Nuestra Señora del Carmen. If the defensive argument is recalled, these geographical features question its validity.

We have identified at least three sectors that account for the anthropic spatial structure of the archaeological site: San José 1 (SJ1), San José 2 (SJ2), and San José 3 (SJ3), which will be described below.

There is a central area (SJ1) at the foot of two hills, consisting of a patch of dense vegetation—in contrast to the low surrounding plant cover—slightly raised, with a surface area of 256 m². The current research hypothesis posits that this is the central square where most of the population would have lived as described in Manuel Soler's document (Figure 3).

Archaeological excavations focused on SJ1. Late-18th-century material culture was recovered from shallow stratigraphic deposits; as mentioned above, water and wind erosion affected the site, resulting in low-integrity deposits. There are no standing walls or artifacts, such as bricks, tiles, iron fittings, and nails, suggesting the former presence of long-lasting buildings (Figure 4). The research

carried out so far has not shown features, such as postholes, hearths, or traces of adobe walls. Therefore, these findings support the hypothesis of the architectural precariousness of the settlement as evidenced by the historical record.

The material culture recovered consisted primarily of domestic and daily-use artifacts compatible with a Spanish occupation, such as late-18th-century and early-19th-century Spanish earthenware: blue-on-white and polychrome majolica, olive jars, and red-glazed ware; creamware; alcoholic-beverage containers: gin and wine bottles; personal artifacts: kaolin-clay pipes; clothing: a button from a Spanish navy uniform; and lead ammunition. Among the lithic artifacts, we identified a possible gunflint, a scraper, and four pieces of lithic debris. Most of the zooarchaeological record is of taphonomic origin, with 83.8% corresponding to mammals, specifically sheep (*Ovis* sp.) and, to a lesser extent, guanaco (*Lama guanicoe*) and armadillo (*Zaedyus pichyi*) (Buscaglia et al. 2012) (Figure 4) (Table 1).

SJ2 and SJ3 are on a hill facing the gulf and are affected by major wind erosion due to the altitude. Sector SJ2 may have been the small battery mentioned by historical sources, as it is a quadrangular structure approximately 20 m on a side, surrounded by a ditch, and with remains of eroded adobe walls, Spanish materials on the surface, and two holes—probably dug by looters. Sector SJ3 is at the eastern end of the hill and is a 6 × 4.3 m rectangular trace of highly eroded adobe with a hole dug into the bedrock, the purpose of which has not yet been ascertained.

Also, the modest conditions of the buildings and of daily life at Fuerte San José contrast with the idea of a significant defensive infrastructure. There is no archaeological evidence of major buildings, and most constructions were temporary and perishable—shelters built from leather and posts—as a result of the lack of specific local resources and investment by the Crown. This image of precariousness is partly supported by the account of a Welshman, H. Libanus Jones, who visited the Gulf of San José five times between 1812 and the 1820. In his diary, Jones describes, among other things, hundreds of head of feral cattle;

