

THE FALKLAND ISLANDS AND THE BRITISH DEPLOYMENT IN THE SOUTH HEMISPHERE AS OF THE 18TH CENTURY

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The deployment of the United Kingdom in the Southern Hemisphere began in 1786, when Australia became part of the British Empire. Since previous years, the presence of British individuals on the great island was constant. This approach - individuals exploring and later settling down as an advance of the state presence- became widespread in the British expansion in the 18th century.

The incorporation of Australia to the British Empire entails a very concrete past event: ten years earlier London had lost its colonies in North America. This had implied a series of damages, from trade and navigation in the Atlantic to the suspended settlement of the penal colonies, in which the prisoners were used as the Empire's policy of territorial occupation.

Nineteen years later, in 1805, the second step takes place. A British sea expedition under the command of William Popham settled in the Dutch Cape Colony, the southern tip of Africa. Holland was by then an ally of Napoleonic France, and Great Britain, at war with it, used this argument to occupy this strategic position.

In this case, Popham gets information from English merchants on the economic and military situation of the Viceroyalty of Río de la Plata. This pushed him to execute a pre-existing plan to take two Spanish colonies - Spain was also at war with Great Britain - Buenos Aires and Valparaíso, two key positions in the Southern Hemisphere. The defeat in Buenos Aires and the fact that Spain became a British ally in the Napoleonic Wars, changed the British strategy and the third raid on Buenos Aires was cancelled.

In 1833, the occupation of the Falkland Islands took place. As in the previous cases, the activities of British individuals precede it. This strategic point had to do with the control of transoceanic navigation through the Strait of Magellan.

In 1840, New Zealand became part of the British Empire. This happens 44 years after Australia joined the Empire. The procedure was similar: it was supported by British individuals who preceded the state occupation.

In 1865, a Welsh colony settled on the Patagonian coast of Argentina. Patagonia is at that time - as the school geography manuals stated - a “res nullius”, that is to say, a no man's land, as Australia and New Zealand had been. According to the circumstances, from the Malvinas there was a private British point from which an expansion and occupation could be carried out.

However, between 1880 and 1885, Argentina occupies Patagonia. That same year, President Julio Argentino Roca initiated Argentina's annual claim for sovereignty over the Falkland Islands, which has been repeated without interruption since then. It was the culmination of Argentina's territorial expansion to the south.

In 1902, Scotsman William Speirs Bruce, explored the Antarctic lands - which Russia had discovered as a state in 1820 - and established a permanent settlement on Laurie Island. At that time, European expeditions such as the Norwegian one rescued by the Argentine State, showed interest in the region. Following the British model whereby the private presence anticipates the state presence, in 1903 Bruce tries to transfer his settlement to the British government in exchange for financial compensation. The Crown rejects the offer, considering that it would not make economic or political sense to formalize a presence in such a distant region, which it did not regard with strategic significance.

Perito Moreno was then attaché at the Argentine embassy in London. Having knowledge of Bruce's plans, he reports directly to the Argentine president, who was Roca, in his second term. The Argentine government takes Bruce's proposal and accepts it. In February 1904, he signed the decree by which Argentina extends its sovereignty to Antarctica based on the settlement in Laurie Island.

In March, on Bruce's ship, that is going to remove his belongings, a commission of six officials from the Ministry of Agriculture occupies the facilities and flies the Argentine flag for the first time in Antarctica. All of them send letters to the Ministry and their families, so that the postage stamp they

carried would be the first sovereign action of the Argentine State in that distant region.

The UK will be the second country to have a permanent settlement in Antarctica. It does so in 1940 and not for strategic, but for military reasons: in the framework of the Second World War, the German Navy had sailed through the Antarctic seas. It should be remembered that both in the first and second world wars, important naval battles took place between the Germans and the British around the Falklands.