

[Alexandro Malaspina to his brother Azzo Giacinto \(*\)](#)

Santiago de Chile, March 27 1790

From the Río del Plata, where we ran into some danger near Cape San Antonio, we were for some time driven by contrary winds out of the sound, and we could only regain the coast at about 40 degrees, right at the mouth of the Negro and Colorado Rivers, with which the former Jesuit Falkner (1) wished he had not impose woe on all Europe (2). We surveyed there the Bahía Ronda and the entire coast not previously visited, and by early December we were able to anchor in Porto Deseado, or Port Desire (3). Not far away, there happened to be a tribe of Patagonians, whose faces and figures we were able to draw, acquiring also not a few ideas about their customs and idioms; all new ideas for Europeans.

Up to this point, we carried out the survey of the coast by the triangular method and had the good fortune that the two packetboats (4) recently in the Strait of Magellan had followed the same method from Port Desire to the Cape Virgines at the north end of the Strait of Magellan.

We therefore crossed over to the Malvinas, and in Port Egmont undertook some astronomical, hydrographic, and natural history observations. From there we went to Cape Virgines, then followed the whole coast of Tierra del Fuego, hitherto uncharted, including the Capes of San Sebastián, and San Vicente in the Strait of Lemaire. The Isla de los Estados was also surveyed, and then we made sea-room for rounding Cape Horn (5).

We did not sail above latitude 60½ degrees. By the middle of January we were already in the vicinity of Cape Pilaes and, although the weather was stormy with poor visibility, we were able to chart various portions of the coast as far as Cape Coral (6), and we sailed so close to the shore that the charts of both Patagonian coasts can now be completed, at least as far as navigation is concerned. Not without serious risk we were able to chart again the coast to the south of the island of Chiloé, surveying its entire length, and then the new harbour of San Carlo (7) on that island: we stayed there to complete our observations until the end of February; then we surveyed the entire coast as far as Valdivia and finished up at Concepción, which the Count de Lapérouse had visited.

From there I set course for the Juan Fernández Islands, and I detached the other corvette to survey the coast [between] Concepción and Valparaíso. We have joined each other just now in Valparaíso; I have not passed up the chance to visit this beautiful capital, and here I am at the foot of the Andes, whence in 38 days, by the mail coach, you can get to Buenos Aires, and where you frequently receive news from Europe within 80 days.

(*) Original now lost; copy in [APSE](#); [PICANYOL](#), pp. 53-54; D. Manfredi, *Alessandro Malaspina e Fabio Ala Ponzone. Lettera dal Vecchio e Nuovo Mondo (1788-1803)*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1999, pp. 214-215. [\[Editing Criteria\]](#)

(1) Thomas Falkner (1707-1784), doctor and missionary, lived for more than thirty years in South America and visited various regions between Paraguay and Patagonia. He wrote *A Description of Patagonia and the Adjoining Parts of South America*.

(2) The sentence is obscure. As in the case of other letters provided to Massimiliano Ricca by Omobon Pisoni, there are some misprints and omissions, perhaps attributable to a careless copyist.

(3) This is on the Patagonian coast, just to the north of 48° South. It was named by Cavendish in 1586, after one of his ships.

(4) Packetboats were two-masted vessels not unlike brigantines.

(5) By the expression here translated “made sea-room” – in the Italian literally “gained height” – Malaspina means that the corvette sailed some distance away from the coast.

(6) Situated in southern Chile, near the Golfo Trinidad.

(7) Now called “Ancud.”

[Original Italian Text](#) courtesy of the [Centro di Studi Malaspiniani](#), Mulazzo, Italy; notes by Dario Manfredi; translation by John Black.