

A History of Chile 1808–2018, Third Edition

As Chile has continued to grow and prosper in the twenty-first century, this new edition of the definitive history of the country brings the story of its political, social, and cultural development up to date. It describes how Ricardo Lagos and Michelle Bachelet, both highly educated Socialists, modernized the country and integrated new interests into Chilean political life, and how the billionaire, Harvard-trained economist Sebastian Piñera, who succeeded Bachelet, addressed the problems caused by the 2010 tsunami. In the last twenty years, Chile diversified its economy, replaced a number of Pinochet's organizations with more inclusive institutions, cultivated Chilean culture, modernized its constitution, and fomented reconciliation of the various political factions – until economic crisis in early 2018 caused political chaos and occasionally violent public protest. Based on new statistics to measure Chile's economic and social development, this volume celebrates Chile's achievements and dissects its failures.

William F. Sater is Professor Emeritus at California State University, Long Beach.

The late Simon D. W. Collier was Professor of History at Vanderbilt University.

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 William F. Sater, Simon Collier
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A History of Chile 1808–2018

THIRD EDITION

WILLIAM F. SATER

California State University, Long Beach

SIMON COLLIER



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In memoriam

HAROLD BLAKEMORE (1930–1991)

SIMON COLLIER (1938–2003)

My friends, and Chile's

To my dearly beloved grandsons

 milo Joseph Dixon

 Ewan William Dixon

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Preface to the Second Edition

For this second edition of the book originally entitled *A History of Chile 1808–1994* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), we have added a new final chapter, to take account of developments since 1990 in a broad sweep, and we have made some minor revisions to the rest of the text to correct a few factual errors and to update the story. Our aim in this book is to present a general account of Chile's history as an independent nation-state for English-language readers, although we hope that Chileans, too, will enjoy it. It is our firm belief that the main task of writing Chilean history belongs to Chileans. Yet we also believe that a fresh eye can sometimes be cast over the changing Chilean scene from outside, and hopefully our effort has been worthwhile. As foreigners, we can never claim the intimate knowledge of Chilean society and culture that Chileans themselves grow up with, but we have both had a long personal connection with the country, going back to the presidency of the unforgettable Jorge Alessandri, and this book expresses, we trust, our strong affection for Chile and the Chileans. We have both enormously enjoyed Chile's undoubted charm, its scenery, its literature, its music, its people's notable humor, and, not least, its admirable wines – the finest, our upper nasal cavities tell us, in the Americas. Our lives have been enriched and sometimes frustrated by Chilean virtues and failings. We hope that something of this is communicated to the reader.

In writing the book, we wanted to combine a basic narrative of political events (bearing in mind A. J. P. Taylor's remark that the historian's first duty is “to answer the child's question ‘What happened next?’”) with descriptions of the broader economic and social tendencies that have

molded Chilean life and that underlie the outward “story.”¹ Our panoramic (and doubtless very incomplete) economic and social overviews for the mid-nineteenth century (Chapter 4) and the mid-twentieth century (Chapter 10) are supplemented by shorter overviews for the so-called Parliamentary period (a section in Chapter 7) and for the end of the twentieth century (a section in Chapter 14). Three short sections on “culture” at different phases are included in Chapters 7, 10, and 14. We are only too aware of what we have had to leave out. There is so much more that we could have said, especially about the vast anonymous production of that intangible, unquantifiable quality, “national character.” It stems, no doubt, from Chile’s long isolation in colonial times, during which Chileans, distinctive members of the great Hispanic family, devised their own ways of doing things, their own idiosyncratic form of the Spanish language, their own highly developed sense of humor. Little of this can be dealt with in a history book of this kind, which has mostly to deal with what can most simply be termed *national performance*. On this score, we are sure that Chileans have more than a little of which to be proud. Despite setbacks, some of them serious and prolonged, their story over the past two centuries has generally been one of progress and improvement. By the same token, we have no wish to present an idealized or “Whig” version of Chile’s past. Our duty as historians is to tell the truth as we see it – warts and all.

Footnotes in this book are confined to (1) sources of quotations, except where these are so well known for referencing to be pointless, (2) references for unusual facts that might seem to need them, and (3) minor points of explanation or elaboration that do not belong in the main text. We have provided a note on further reading (emphasizing English-language materials), a glossary of Spanish terms, and a list of acronyms and initialisms, of which, in our era of alphabet soup, there are far too many. As a matter of principle, we use (where they exist) the time-honored English forms for South American names. The classic cases here are Valparaíso, always properly spelled in English *without* its Spanish accent, and River Plate, not Río de la Plata.