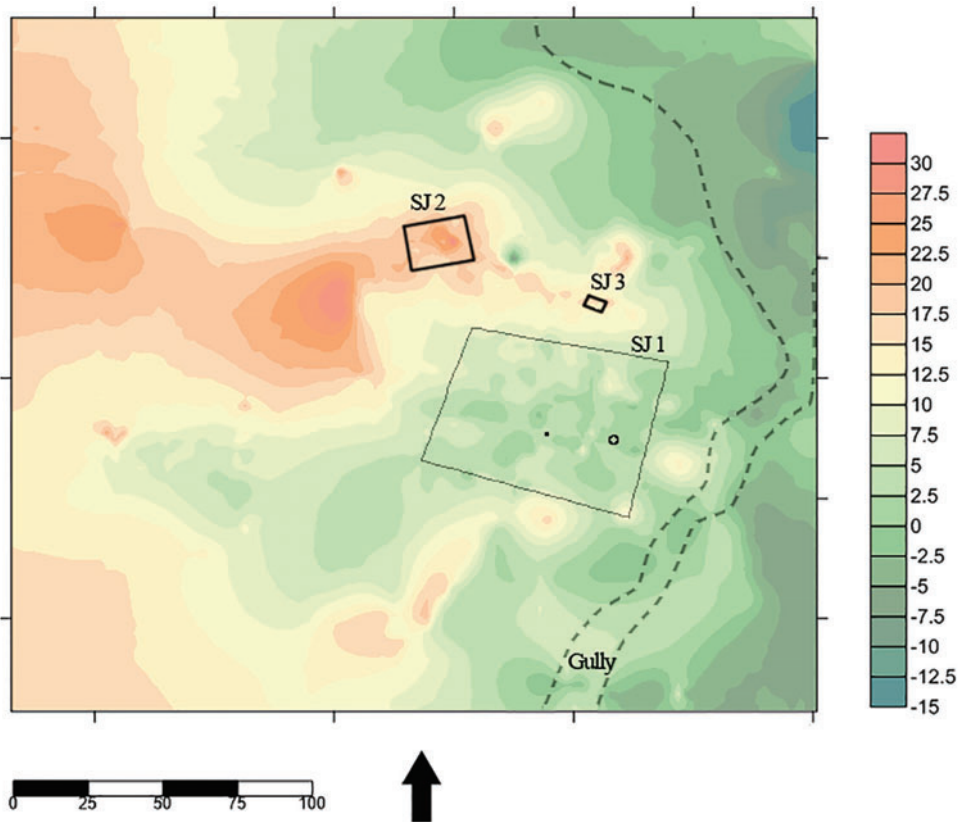


FIGURE 3. Archaeological plan of Forte San José, showing the elevation levels (color gradation indicates lower and higher elevations) and the areas and structures identified by the project (SJ1 with excavation locus, SJ2, and SJ3). The gully is associated with the erosive dynamics of the site and is probably later than the colonial occupation. (Plan by Marcia Bianchi Villelli, 2014.)

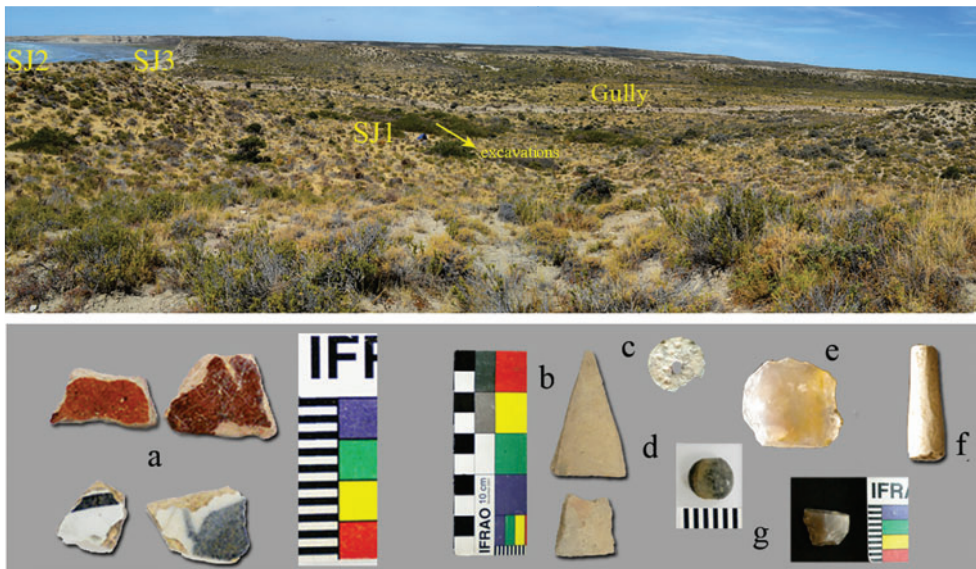


FIGURE 4. *Top*: Panoramic view of the site and location of SJ1, facing east. On the *left*, San José Gulf; on the *right*, the vastness of the steppe. (Photo by authors, 2010.) *Bottom*: Archaeological remains: (a) majolica and red-glazed earthenware; (b) fragments of *botijas*—olive jars; (c) *jeton*—token; (d) lead ammunition; (e) chalcedony scraper; (f) fragment of a kaolin pipe; and (g) French gunflint. (Photos by authors, 2014.)

TABLE 1
 ABUNDANCE AND DIVERSITY OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD RECOVERED AT SJ1

Artifact	Count	%
Zooarchaeological remains	1,157	56.2
Ceramic	432	21
Metal	319	15.5
Glass	145	7.0
Lithic	6	0.3
Total	2,059	100

a few structures that were part of the fort on the coast, such as “a thatched hut or quarters” on the hill, a chapel made of adobe with a thatched roof lower down; and an adobe building with a tiled roof and an oven near the beach, which Jones believes to have been the bakery (Dumrauf 1991:72–80). It is even more remarkable when this 31-year settlement is compared to the much more complex and enduring remains of Floridablanca, only inhabited for four years.

