

The Road to Tucapel

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February 21, 2012

INTRODUCTION

This is a story I have wanted to share with Kit Kat members for a long time. It is about the conquest of Chile, a fascinating country in which I have had the privilege to live for 16 years and with which I am still connected through my wife, our friends, and my work. As we will see, the conquest of Chile proceeded much differently from the conquest of other countries in the Americas, and I think it reveals much about the nature of modern Chile today.

To set the stage, let me give some background on how I learned about this story and why I think it has relevance for us at the present time.

I arrived in Chile in October 1969 a few weeks after completing my Ph.D. work at Caltech to take up a postdoctoral research position at the Cerro Tololo Inter-American Observatory, which was then in the process of building up as the first major U.S. observatory in the southern hemisphere. Cerro Tololo was supported by U.S. National Science Foundation and founded to provide world-class observing facilities for astronomers in the U.S. and all of the Americas.

Chile overall has the best observing conditions in the world for ground-based astronomy and now hosts the world's largest collection of ground-based telescopes, both optical/infrared and radio, with the soon to be completed ALMA observatory in the north of Chile. There are several reasons why Chile is so good for astronomy: it is bordered on the east by the Andes mountains. Northern Chile has clear, dark skies, with many mountain and high elevation sites that have stable air and low humidity. Chile is also now well developed and offers excellent infrastructure support for building large, high-tech facilities in remote, challenging sites.

In 1969, however, these developments were in the future, and Cerro Tololo was a pioneer in preparing the way. When its 4-m Blanco telescope entered into operation in the mid-1970s, it was the largest telescope in the southern hemisphere and one of the most powerful telescopes in the world. It offered me as a young astronomer unparalleled opportunities for research and discovery and the basis for establishing my entire career at a time when our understanding of the nature of the universe was being greatly transformed.

Beyond the remarkable scientific opportunities that I had in Chile, my life was changed through meeting the wonderful woman who has now been my wife for 39 years and through her and her family learning in depth about Chilean culture, to say nothing of learning the Spanish language. A common phrase at that time was that the best way to learn the language was to have a dictionary with long hair. Anita was extremely patient in guiding me through the subtleties and nuances of Chilean Spanish. As you may have heard, Chilean women are extremely charming, and the people are remarkably warm and friendly.

The third life changing experience for me was to live through one of the most turbulent periods of change in Chilean history. I arrived at the end of President Eduardo Frei M.'s term. A year later Salvador Allende was elected, and in 1973 his government was overthrown by a military junta led by Augusto Pinochet. Within my first four years in Chile, I lived under a center left, a far left, and then a military government that set out to transform Chile into market-based economy. I would say that Chile underwent as great changes in the 16 years I was there as any country in the world.¹

GEOGRAPHY AND HIGHLIGHTS OF CHILE

Let me review some of the main properties of Chile as a country. Located on the west coast of South America, Chile has an unusual geography. It is nearly 2700 miles long and averages only about 100 miles wide. Extending from 17° to 56°S latitude, Chile would reach from below Mexico City to southern Alaska if it were located in the northern hemisphere. Chile is bordered on the north and east by Peru and Bolivia and then by Argentina as one goes farther south. The Pacific Ocean is its western border, and it ends at the southern tip of South America, less than 700 miles from Antarctica, of which it claims a part, along with many other nations.

According to one legend, after God finished making the world, he had many parts left over – mountains, deserts, beaches, lakes, minerals, fertile valleys – and he threw them all together to form Chile. The origin of the name 'Chile' is not well understood, but it is said to mean either 'cold' or 'the end of the world' in the Aymara and Quechua languages of the Peruvian and Bolivian highlands.

Although it reaches into the tropics, Chile does not have a tropical climate (nor does it have spicy food). Instead, the north of Chile contains the Atacama desert, which is the driest desert in the world. The Andes mountains, which exceed 20,000 feet in elevation in the northern and central regions of Chile, mark the eastern border of Chile. They are the highest mountains in the world outside of Asia. The cold Humboldt current off the west coast of South America gives it a remarkably even and temperate climate. I often describe the central part of Chile as a scrunched up version of California – the mountains are higher and the country is narrower.

