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Source: *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 56, No. 3 (Sep., 1920), pp. 196-200

Published by: geographicalj

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1781535>

Accessed: 24-06-2016 23:47 UTC

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## THE ISLES OF SAN FELIX AND SAN NABOR

## B. Glanvill Corney

IN the year 1579 the Viceroy of Peru, D. Francisco de Toledo, commissioned Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa, a very competent navigator for the times in which he lived, to sail southwards with two ships into the Straits of Magalhães with the principal object of intercepting Francis Drake and his companions, who, it was expected by the Spaniards, would return out of the Pacific towards Europe by that route—which, however, our countryman did not. Three weeks after Sarmiento put to sea from El Callao roads he made an entry in the log of his ship, the *Esperanza*, in the subjoined terms. The log was certified true, and was signed at the end by Sarmiento, by the master Anton Pablos [Corso], and by sixteen other members of the expedition; and was attested in the presence of the Royal Notary. The entry runs:

[Translation].—"November 1. This day we found ourselves East and West \* with Copiapo 180 leagues, and 150 leagues West of the meridian of Lima, that city bearing N.E. by N. 285 leagues. We passed 18 leagues to the westward of the *Islas Desventuradas*, which lie in 25° 20'. In the year 1574, when the shipmaster Juan Fernández was on a voyage to Chile, he chanced to fall in with these islands—for the second time only, as they had not been seen since Magalhães sighted them in 1520. They are now called after S<sup>t</sup> Felix and S<sup>t</sup> Ambor. They are small, consisting of three † lumps of land, uninhabited, waterless. They are resorted to by many sea-fowl and seals, and quantities of fish." ‡

The historian B. Leonardo de Argensola, who was a late contemporary of Sarmiento and Juan Fernández, reproduced the above passage in his *Conquista de las Islas Malucas*, printed at Madrid in 1609. He states, however, that Sarmiento "passed within sight" of the islands in question, § a circumstance which, if their distance was rightly computed at 18 leagues, may or may not have been true as regards San Ambor; but it could scarcely have been so of San Félix, because this latter, though the more westerly, and therefore the nearer island to Sarmiento's ship, is much the less elevated of the two. ||

\* Or, as we should say, "on the parallel, or in the latitude of."

† The third islet is González, an inaccessible and barren mass of rock connected to San Félix by a reef awash.

‡ *Viage al Estrecho de Magallanes*. Por Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa. (See p. 49.) Madrid, 1768.

§ The complete passage (lib. iii., p. 111, B) runs: "El primero de Nouiëbre passaró a vista de las [islas] que llaman *desventuradas*, puestas en veynte y cinco grados y vn tercio, que a caso, en el año de mil quinientos setenta y quatro, descubrió Iuan Fernandez Piloto, yendo a Chile: segunda vez inmediata al descubrimiento de Magallanes desde mil quinientos y veynte. Llamanse agora Yslas de San Felix, y San Ambor."

|| Though the one small peak of San Félix is reputed to reach 630 feet in height, the greater part of the island is much below that elevation. According to the Chilean survey conducted in 1874, San Ambrosio is 254 metres high; but the late Captain

Three points in these records are especially worthy of notice. One is that Sarmiento and Argensola (who in this reference simply copied from him, with slight embellishment) were both mistaken in supposing that the islands seen by Juan Fernández were the same as *las Desventuradas* of Magalhães—*i.e.* the *Isole Sfortunate* of Pigafetta. For, after emerging from the straits that bear his name, and gaining an offing from the Patagonian coast, Magalhães and his companions sighted no land for the space of fifty-five days, sailing first to the northward as far as lat.  $33\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$ , and thereafter in a west-north-westerly direction, with fine weather and smooth seas all the time.\* The two islands they next met with were evidently small atolls, for the pilots could find no soundings off their shores, and they presented only birds and trees to their observation. There are, in fact, none but atolls anywhere near the position assigned to them. They lay, by Albo's reckoning,  $9^{\circ}$ , and by Pigafetta's account 200 leagues, apart,† on a bearing north-west and south-east with each other and with the western exit of Magalhães' Strait. The one was found to be in lat.  $16^{\circ} 15' S.$ , uninhabited by man but well wooded, and this they named after San Pablo ‡ (the day being the festival of his Conversion); the other, fallen in with eleven days later in lat.  $10^{\circ} 40' S.$ , was also uninhabited, save by birds, but its waters abounded with sharks, and they therefore named it *la Isla de Tiburones*.§ Obviously the latitude and surface of these atolls had nothing in common with the position and character of the treeless and elevated igneous rock formations of San Félix and San "Ambor," which lie only 10 miles from one another on a bearing

Maclear, of H.M.S. *Alert*, computed it (in 1880) to be 1570 feet—a remarkable discrepancy—and the latter figure has been adopted by the British Hydrographic Office.

\* Magalhães' track, pricked off on a modern chart, shows that his squadron passed about midway between SS. Félix and Nabor and Juan Fernández' own two islands, both clusters being far beyond his range of vision.