The assemblages of domestic glazed earthenware and alcoholic-beverage bottles indicate Crown supply—it is important to remember that Fuerte San José was only supplied by shipments from Nuestra Señora del Carmen. Nevertheless, quantities, fragmentation, and the presence of personal artifacts suggest that, beyond the basic supplies provided by colonial supply sources, personal possessions were also brought to the site—for example, tableware that is not mentioned in the supply lists.

Analysis of historical documents has not yet uncovered evidence suggesting that previously planned productive activities were carried out at the fort—neither for subsistence nor for trading purposes. On the contrary, as the resources of the peninsula were discovered, the productive activities were developed. As time went by, Fuerte San José has been associated mainly with trade in cetaceans, pinnipeds, and, to a lesser extent, fish. How successful these activities were and how long they lasted are still in evaluation.⁵ As

we mentioned above, issues, such as the low archaeological integrity and resolution of material evidence, have not yet allowed us to discuss the productive aspects of San Jose.

While the historical analysis of interethnic relations is currently in progress, the information about the first 10 years of colonization indicates that Puesto de la Fuente and its surroundings—unlike the fort—were central to the interactions between indigenous people—predominantly Tehuelches from different regions of Patagonia—and Spanish creoles since 1787 (Buscaglia 2015). This situation highlights the differential importance that both sites had for the Tehuelches who inhabited and frequented the Valdés Peninsula, as will be shown later. In contrast, the historical references on the relations between natives and settlers at Fuerte Nuestra Señora del Carmen and Floridablanca were continuous; interactions took place from the beginning of the colonial enterprise, and they eventually became part of everyday life (Buscaglia 2011, 2012).

Puesto de la Fuente

As supplies from the Crown were scarce and isolated in time, the discovery of fresh-water sources on the southwest border of Salina Grande allowed people to settle permanently on the Valdés Peninsula. A post was set up to guard and draw fresh water from the springs. Historical maps show only

the location of Puesto de la Fuente, while written sources provide isolated references to the construction of precarious huts, corrals, and possibly a shed for storing salt (although they do not give details of their location).⁶ Puesto de la Fuente is actually at the edge of a rock outcrop over the salt pan, close to several springs. Its location is strategic, both for water supply and for controlling access to the area (Figure 5). The diary of H. Libanus Jones mentions two stone buildings at the edge of Salina Grande that he attributes to settlers from Fuerte San José (Dumrauf 1991:72–80).

The analysis of historical sources has established, preliminarily, that Puesto de la Fuente became a productive site, not only to supply settlers, but also for the colonial trade in salt. Vegetables were planted and the quality of the pastures enabled horse and cattle raising, which promised to become one of the main subsistence activities at the complex of settlements, in particular with the discovery of a land route between Río Negro and San José in 1783 (Viedma 1969; Gorla 1983). The nearby salt pan yielded excellent quality salt that could be traded in the Río de la Plata.

Although historical descriptions of the architectural features of the site are few and ambiguous, the initial results of archaeological studies indicate massive, long-lasting constructions using materials found in situ.

According to oral testimonies and historical and archaeological evidence, Puesto de la Fuente has also been repeatedly looted over time. At least three stone structures were identified, and archaeological remains were found on the surface and near the structures. Excavation focused on Structure 1, whose approximate dimensions are 8.4 × 8 m with 0.77 m high walls made of slabs cut from fossil conglomerate (Figure 5).

Excavations in Structure 1 showed few archaeological remains, mainly due to looting activities, resulting in low artifact frequencies and diversity (Table 2). All archaeological remains, with the exception of lithic assemblages, have been dated to between the late 18th and mid-19th centuries. The zooarchaeological remains mainly show the presence of rodents, ostriches (shells), and fauna of European origin, i.e., sheep and large mammals, such as cattle or horses.