With a population of 16 million people (six million of whom live in the Santiago metropolitan area), Chile is a mid-sized country in South America. Today it is the most developed country in South America by many measures and was the first country in South America to join the OECD (Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development). According to the OECD, it now has a higher high school graduation rate than Australia, Norway, or Iceland. Although the per capita GDP of Chile is only one third that of the U.S., life expectancy in Chile is virtually the same as ours, a result that invites discussions on quite a different topic.

Here in the U.S. Chile is known for its good wines, and we are now accustomed to seeing fruit from Chile in our grocery stores in winter, which is summer in the southern hemisphere. You may also know that

¹ Change and adventure are two key words that epitomize my time in Chile. Three significant earthquakes occurred, two of which caused damage in the region of La Serena. Other events included civil unrest, seizures of land and factories, general strikes, shortages of food and staples, economic collapse, and hyperinflation.

Chile is the world's largest producer of copper but you perhaps do not know that it has become the world's second largest producer of salmon. Chile now has a robust, market-oriented economy that is highly globalized, in great contrast to the high-tariff, closed, and rather backward economy that it had when I first arrived. The changes within the country and the rapid pace of development in terms of housing, traffic, infrastructure (and congestion and smog...) are astounding to me.

Chile's tourism industry has also developed significantly in recent years and provides stunning opportunities for travelers with a sense of adventure. I know some of you have visited the country and will be happy to offer comments on that separately.

In summary, I think Chile is a country of interest for us because of the changes it has experienced in its economic and social policies (for example, it privatized much of its health and pension systems and is now facing the challenge of how to provide college education for students from its rapidly expanding middle class) and because it is now so globalized. In that sense it serves as a laboratory or source of case studies for many of the topics that the U.S. is grappling with.

HISTORY OF CHILE

Like other foreigners before me who lived and worked in Chile, I began to wonder how this very charming country with such an unusual geography got started. I had the good fortune to encounter many years ago a book called 'The Conquest of Chile,' written in 1967 by H.R.S. Pocock. Pocock, an Oxford graduate in classics, lived in Chile for 20 years while working for the Shell Oil company. He asked himself the same question while driving through the barren Atacama desert and discovered that there was no good account in English of the history of Chile for the general reader. This caused him to undertake his own study, based on the historical accounts in Spanish of the conquest. The result of his work was one of the best books of his type that I have ever read. Written in the graceful English style of the mid-20th century, it is both gripping and informative at a level that gives the main facts without overwhelming or boring the reader. And the story of the conquest is one of the most fascinating I know in all history.

I cannot pretend to cover all parts of the story in a brief after dinner talk, so I have chosen some parts of it that I think illuminate important aspects of both the history of Chile and the character of its people. During my experience in Chile, which included directing the largest U.S. scientific operation in the country, I came to realize that to work successfully within a foreign country, one must understand its language, culture, and history.

I have chosen three protagonists for our story: Pedro de Valdivia, the conqueror and founder of Chile, Inés de Suárez, his mistress and co-conqueror of Chile, and Lautaro, a leader of the Mapuche indian tribe in the south of Chile.

CONTEXT

Recall that the motive for the Spanish discovery of America was to find trade routes to India to replace those being blocked by the Turks in Asia. Spain was forced to accept Columbus's radical idea of sailing

westward because Portugal had developed and dominated the sea route around Africa. Although the Americas at first seemed to block the Spanish quest for riches, further explorations in Mexico and Peru demonstrated that enormous wealth was to be found in the Americas.

We will pick up the story in Peru, which had been conquered under the leadership of Francisco Pizarro, and which yielded unimaginable quantities of gold for the conquistadores and for Spain. Pedro de Valdivia was Pizarro's most accomplished general during the conquest and was handsomely rewarded with the grant of a huge estate and native serfs, which set him up for life as a very wealthy man.

Following the conquest of Peru, further exploration efforts of South America followed, primarily motivated, I believe, by the search for more gold and wealth. One such effort, in the direction of Chile, was led by Diego de Almagro, who found, after an arduous expedition with great suffering and losses from attacks by the native Indians, that there was no gold comparable to the riches of Peru. Consequently, the land that eventually became Chile was written off by the conquistadores.

