

NSW State Library secures ‘holy grail’ of Australiana

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An extraordinarily rare 17th century Spanish document – considered amongst the most valuable of all printed Australiana – has just been acquired by the State Library of NSW and will go on public display **TODAY [Wednesday 20 November]**.

Fernandez de Quirós Memorial No. 1, 14 Dec 1607, Madrid, the first and oldest of 14 known printed Memorials to King Phillip III of Spain, was purchased from a private collector for \$1 million thanks to the support of the State Library Foundation.

According to State Librarian John Vallance: “The Quirós Memorial No. 1 is the earliest example of a sponsorship request and is considered the ‘holy grail’ by many Australian collectors!”

Pedro Fernandes de Quirós (1563–1615) was best known for his participation in Spanish voyages of discovery in the Pacific Ocean. In 1606 he landed on a large island (Vanuatu) which he mistook to be the famed great Southern Continent and named it Austrialia del Espiritu Santo.

Determined to further explore the existence of a southern continent, Quirós wrote at least 50 memorials (or ‘sponsorship’ requests) addressed to the Spanish King desperately seeking Royal support to fund his next expedition. At least 14 of the memorials were printed between 1607 and 1614 at Quirós’ personal expense for presentation at the Council of the Indies.

The State Library holds the largest number of printed Quirós Memorials known to exist in a single public collection.

In Memorial No. 1 Quirós gives a detailed account of the 1605-1606 expedition, providing a description of the voyage and the discoveries. He writes:

“I say that this must be another new world that promises to be larger and populated by better peoples than America, rich for very good reasons, considering the reports and the silver, pearl samples and mother-of-pearl conches that I saw in many places during this and two other voyages, given the land disposition within the parallels of Peru , with a climate like that of Potosi.”

According to the Library’s head curator Maggie Patton, “The Memorials document one man’s obsession to solve the mystery of the Great South Land – each Memorial becoming a little more desperate, mounting increasingly exaggerated arguments in the

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hope of convincing the Spanish King with the promise of untold riches, including gold, silver and spices, for Spain and souls for the Church.”

The King did eventually promise funding for another voyage, but Quirós died shortly after arriving in Panama in 1614.

“The research value of the Library’s collection of Quirós Memorials is considerable given Quirós’ role in the chronology of Spanish voyages in the Pacific in the early 17th century and the gradual mapping of the Pacific through European exploration,” said Ms Patton.

The Quirós Memorial No. 1 was acquired with support from the State Library Foundation, which is celebrating its 30th anniversary on Wednesday 20 November. This landmark acquisition, along with a selection of other acquisition highlights from the Foundation’s history, will be in display in the Library’s galleries from 21 November to 6 December 2019.

[Maggie Patton is available for interviews.](#)

For more information, interviews and images, please contact:

Vanessa Bond, Media & Communication Branch, State Library of NSW
(02) 9273 1566, 0411 259 898, vanessa.bond@sl.nsw.gov.au