The surface archaeological record at the site is a palimpsest concentrated in two assemblages (Alberti and Buscaglia 2015). Concentration 1 (C1), on the rock outcrop over the salt pan, shows a mixed record, mainly composed of lithic remains (Table 3). The techno-typological analysis suggests the indigenous origin of the lithic remains, based on the manufacturing techniques and the types of artifacts represented. Some other remains were found, including modern and, to a lesser

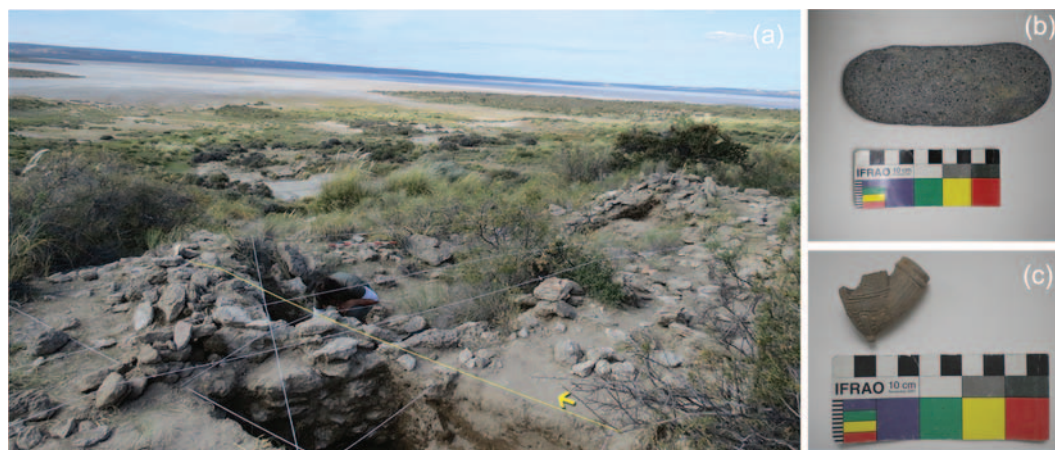


FIGURE 5. Puesto de la Fuente, excavations in Structure 1: (a) North view with Salina Grande in the background; (b) grinding tool; and (c) clay pipe. (Photo by authors, 2013.)

TABLE 2
 ABUNDANCE AND DIVERSITY OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL
 RECORD RECOVERED AT STRUCTURE 1

Artifact	Count	%
Zooarchaeological remains	110	72.4
Charcoal	26	17.1
Ceramic	2	1.3
Metal	8	5.3
Glass	3	2.0
Lithic	3	2.0
Total	152	100

TABLE 3
 ABUNDANCE AND DIVERSITY OF MATERIAL CULTURE RECOVERED ON C1

Category	Count	%
Zooarchaeological remains	326	78.8
Ceramic	13	3.1
Metal	25	6.0
Glass	10	2.4
Lithic	40	9.7
Total	414	100

extent, late-18th-century objects, such as ceramic pipes, Spanish majolica, and fragments of bottles, similar to the ones found at Fuerte San José. The metal remains were unidentifiable due to the poor preservation conditions of the salty soil; the faunal remains are similar, from a taxonomic viewpoint, to the ones recovered in Structure 1. It is worth mentioning that the accumulation on the rock outcrop is probably a result of disposal activities—both indigenous and Spanish creole—looting, re-deposition, and exposure to the natural dynamics of the environment.

In the second concentration (C2)—about 50 m away from Structure 1—only lithic artifacts were found (Table 4). This assemblage shows similar characteristics to the former one. In both cases stone tools predominate, although a functional diversity of types is observed. Scrapers dominate the sample. Analyses indicate that both assemblages would have resulted from indigenous residential occupations dating back to the period between the middle-late

Holocene (ca. 1,200 years ago) up to the European contact period.⁷

Archaeological evidence seems to point to the importance of the salt pan in contrast to the coastal area. For indigenous people, Salina Grande offered fresh water, salt, plant and animal resources, and pasture during the equestrian period, i.e., the 17th century onward. At the moment, however, there are no clear indicators of cultural contact at either a contextual or artifactual level. In this sense, it is significant that the absence of any evidence indicating the use of imported raw materials—metal, glass, and ceramics—nor artifacts of European origin, usually used as items of exchange: glass, thimbles, bells, clothing items, and so on. It is important, however, to highlight that the lack of material evidence should not necessarily be interpreted as a lack of interethnic contact.