In the meantime, Inés de Suárez had somehow made her way from Spain to Peru in search of her husband, a soldier in Pizarro's forces, only to find that he died before her arrival. Her story is so remarkable in itself that it was the subject of one of Isabel Allende's historical novels, 'Inés of My Soul.' She managed to convince the Pizarro government to grant her a piece of land from which she could make a living and met Pedro de Valdivia, eventually becoming his mistress.² As we shall see, 'mistress,' while technically correct, is hardly the term to use for one of the most remarkable women in South American history, if not in all western history. The Wikipedia entry for Suárez refers to her as a co-conquistador of Chile, a much more fitting description of her leadership skills and contributions to the country.

I will elaborate more on Lautaro later in the story but want to mention here the Mapuche³ tribe to which he belonged. The Incas had extended their empire well into Chile prior to the arrival of the Spaniards, and indeed their roads and trails were later used by the Spaniards to travel southward. The Incas, who were militarily very strong themselves, were able to dominate the native tribes in northern and central Chile, but they were never able to conquer the Mapuches, who lived farther south. Let us bear this in mind as we proceed with the story. For now we will note that the Mapuche men concentrated on being warriors. Their wives had the responsibility of managing the fields, production of food, and raising the children. This is another factor in understanding the strong role of Chilean women in modern times.

SYNOPSIS OF THE CONQUEST

For reasons still unknown to me and certainly to his compatriots, Valdivia evidently tired of his life as a wealthy landowner and began to make plans for an expedition to Chile. People thought he was crazy – why would he want to give up his riches to go to a dangerous place that had no gold? He had to sell or

² Pedro de Valdivia himself was married, but his wife had remained in Spain, owing to the dangers of the conquest of Peru. She later set out to join Valdivia in Chile, only to arrive after his own death.

³ The Mapuches are sometimes called Araucanians, from the Chilean region in which they live.

hock essentially all his land and possessions and find investors who were willing to back him for his expedition. It took him some years to get enough resources together even to begin the journey at less strength than people thought was needed to overcome and dominate the natives who had inflicted heavy losses on Almagro. Nonetheless, he set out in January 1540 with about 20 men, 1000 native support people, and Inés de Suárez, the lone woman on the expedition.

The first challenge was simply how to make the journey. There were two choices: proceed on the east side of the Andes through what is now Bolivia and Argentina and make a very difficult crossing at one of the few passes through the mountains, or travel on the west side of the Andes and traverse the Atacama desert, which, as mentioned above, is the driest in the world.

Recall that this had to be done on foot or horseback. There were no Land Rovers, Patagonia gear or any modern tools to which we have become accustomed. The conquistadores traveled 1500 miles, crossing the desert, reaching altitudes of 15,000 feet above sea level (higher than any point in the continental U.S.), and risking extremely harsh and dangerous weather to cross the Andes.

The second challenge was fighting off the numerous attacks by natives at points along the way. How fewer than 100 Spaniards could withstand attacks by several thousand Indians is also difficult to comprehend. In brief, they did this because they had the ultimate weapons of their time; armor and horses. Horses were not known to the natives, and it is said that they thought the armored warrior and his horse were one, with supernatural powers. Perhaps so, but I will leave to others more expert than I to sort out that question. We should, however, recall that Valdivia was the most accomplished general of his time, and that must have been a factor.

The third challenge turned out to be dealing with conspirators within the group, the worst of whom wanted to kill Valdivia and take over the expedition himself. We could use the rest of the time tonight on this situation itself, but time does not permit. However, I will give one anecdote that reveals much about the strength of Inés de Suárez.