† Francisco Albo (or Calvo) was the mate of Magalhães' ship the *Trinidad*. His log is one of the treasures preserved in the *Archivo de Indias* at Sevilla (Sir Clements Markham says in the Royal Library at Madrid). It was printed, in 1837, in the fourth volume of Admiral Fernández Navarrete's *Colección de los Viajes y Descubrimientos*, etc., pp. 209-247.

The cavaliere Pigafetta, otherwise Antonio the Lombard, was an Italian patrician who embarked with Magalhães in the quality of a passenger, or supernumerary, and wrote what is perhaps the best original account of the voyage extant—*Navigazione intorno al globo terraqueo*. It was first printed at Milano in 1800.

‡ In some maps it is laid down as S. Pedro and S. Pietro. This arose first through an error in a summary of Magalhães' voyage written by an unnamed friend of Duarte Barbosa, who was shipmate with him in the *Vitoria*, probably Vasco Gallego the sailing-master. That San Pablo is correct is vouched for by the fact that the island was discovered on the commemoration day of St. Paul's Conversion and named accordingly, as Albo specifically relates in his log.

§ These two atolls cannot be positively identified from the scanty particulars recorded; but it appears most probable that the first was Pukapuka (the Honden Eyland of Schouten) in lat.  $14^{\circ} 56' S.$ , long.  $138^{\circ} 50' W.$  of Greenwich, and that the *Isla de Tiburones* was either Caroline, Flint, or Vostok island, whose characteristics are similar and positions approximate.

almost due east and west, in lat.  $26^{\circ} 13'$  and  $26^{\circ} 19'$  S. respectively, distant only a bare 500 miles from the mainland of South America.\* But this disparity is merely a side issue and has no farther bearing on the present topic, except as a necessary premiss in relation to point No. 2. This second point is that the original discovery of the isles of San Félix and San Nabor, Ambor, or Ambrosio, as related by Sarmiento de Gamboa (and which does not appear to have been independently recorded by any other contemporary writer whose works have survived), is here brought definitely home to Juan Fernández; and the year when it occurred is fixed beyond cavil, which is more than can be affirmed of the supposed date of his discovery of the two better-known islands near the same meridian, but some 500 geographical miles farther south, which bear his own name.

The third point that arises is, that instead of its present patronymic, San "Ambrosio," the name was quoted by Sarmiento, and repeated by Argensola, as San "Ambor." Now, who was San Ambor, or Mabor, or Nabor, as we find it in some old prints? The latter spellings tend to belie any impression that Ambor stands for an archaic, abbreviated, or erratic form of Ambrosio. Rather does it look as if Ambrosio had been evolved later out of Ambor. References to hagiological books† seem to confirm this negation, for they set forth that one of several early Christian saints named Nabor was the reputed comrade and fellow-martyr of one of the still more numerous saints called Félix, and that the deaths and glory of these particular two martyrs are commemorated jointly on the same day—July 12. Their biographers further relate that Félix and Nabor were Easterns, or Moors, of sorts; that, though their exact origin was obscure, they certainly came to Italy from Tunis (probably Utica); that, having become ardent Christian proselytes, in spite of their Semitic ancestry, they incurred the wrath of the Emperor Maximiano Ercoleo, in whose army they were serving; that after stubbornly rejecting his blandishments and contemning his threats they were confined, by an imperial order, in a darkened, malodorous, and insanitary cell, at Milano, where they endured fiendish refinements of torture with miraculous fortitude, but refused to renounce their Faith; and that finally they suffered the death penalty together by decapitation. Their martyrdom was, in effect, consummated on a day corresponding to July 12 in or about the year 304, at a spot without the walls of the city near the brook called Silaro, where Sabina, illustrious by her virtues no less than by her birth, gave their bodies burial.

The older maps of America and the neighbouring ocean throw

\* *Anuario hidrográfico de la Marina de Chile*. Año I. Santiago, 1875 (see pp. 341-7).

† J. P. Migne's *Patrologia* (tome xv., § 1453 (178)). Paris, 1845.—G. Moroni's *Dizionario di erudizione storico-ecclesiastica* (vol. 47, p. 154). Venezia, 1847.—*Les petits Bollandistes: Vies des Saints* (tom. viii., pp. 256-7). Par M. Paul Guérin. Paris, 1882.—Letters of St. Ambrose (No. 22). Oxford, 1881.—Forcellini's *Onomasticon*, by Dr. De-Vit (art. S. Nabor in tom. iv., p. 611). Prati, 1887.

the clearest light upon this problem. Didacus Mendez' draft *PERVVIÆ AVRIFERÆ REGIONIS TYPVS*, for instance, first published by Ortelius at Antwerp in 1584—only five years after Sarmiento penned his journal—displays the two islands in approximately their true position. They are there designated San Felix and San Nabor; and the following note is adjoined, *Hæ Insulæ primum detectæ fuere a° 1574*. In Ortelius' larger map of 1587, *AMERICÆ SIVE NOVI ORBIS NOVA DESCRIPTIO*, the same names occur in even truer position, though the date of their discovery is noted as 1572. This may have been a slip on the part of the engraver, or it may point to confusion in the draughtsman's mind between these islands and those other two called after Juan Fernández himself—a confusion which, as will presently be shown, did exist in the minds of some geographers even fifty years later, and may possibly account for the omission of both clusters from Gerardus Mercator's atlas of 1595.