Interethnic relations in the Valdés Peninsula were described in written historical sources as predominantly hostile, focusing on cattle

TABLE 4
ABUNDANCE AND DIVERSITY OF MATERIAL CULTURE RECOVERED ON C2

Category	Count	%
Zooarchaeological remains	2	0.49
Ceramic	0	0
Metal	1	0.25
Glass	1	0.25
Líthic	401	99.01
Total	405	100

raiding—to sell or exchange in both indigenous and colonial networks—and on violent episodes, such as the taking of captives, physical aggression, and deaths on both sides.⁸ In general, there are few references to peaceful trade and dealings or exchanges between indigenous and Europeans, so a minimization of contemporary indigenous occupations in proximity to Puesto de la Fuente would be expected (Buscaglia 2015). On the contrary, at Floridablanca and Nuestra Señora del Carmen, coexisting occupations—even with the same indigenous groups related to Fuerte San José and Puesto de la Fuente—were usual, as these colonial settlements depended heavily on the help of indigenous groups—Tehuelches and Pampas, among others. The changing nature of these relations, as well as their causes and meanings, are still under investigation (Buscaglia 2011, 2012, 2013, 2015).

Conclusions: Between Colonial Planning and Daily Practices at the Valdés Peninsula

Considering the case of Fuerte San José within the Spanish colonial project on the Patagonian coast has showed no homogeneous implementation of the plan. Hence, the Valdés Peninsula settlements are more the exception than the rule in relation to the ambiguity of their functions, their precariousness, their productive development, and the predominantly hostile interaction with native populations. So, the comparison of the Spanish occupation of the Valdés Peninsula with Fuerte Nuestra Señora del Carmen and Floridablanca provides an insight into variability within a single colonial project.

The analysis of primary historical sources has established that the Fuerte San José and Puesto de la Fuente developed beyond a strictly defensive role. Fuerte San José evolved over its 31 years toward an unfinished project devoted to the exploitation of fish, whales, and, to a lesser extent, sea lions. Salt extraction was more systematic and successful, while livestock raising could have been strongly conditioned by the relations with indigenous people. In this sense, the colonial settlements on the Valdés Peninsula accomplished extractive and productive functions that were not originally planned in the settlement project, but, rather, evolved in practice. A preliminary comparison with Floridablanca and Nuestra Señora del Carmen shows that Fuerte San José was the object of different colonial planning; perhaps its less intensive planning led to a greater diversity of function.

Even though all three Patagonian settlements faced precarious housing conditions at different times, solid adobe buildings with tiled roofs, for living and other purposes, were built both in Floridablanca and Nuestra Señora del Carmen. At Floridablanca, the historical and archaeological records show that the design and construction of the buildings financed by the Crown were carefully planned, considering the ideals promoted by the Spanish Enlightenment (Senatore 2005; Senatore, Marschoff et al. 2008). Nevertheless, many other buildings beyond the official plan were erected (Bianchi Villelli 2009, 2011). In contrast, buildings at Fuerte San José lacked a preplanned design and were precariously constructed, even though the Spaniards remained there for 31 years.

Also, the historical record resulting from the three settlements is quite different. There are detailed reports and accounts of progress from Fuerte Nuestra Señora del Carmen and Floridablanca, but those from Fuerte San José and Puesto de la Fuente are ambiguous and lack detail. If the major confusion generated by the erroneous assignment of plans to the site is also considered, it is not surprising that an historiographic approach has created a mistaken image of Fuerte San José.

Fuerte Nuestra Señora del Carmen was the main settlement, due to its proximity to Buenos Aires and its location in an area that was good for farming and frequented by indigenous people in their movements. Thus, for a long time, Fuerte Nuestra Señora del Carmen was one of the main centers of interethnic trade between Spaniards and native groups from different parts of Pampa and Patagonia. The settlement was also known for the robbery and looting that these groups traditionally practiced—especially after a cattle farm was created (Gorla 1983, 1984; Nacuzzi 1999, 2005, 2011; Irurtia, 2002; Luiz 2006a, 2006b; Davies 2009).

In Floridablanca, the settlers committed to occupying the region by extending the settlement, building houses, farming, and forming families (Bianchi Vilelli 2011); in contrast to Fuerte Nuestra Señora del Carmen and Fuerte San José, it was not harassed by indigenous groups, maintaining peaceful, daily dealings with them, which were often crucial to its survival. In spite of that, Floridablanca was abandoned in 1784, complying with the viceroy's order, due to the expense of supplying such distant lands at a time of conflict with Peru.

Although archaeological evidence is still not sufficient to discuss contact between indigenous groups and Spanish creoles on the Valdés Peninsula, the written sources characterize their relations as predominantly hostile and focused on Puesto de la Fuente. This information highlights the differential status of this settlement and Fuerte San José for native groups, not only because of the presence of cattle and horses, but also possibly because of the rivalry for strategic resources—mostly fresh water, salt, and pastures—used by these populations over time, as shown by the archaeological record at Puesto de la Fuente.