During the trip across the desert in the direction of the oasis where San Pedro de Atacama is located today (and has become a world-known destination for adventurous travelers), Valdivia's own partner in the expedition, Sancho de Hoz, entered Valdivia's tent one night with the intent to murder him. However, it happened that Valdivia was away making preparations for the next stop in the journey, and the would-be assassin encountered Inés de Suárez alone, asleep in bed. She had the great presence of mind to keep calm and shoo him away, saying Valdivia was not there, even though the evil intent of his partner was clear to all. That led to a major dilemma for Valdivia and Suárez. Normally (and as happened later), Sancho would have been tried, convicted, and hung on the spot for such an offense, but the political risks to Valdivia for doing this were quite high, and he deftly managed the situation in a way that allowed the expedition to proceed while ensuring that Sancho was under control, at least for the time being. Not surprisingly, his machinations did not end there, and later on in the conquest became so egregious that he was executed for his plotting. For our purposes, this incident serves as an example of the challenges faced by Valdivia and Suárez and the tremendous leadership skills they both possessed.

THE FOUNDING OF SANTIAGO

Valdivia and his group continued southward in their arduous journey, eventually reaching in December 1540 the Mapocho river in central Chile and the site of modern Santiago. As described by Pocock, the area must have looked like paradise after the crossing of such dry land to the north. Santiago has a wonderful Mediterranean climate with abundant water from the river and rich agricultural land that would have looked green and fertile in the early summer season in which they arrived. In modern times people would appreciate that the Andes mountains to the east, with their excellent ski resorts, can be reached in an hour or so by car, while to the west the Pacific Ocean and the cities of Valparaiso and Viña del Mar are no more than an hour and a half distant.⁴

Santiago was founded on February 12, 1541 according to the minutes of the municipality. One is struck by the high degree of planning and organization that went into the founding of new cities in South America. There were detailed instructions from the King of Spain about locating the city with regard to defensive considerations, availability of water, laying out the streets in a grid, dividing the land into plots for ownership, and allowing for future expansion. Visitors today will note that cities were built around a central plaza on which were located the cathedral, municipal government buildings, and the post office. The instructions also noted that the land should be vacant and that the formation of the city would not harm the natives living in the area. While a noble ideal, in reality on the ground, the founding of the cities in Chile led to great conflict and battles with the native population which ended only with the complete domination of the natives.

An additional milestone in the founding of cities at that time, and indeed one that according to Pocock's accounts appears to have been the defining requirement, was the installation of the 'tree of justice' in the town square. We would call it 'gallows,' and it indicates that a process and means of capital punishment was fundamental for maintaining order among the populace.⁵

In addition to the detailed planning that went into the new cities, the governance practices were equally well established. The municipal council and government were formed and the various officials, such as the mayor, town council, majordomo, and procurator were named. This was not formally required for Valdivia's expedition, but it was in his interest to delegate responsibility and authority so as to reduce both the demands on him and to distribute some of the difficult decision making on topics such as the distribution of land and resolution of disputes among the soldiers. Here, too, we learn more about his gifts for leading such a complex enterprise in very dangerous circumstances.

Although Santiago was in a wonderful location with the mild climate, fertile land, and abundant water that might well have been sufficient for many people to end the expedition and settle there, Valdivia's ambitions were much greater. To him, Santiago was only a stop on the way south to the Straits of

⁴ To me Santiago's location and climate are similar to that of Pasadena, California, both wonderful places until they were discovered by the millions of people who moved there and brought the congestion and smog that we know only too well today.

⁵ And the judicial process from start to execution (literally) could be very rapid, e.g., one or two days.

Magellan. His vision was to develop a country, not retire again to a life of (potential, at least) comfort and luxury. He had given up all that in Peru.

Impressive as the founding of Santiago may appear from the historical record, we have to remember that the city in the first few months consisted of straw huts being built by 150 men and their native help – a very modest beginning. More importantly, the apparent cooperation and friendliness of the Indians was simply a part of their strategy to gain time to prepare their own defense of their lands and country. The continued development of Santiago and the surrounding regions was a very dangerous enterprise, and within a few months serious attacks by the Indians on the colony and Valdivia's forces began. At the same time there were serious internal problems in Peru, from where Valdivia's authority derived, and Pizarro was murdered in what became a civil war in the country.

The events and adventures that unfolded during the next stage of the conquest and development of Chile were perhaps even more extreme and in retrospect, appear to defy credulity. They are, however, well documented,⁶ and I have no reason to doubt their veracity. There is not space or time to recount them here, but Pocock's account of them is highly readable. For the present story, I have selected two events that in my opinion highlight both the struggle faced by Valdivia's expedition and characteristics that illuminate the nature of Chile as it subsequently developed.