The map of the world on Mercator's projection issued by Hondius at Amsterdam in 1608,\* of which our Society possesses the only known copy, shows these two islands as "S. Felicis" and "S. Nabor." The Flemish cosmographer and publicist, Jean de Laet, whose position as Director of the Netherlands West India Company must have afforded him exceptional opportunities for discussing hydrographic data with shipmasters and other travelled persons, published his *Histoire du nouveau Monde* at Leyden in 1640.† In it he refers, when treating of Juan Fernández' Islands proper, also to "those called after San Felix and San Nabor"; but he candidly expresses doubts about the identity of these with the former, and goes so far as to question their separate existence.

Not so, however, the lucid and engaging Jesuit Father Fr. Diego de Rosales, whose manuscript was written between the years 1660 and 1670, though it never went to press until B. Vicuña MacKenna rescued it from oblivion two centuries later; for, taking as his text the passage quoted above from the *Conquista de las Islas Malucas*,‡ in describing the isles of Juan Fernández, Father Diego observes:

"Those are the exact words of Argensola, who was ill informed both as to the names and as to the latitude, unless it be that he mistook them for two other islands situated on the parallel of the Atacaman desert and the outlet of the valley of Copiapó, and which lie more than sixty leagues distant from the mainland. But on the navigation charts drawn in Perú these are called the isles of S. Félix and Ambrosio. Nicolas Juan Bicher,§ in the map he printed in the year 1631 intitled *Nueva descripcion de la América*, named them more properly the 'Isles of S. Félix and S. Nabor,'

\* *Nova et exacta totius Orbis terrarum descriptio geographica et hydrographica*. Auctore I. HONDIO.

† The original edition appeared in Latin in 1633.

‡ See fourth footnote, p. 196.

§ *I.e.* Claes Jansz. Visscher, *alias* Nicolaus Joannis Piscator. I am indebted to Mr. Heawood for this identification of "Bicher," and for several other valuable references to early maps quoted in this article.

saints whom the Romish Church commemorates together on the 12th of July. The error in Ambor and Ambrosio, for S. Nabor, is thus manifest." \*

Here, then, after lying hidden away in Father Diego's manuscript for more than two hundred years, is found direct and complete confirmation of the opinion independently arrived at that Nabor, and not Ambrosio, was the saint after whom the companion island of San Félix was named by its discoverer. And knowing as we do that it was the general custom among Spanish explorers to name newly found lands, peaks, bays, harbours, etc., after the saint or saints upon whose anniversaries such places were discovered, there seems to be full warrant for believing that Juan Fernández' rencontre with these two islands in 1574, vouched for as to the year by Sarmiento de Gamboa, actually took place on the 12th day of July (O.S.) thereof.

Nabor, then, and not Ambrosio, was beyond question the name allotted by its discoverer to the eastern, which is also the higher, of the two islands. Father Diego's mention of Claes Jansz. Visscher's map corroborates the impression that Nabor had not quite fallen out of use before 1631, though Ambrosio was already adopted in certain manuscript charts drawn in Peru, and is in fact found on the engraved map *AMERICÆ PARS MERIDIONALIS* in Hondius' atlas of 1639, and somewhat later on Pieter Goos's *PASCÆRTE VAN NOVA HISPANIA*, etc., † dated 1666; but how, by whom, and wherefor the original name became transformed into Ambor, within five years of its bestowal, will perhaps never be known. From Ambor to Ambrosio the conversion was easier and more natural. Possibly it was the unconscious lapse of a scribe or draftsman, more intent upon the manipulation of his *cigarillo* than upon the guidance of his quill; or some scholiast may have deliberately "corrected" a document. At any rate, it is plain that the rightful name of the island formerly called St. Nabor's has passed to the more renowned San Ambrosio.

Meanwhile it would be interesting to know what our colleagues in Spain, in Chile, and in Peru can bring forward with reference to the main theme of this argument, and to what opinion they incline. In 1892 Ecuador renamed all the islands of its Galápagos dependency (not altogether advisedly, think some) to commemorate the discoveries made by Cristóbal Colón and other explorers on the eastern side of America at a time when no European had yet seen the great waters of the West. It would be a graceful action if Chile, whose Constitution seems intended to include the isles of San Félix and San Nabor in the expression "las de Juan Fernández," ‡ were to render a small act of justice to the pioneer's memory by restoring to his unchallenged discovery the name that he himself bestowed upon it.

\* *Historia general de el Regno de Chile* (lib. ii. cap. xvii. p. 285). Valparaiso, 1877-8.

† No. 38 in his 'Sea-Atlas, or the Watter-World.' Amsterdam, 1670. On this map the relative position of the two islands is reversed.

‡ Constitución política de la República de Chile, cap. 1º, art. 1º (del Territorio).