¹ A. J. P. Taylor, *A Personal History* (London, 1984), p. 301.

Preface to the Third Edition

Chile is an exceptional country. While chronic instability seems to characterize its neighbors, Chile has endured few internal upheavals while abstaining from foreign adventures. In 1970, it saw the election of Salvador Allende, a Socialist, and three years later a coup would depose him ushering in dictatorship which would endure until 1989. A popular election expelled him from office, initiating a return to civilian rule. In the nearly two decades since 2002, Chile has continued to grow and to prosper. Ricardo Lagos and Michelle Bachelet, both highly educated and both Socialists, governed for the first years of the twenty-first century. While hobbled by Pinochet's 1989 Constitution, these regimes nonetheless modernized the country and integrated new interests into Chilean political life. Bachelet would be succeeded by a billionaire, Harvard-trained economist, Sebastian Piñera. The new president nudged the nation to the Right but in such a way that did not precipitate a violent reaction. Four years later, Bachelet would return for another term only to cede power to Piñera, who won re-election in 2018. During these years, Chile has not suffered the turmoil of its continental neighbors, Brazil and Argentina. On the contrary, the updated and comprehensive Further reading section, which relies extensively on recently published Spanish- as well as English-language sources, explains how Chile diversified its economy, dismantled various Pinochet innovations, replacing them with more inclusive institutions, cultivated Chilean culture, modernized its constitution, and fomented reconciliation of the various political factions. While surrounding countries seem frozen in political turmoil, Chile has emerged as a model of development, improving public health as well as educational institutions. In early 2018, the situation changed for the

worse: copper prices dropped by a third, as did government revenues; only the unemployment rate rose. Worse, the effects of a decade-long drought impacted the country as a substantial portion of the public, particularly in Santiago, lacked adequate water supplies. The political system, which consisted of an increasing number of fringe parties, seemed unable to cobble a consensus on what policies to adopt. The public manifested, sometimes violently, its discontent. It is not within the purview of this volume to address these issues which remain unresolved. Still, Chile has survived equally crucial events in its past and perhaps its institutions will permit it to do so again. Clearly, Chile, a nation with a rich history, deserves the attention of students and scholars.

Acknowledgments

Our greatest debt is to the late Harold Blakemore. He was to have been our co-author. His death (February 20, 1991) was a severe personal blow to both of us. There are many others who could say the same, not least in Chile. Although fate denied Harold his part in writing this book, his influence on it was not small. He commented in detail on all the chapters in first draft up to the time of his death (roughly half the eventual text), and the book greatly benefited from many of his ideas and suggestions.

We wish to acknowledge the numerous friends, in Chile and elsewhere, who advised us (even if just by sparking off ideas) or who gave us help and support in other ways, in some cases over many years. In particular, we express our gratitude to Patricia Arancibia, Christon Archer (Calgary, Canada), the late Mario Bronfman, his widow Nana and their children as well as their respective spouses, Eduardo Cavieres, Ricardo Couyoumdjian, Baldomero Estrada, the late Patricio Estellé (Director of the Archivo Nacional at the time of his sadly premature death in 1975), Cristián Gazmuri, the late Mario Góngora, the late Gonzalo Izquierdo, Iván Jaksić (Mishawaka, Indiana), the late Álvaro Jara, the late Rolando Mellafe, Gonzalo Mendoza (former Chilean Consul General in Los Angeles) and his wife Verónica, the late Claudio Orrego Vicuña (whose far-too-early death in 1982 was a real loss to Chilean politics), Luis Ortega, the late Arturo Prat E. and his widow Elena Walker Martínez vda de Prat, Jaime and Linda Rodríguez (Los Angeles), Sol Serrano, the late Richard Southern (whose understanding of Chile was unique among English-speaking scholars), the late Juan Uribe-Echeverría, Michael Varley (Rector of Wenlock School, Santiago), and Sergio Villalobos R. (whose intellectual tenacity has been a constant

inspiration to us). Ricardo Donoso, Guillermo Feliú Cruz, and Eugenio Pereira Salas – Chilean scholars of a now vanished generation – gave much unwitting stimulation; it was a privilege to have known them. Our warm gratitude is also due to the friendly staffs of the Biblioteca Nacional de Chile (Sala Medina, Sala Matta Vial, Newspaper and Microfilm sections in particular), where we have both passed nontrivial portions of our adult lives, as well as (far from Chile) those of the Albert Sloman Library (University of Essex) and the Jean and Alexander Heard Library (Vanderbilt University). Simon Collier thanks the Catholic University of Valparaíso and the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile (Santiago) for their generous hospitality to him as visiting professor in 1994 and 2002. Norma Antillón (Center for Latin American & Iberian Studies, Vanderbilt University) gave us eagle-eyed assistance in the final preparation of the original manuscript. Finally, we are both extremely grateful to the original two anonymous readers for Cambridge University Press for some valuable comments and to Frank Smith (Publishing Director, Social Sciences, Cambridge University Press) for inveigling us into doing this second version of our book.