The first event took place on September 11, 1541,⁷ only seven months after the founding of Santiago. Valdivia had departed with a substantial force of soldiers towards the south to subdue a large group of Indians who were reported to be threatening a major uprising. The Indians in the vicinity of Santiago, who had been developing their own plans against the Spaniards, took advantage of Valdivia's departure to mount a surprise attack on Santiago. Their numbers were reported to be as large as eight to ten thousand, a size I continue to find astounding if not incredible. Although the Spaniards were prepared and fought hard all day, the sheer size of the Indian forces pushed them back to their last point of defense, the central Plaza de Armas of the town, which in the meantime was being burned to the ground by the attackers. At the end of the day, their situation was truly desperate and they were facing annihilation. At this point, Inés de Suárez, who had been tending the wounded and giving support to the troops all day long, made the suggestion that eventually saved them all. The Spaniards had previously captured and were holding seven Indian chiefs. She said that they should be killed, decapitated, and their heads thrown to the attackers to sow panic among the Indians. This action would then be followed by a final charge of the Spanish cavalry. The idea was not initially accepted; the counterargument being that they would lose their final bargaining chip, the hostages. Nonetheless, she prevailed, the chiefs were killed, their heads thrown among the attackers, and the final cavalry charge was made. The attacking Indians indeed did panic and fled, allowing the Spaniards to survive.

⁶ This is another impressive feature of the conquest, the large amount of letters, accounts, and records that were written and preserved, a feature of the Spanish government and practices that should not be overlooked in the history of their empire.

⁷ September 11 is an even more fateful day in Chilean history than in the U.S. In addition to the events of 1541 described here, the military overthrow of Salvador Allende's government occurred on September 11, 1973.

Pocock recounts that the heroism of all the Spanish soldiers defies description. The lance of Francisco de Aguirre, one of Valdivia's bravest lieutenants, had to be cut away from his hand, which he could not unclench after having fought tirelessly all day. But the colony was left in a desperate situation. When Valdivia returned, not only had all the buildings been destroyed, but, as he wrote to the King of Spain, so had "our food and clothing and everything we owned, so that we were left simply with the rags we had for war, the arms we carried, and two small sows and a hog, a hen and a cock, and two handfuls of grain."⁸ Pocock goes on to note⁹ that "It was not a great deal, says Errazuriz, with which to found a kingdom."

CONTINUED DEVELOPMENT OF CHILE

The above event shows several things about the Spanish efforts in Chile: the remarkable strength of their fighting forces against odds that appear insuperable today; the even more remarkable abilities of Inés de Suárez; the leadership role she played in the expedition; and the respect accorded her by the soldiers. As we of course know now, the conquest continued, Valdivia and his expedition eventually did prevail in rebuilding Santiago and extending the conquest and development of lands in Chile. However, as I have previously noted, the incidents along the way seemed never ending and often approached the level of danger and threat of the one I have just described. Again, it is worth mentioning that it was the overall leadership qualities of Valdivia that enabled continued success against challenges that would have defeated any normal leader.

As I have given examples of the stamina and fighting prowess of the expedition, let me mention one more that shows another means that Valdivia employed to keep his desperate enterprise alive. I would say that 'subterfuge' is the right word for this one.

At the end of 1547, seven years after the arrival of Valdivia's expedition at Santiago, he decided to return to Peru to gain confirmation of his position as Governor of Chile and to settle important financial problems, his own resources having been consumed in the conquest and development of Chile up to that time. However, he needed to raise more funds for the trip, and his own followers by this time were not going to lend him any more money, having not been repaid for many previous loans.