While further research is needed, the information generated so far indicates the unstable and vulnerable nature of the colonial enterprise on the Valdés Peninsula. This instability was associated with the lack of a clear purpose for the settlement from its origins and the precarious conditions on a hostile steppe under which the members of the military population lived. Their struggle was not so much against European nations as against different indigenous groups, who during the 18th century had effective power to condition everyday life and the productive activities of the colonial settlements of the region.

We consider that enquiring into the variability that emerges from specific cases and the disparity in their development may serve to contrast the structures upon which the discourse, practice, and materiality of colonialism are based. As Barbara Voss (2015:357) states: “[I]t is clear that there was no predetermined, unifying colonizing policy within either the Portuguese or Spanish empire. Rather, policy emerged through improvisation, failures, and re-assessment.” This argument constitutes a call not only to avoid an homogenizing view that often goes hand in hand with global perspectives, but also to be critical of narratives of modernity in which less “important” cases are left out of explanations. Approaching these issues from the standpoint of historical archaeology prevents us from limiting the understanding of colonial societies in Patagonia to mere components of a homogeneous colonial process. The interplay of scales, cases, and evidence enables the understanding and discussion of the processes shaping colonial societies on the basis of their contradictions, multidimensionality, and specificity.

Acknowledgments

We are very grateful to the anonymous reviewers and *Historical Archaeology* editors, whose valuable comments and suggestions contributed substantially to improve the quality of this study. Especially, we thank Drs. Melisa Salerno and Felipe Gaitan-Ammann for reviewing the translation of the manuscript. Research was supported by the following grants: Project “Relaciones Interétnicas en Península Valdés (Chubut, siglos XVIII–XIX):

Una perspectiva Histórica y Arqueológica” (Interethnic relations in the Valdés Peninsula [Chubut, 18th–19th centuries]: An historical and archaeological perspective) (PIP 0183, CONICET, 2011–2013) directed by Dr. S. Buscaglia, and Project “Paisajes Coloniales en Patagonia: Los Asentamientos de Península Valdés (1779–1810)” (Colonial landscapes in Patagonia: The settlements of the Valdés Peninsula [1779–1819]) (PICT 2010-050, FONCYT, 2011–2012) directed by Dr. M. Bianchi Villelli. We specially thank Julieta Gómez Otero, Bruno Sancci, Jorge Depascuali, Sabrina Carelli, Celeste Demicco, María Marschoff, and Demian Laborde for their help during fieldwork activities.

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Endnotes

¹See also Barba Ruiz (2009), Destéfani (1984), Entraigas (1960), Dumrauf (1992), D'Orbigny (1999), Lanöel et al. (1974), and Lenzi (1968).

²The survey of historical documents focuses on published and unpublished primary sources (written and cartographic). This involves collation of documents at Argentina's Archivo General de la Nación (AGN), where a large part of the historical primary sources on Patagonian settlements are located, and at other local and foreign archives, including Fundação

Biblioteca Nacional in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (FBN); and in Spain, the Archivo General de Indias (AGI), Archivo General de Simancas (AGS), Archivo Histórico Nacional (AHN), Museo Naval of Madrid (MNM), Archivo General Militar of Madrid, Archivo Cartográfico y de Estudios Geográficos del Centro Geográfico del Ejército (AECG-CGE), Biblioteca Nacional de España (BNE), and Biblioteca Virtual del Patrimonio Bibliográfico (BVPB). The collection of Pedro de Ángelis (De Ángelis 1969a, 1969b) and traditional publications on Spanish cartography (Torre Revello 1941; Furlong 1963; Ministerio de Defensa 1992) integrate published primary sources.

³The plans referred to are Archivo General de Indias (1779b), which lacks an author and date, but is probably by Pedro García in 1779; Archivo General de Indias (1779a); and Fundação Biblioteca Nacional (1779).

⁴For example, J. J. Gómez (1782) and Archivo General de la Nación (1785). These sorts of claims were repeated during the following years.

⁵See de Salazar (1783), Archivo General de la Nación (1784), and Pérez (1797), among others.

⁶López (1785, 1786), Archivo General de la Nación (1785), and de Elguera (1800).

⁷This information partly confirms the results of the first research carried out by Gómez Otero (2007) regarding the progressive abandonment of the coast as horses were introduced, as well as the residential character of native occupation in the area of Salina Grande.

⁸Burriño (1787), L. Gómez (1787), Lucero (1788), and Aragón (1810), among others.