For permission to quote two lines from W. H. Auden's classic poem "Letter to Lord Byron," first published in W. H. Auden and Louis MacNeice, *Letters from Iceland* (London, 1937), the authors thank Faber and Faber Ltd., London.

S. C.
Nashville, Tennessee

Postscript

Regrettably, Simon Collier unexpectedly succumbed to cancer in February 2003. As much as Simon loved fine wine and the tango, he loved Chile more. His loss is a personal tragedy for me, his colleagues at Vanderbilt, particularly Professors Michael Bess, Marshall Eakin, and Jane Lander, as well as his many friends in Chile, Great Britain, and the United States.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the enormous assistance of Professor Iván Jaksic as well as the editors of this series.

W. F. S.
Beverly Hills, California
July 2022

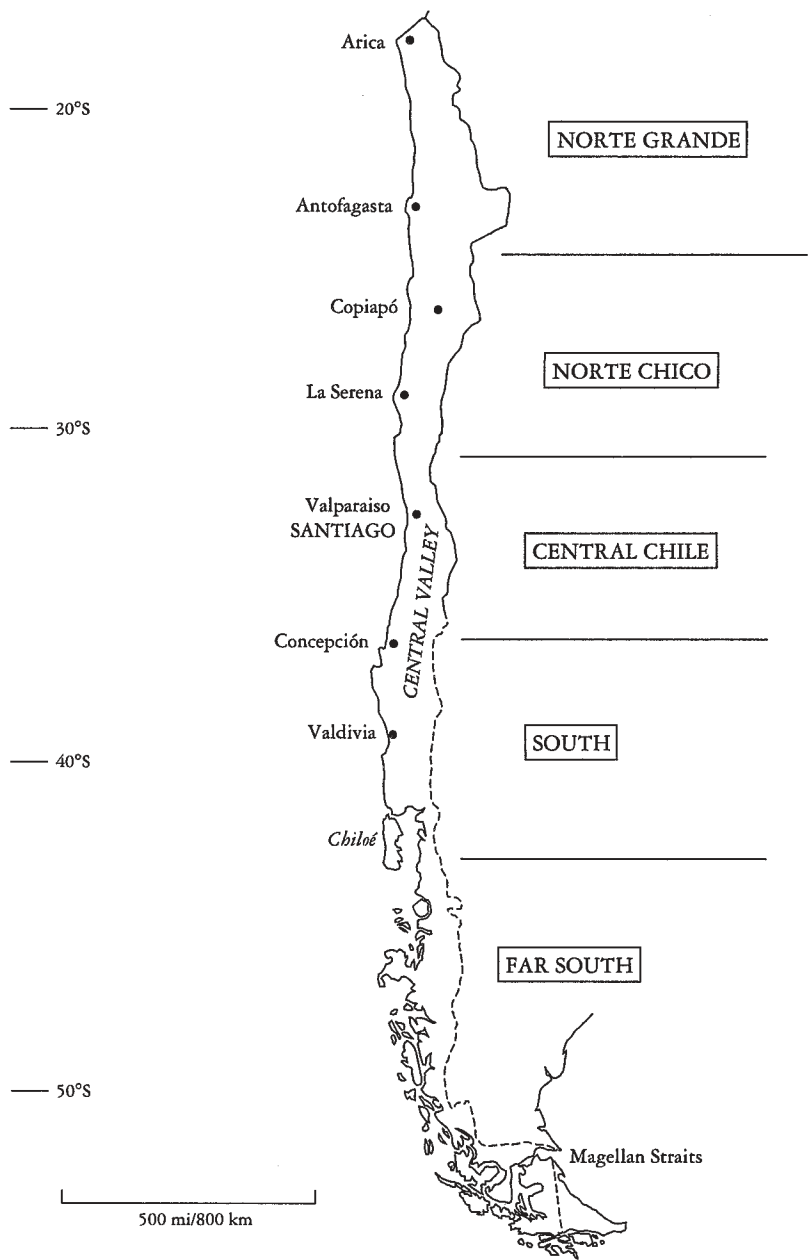
A note on geography

Nobody who looks at the map of the western hemisphere can fail to be struck by the unusual shape of the Republic of Chile. “The worst-located and worst-shaped nation on the planet” – this verdict by the Argentine writer Ezequiel Martínez Estrada is no doubt exaggerated.¹ Yet there is no denying that the country is about 2,600 miles (4,200 kilometers) long and on average about 90 miles (140 kilometers) wide, and hence indisputably *una larga y angosta faja de tierra*, a long thin sash of land, as Chileans themselves often say. How the sash came to be so long is part of the story unfolded in this book.

In area (292,257 square miles/756,946 square kilometers) Chile is somewhat larger than either France or Texas, but it stretches out across no less than thirty-eight degrees of latitude, its southernmost point, Horn Island (where the cape is), lying almost exactly on the 56th parallel. Thus part of Chile falls inside the tropics, and part is the closest continental land on earth to the snowy expanse of Antarctica, a section of which is claimed by Chile. So large a span of latitude is bound to contain great variations in climate. In the desert north there is scarcely any rainfall; Santiago, the capital, has what is often called “Mediterranean” weather; in the south the dampness is of British or Irish proportions; the southernmost part of Chile is as windy as New Zealand. Arid deserts, valley-oases, tranquil green pastures, rainforests, mountain-framed lakes, icy glaciers, rocky archipelagos – the range of scenery is impressive, and the scenery itself often a delight to the eye.

¹ *Radiografía de la pampa*, 8th ed. (Buenos Aires, 1976), p. 81.

A note on geography



General sketch map of Chile