Valdivia let it be known that anyone who wanted to leave Chile could do so and could take as much gold as they wished. The trip would be on a ship departing from Valparaiso and would be led by one of Valdivia's lieutenants. Some fifteen or so men accepted the offer and gathered in Valparaiso for the departure. Everyone had placed their belongings, and gold, on the ship, when Valdivia arrived on the scene and offered a lunch for everyone on the occasion of their departure. He toasted their dedication and devotion to the expedition, recognized their sacrifices, and asked for their support of his own work when they arrived in Peru. He then asked them to declare the amount of gold they were taking with them so that there would be a record of how much had eventually been found in Chile and thus show that there was value in the country. Then, while they all lined up before the notary to make their declarations, he surreptitiously strolled away toward the beach, where he suddenly jumped in a boat

⁸ Pocock, p. 94.

⁹ Ibid.

waiting for him and was rowed away toward the ship, leaving everyone else behind on shore, entirely helpless to reach the ship and recover their gold. Pocock notes that this is all well documented in the letters and records of the time, and even he was astonished by Valdivia's guile in the whole ruse.

Valdivia's adventures continued unabated in Peru. He successfully navigated the political instability and intrigues of the court there, again with adventures, threats, and battles that are all worth knowing in themselves, as Pocock very well describes. Here we will have to fast forward and skip several chapters in the saga. Valdivia did return to Chile, with authority as Governor, and, I recall, repaid or gave credit to the men whose gold he had lifted.

Valdivia, indefatigable as ever and now with more men and resources, pressed on with his effort to develop the south of Chile and reach the Strait of Magellan. Along the way, he and his soldiers also made forays into and conquered the transandine regions of what is western Argentina today. As with all the developments mentioned so far, the struggles, battles, and conflicts in this enterprise provide fascinating reading themselves. However, we must press ahead to the final chapter of tonight's essay from which I drew the title.

THE ROAD TO TUCAPEL

When Valdivia and his forces reached and crossed the river Itata in their march southward, they encountered a new tribe of Indians who put up much more resistance than their neighbors to the north. These were the Mapuches, who, as I mentioned before, were never conquered by the Incas. The Mapuches made fierce attacks on the Spaniards but were always driven off in these first encounters. They were not able to resist the armored cavalry attacks and they broke and ran under the force of repeated charges. However, they did not give up and worked to understand better the Spanish arms and tactics and develop their response.

It is interesting to note that the excellent fighting capabilities of the Mapuches gained increasing respect from the Spaniards, and concerns began to be raised about the wisdom of continuing the push southward. Indeed in one communication from Spain Valdivia was ordered to desist and to consolidate the gains made in the Santiago region and the nearer southern regions. Valdivia, of course, was not be dissuaded.

Turning back to the Mapuches, let us note that they were a tribe of dedicated warriors. Boys were trained from youth to develop their fighting skills, while women were in charge of providing food, raising children, and generally managing all non-military affairs. These customs subsequently entered into Chilean life and could probably be cited as influences on the development of 'macho' culture.¹⁰

At one point during those years a young Mapuche named Lautaro entered into Valdivia's service as a groom to help care for the horses. Native Indians were the primary sources of labor and support for the

¹⁰ However, as with so many things in Chile, machismo and the role of men and women took different paths from the rest of Latin America. Isabel Allende wrote some very humorous pieces about the resulting foibles of Chilean culture when she was a magazine columnist early in her career.

Spaniards, another subject of potential interest but for which Pocock notes that the written historical accounts do not provide much information.

Lautaro was a very remarkable man who achieved three pivotal accomplishments for his tribe. First, as a groom, he learned how horses work so to speak, that is, that they are animals, not divine creatures, and that they have limits to their strength and endurance. Second, after he escaped from Valdivia's service, he was able to persuade tribal elders to give him a leadership position at a very young age (about 20). These two breakthroughs enabled the third, which we will come to in a moment.

All the while Valdivia was extending his development southward, founding the city of Concepción, now Chile's third largest and the principal city in the south,¹¹ and numerous other towns in the region. Forts were built to protect against continuing attacks by the Mapuches, which Valdivia's forces were able to repel, but with increasing difficulty.

Undeterred, Valdivia kept pressing ahead, and the end of the year 1553 found him and his forces in an area south of Concepción containing a string of towns and forts that were being threatened by the Mapuches. He and his forces engaged in various skirmishes, and he arranged to meet one of his lieutenants at the fort of Tucapel on December 25. In so doing, he fell into a devastating trap set by Lautaro and his forces.

By this time Lautaro had understood what the limits of stamina of horses were, and he arranged his forces in groups in an area in which they were protected by the forests and the cavalry had restricted area for maneuver.

When Valdivia and his men arrived, Lautaro sent the first wave of Mapuches to attack them. Valdivia and his cavalry responded with their customary tactics and were able to defeat the group. But then Lautaro sent in his second wave and repeated the process. Again the Spaniards prevailed, but at significant cost in men and energy. When the third wave attacked, the Spaniards could not break through and were pushed back. At that point Lautaro sent in all his remaining reserves and overwhelmed the Spaniards.

And so died Valdivia with all his troops. None of them escaped, and what account we have of the battle was assembled from various sources afterward.

EPILOG

In the end Valdivia died fighting for the cause to which he had dedicated his life, the development of the new country called Chile. It was a cause for which he gained no riches; to the contrary it was a cause in which he had invested all his wealth and more. He died leaving substantial debts. Valdivia is not well known in history, certainly less so than Cortes and Pizarro, the conquerors of Mexico and Peru. But we must admire his dedication to the noble cause in which he believed, and we must equally admire his great leadership skills, his overall humanity (in the context of the times), and, as Pocock notes, his ability

¹¹ Concepción has also been the site of devastating earthquakes, the most recent of which occurred two years ago. Darwin also experienced a large earthquake in Concepción during his travels in Chile.

to capture in his letters and writings the charm and attractions of the country of Chile. It could be said that he died because of overreach, excessive ambition, and perhaps some hubris for not recognizing the deep strengths of his adversaries, the Mapuches. But given his nature and selfless dedication to the founding of his country, many will prefer to think of him as a hero who died in the service of his nation.

Inés de Suárez must also belong to the ranks of great figures in history, even though she may be less well known even than Valdivia. We have seen above the incredible bravery and strength she exhibited in supporting Valdivia in the conquest of Chile. She must also have had a great sense of dignity. One of the conditions of Valdivia being named Governor of Chile by the imperial court was that he could not continue living with Suárez, she being a widow and he married to a wife who stayed behind in Spain. This was a Catholic empire after all. It was arranged for her to marry Rodrigo de Quiroga, one of Valdivia's most accomplished lieutenants, who later became Governor of Chile himself, thus making her officially the first lady of Chile, and giving her formal recognition of the crucial role she had played in the founding of Chile, for which she was much admired by the people of the colony.

Lautaro and the Mapuches, as we have seen, accomplished something that no other native tribe in the Americas did – they defeated and killed the leader of their invaders and they blocked the takeover of their native lands. The war that had begun during Valdivia's reign continued for more than 300 years. The Mapuches were never completely defeated. It was only in 1883 that they finally laid down their arms, weakened by diseases contracted from the invaders and by the difficulties of maintaining their independence against a country that by that time had developed around them. Lautaro himself was killed in battle some three years after his victory at Tucapel, but by that time the Mapuches had perfected their techniques for resisting the Spanish cavalry and were no longer able to be conquered militarily. Thus Lautaro must be regarded as one of the great native leaders of all time in the Americas.

In the meantime, the development of Chile did continue after Valdivia's death in all regions except those controlled by the Mapuches. By the beginning of the 20th century Chile was quite developed in many ways, helped significantly by the wealth produced by the mining of nitrate deposits in the Atacama desert that were a major source of the world's fertilizer at the time.

Today, as I mentioned at the beginning of this essay, Chile is reaching the status of a developed nation by several measures, and it has had an enviable growth rate for most of the last two decades. While less isolated than it was historically because of advances in transportation, electronic communications, and the general globalization of the world, it retains its distinctive character and charm. I think the stories I have recounted here shed some light on the nature of its people and, perhaps, on their soul as well.

REFERENCES

The main reference I used was:

Pocock, H.R.S, "The Conquest of Chile," 1967, Stein and Day, New York.

Isabel Allende's historical novel about Inés de Suárez, "Inés del Alma Mia" is also of interest. The title of the English edition is "Inés of My Soul."

Finally the various Wikipedia entries on Chile and the conquest provide helpful summaries of some of the main events and properties of the country.