Geographers sometimes divide the republic into zones, slicing the map along lines of latitude – Desert Chile, Mediterranean Chile, Forest Chile, and so on. We avoid this terminology in our book, although certain commonly used expressions will recur: Norte Grande (“the greater North”), Norte Chico (“lesser North”), Central Valley, South, Far South. A basic, underlying physical configuration is common to all zones, though sometimes disguised. To the east the skyline is always dominated by the huge Cordillera of the Andes, whose highest peak, Aconcagua (23,000 feet/7,000 meters), rises on the Chilean-Argentine border less than 100 miles from Santiago. To the west, of course, there is the ocean: its specks of land include Easter Island, Chile’s toehold in Polynesia (spontaneously annexed by a naval officer in 1888), fully five hours in a jet airliner from the South American mainland. Immediately behind the coast for much (though not all) of the length of the country there rises a coastal cordillera, much lower than the main Andean chain, but in places (near Santiago, for instance) rising to elevations of more than 6,000 feet. (The wild Cordillera de Nahuelbuta, the section of this lesser chain to the south of Concepción, is a bit lower.) At around 42°S., some 600 miles south of Santiago, the coastal range sinks beneath the sea, reappearing above the water farther south to form islands such as Chiloé. Between the two ranges there lies a shallow depression. In the Norte Chico this is broken up by hills and river-valleys; in the Norte Grande it is more a sloping shelf connecting the coastal range (here rising in huge cliffs straight from the ocean) to the main Cordillera. Between Santiago (33°S.) and Puerto Montt (42°S.), however, a continuous series of intermontane basins forms the so-called *valle central* or Central Valley, the northern half of which, the 300 or so miles between Santiago and Concepción, has been the true Chilean heartland for more than four centuries. The South can be said to begin roughly at the latitude of Concepción, and the Far South somewhere below Chiloé.

The first Europeans to be seen and heard in any part of what is now Chile were Ferdinand Magellan and the members of his expedition, some of whom were later to complete the first circumnavigation of the globe. In October and November 1520 three of Magellan’s ships made their way through the straits now bearing his name (a distance of 310 nautical miles) and out into the ocean that Magellan decided (in hopes of a calm crossing) to call the Pacific. This event, whatever its intrinsic interest, has no real connection with the story of Chile. It was not until Francisco Pizarro’s conquest of the Inca empire of Peru in the early 1530s that the Spaniards (now sweeping across the newly named American continent in the most

spectacular and ruthless invasion the continent has ever experienced) mounted their first incursion into Chile (1536), with an expedition led by Diego de Almagro, Pizarro's principal lieutenant. Almagro's men beat a retreat to Peru after reconnoitering a part of the Central Valley. In 1540 the Spanish conquistadors returned to Chile. This time they came to stay.