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CHILEMONOS

# Salomones

*Magazine*

25 JULIO

**DIA** DE LA ANIMACIÓN  
**CHILENA**

25 JULIO

**DIA**  **DE**  
**LA**  
**ANIMACIÓN**  
**CHILENA**

**C H I L E M O N O S**

104 YEARS SINCE  
*LA TRANSMISIÓN DEL MANDO  
SUPREMO 1920 - 1925*

By Fernando Vargas García

25 JULIO  
**DÍA** DE LA ANIMACIÓN  
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*"It would be immensely helpful that, based on this discovery, we could declare July 25 as the National Day of Chilean Animators, as having material foundation (the existence of the short film itself), the role of audiovisual animation in the country gains the historical legitimacy to require its commemoration. We have found the first trace, something not many countries in our continent can say."*

**Jaime Córdova**

*director of Cine Recobrado Film Festival*

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Alfredo Serey Vial's *La transmisión del mando supremo 1920-1925* [The transfer of the president's power 1920-1925] first screened in Concepción's Teatro Central on 25 July 1921<sup>(1)</sup>. The first screening in Santiago was held a week later, on 1 August 1921. Believed to be the first Chilean animation, the short film remained lost until 2023, when it was rediscovered by Jaime Córdova, director of Cine Recobrado Film Festival in Valparaíso. The short film marked the first production of the company National Film, with Nicolás Martínez Ezquerro assisting on the film as photographer. *La transmisión del mando supremo 1920-1925* was Serey's first and last experiment in animation.

True to its title, the film depicts the transfer of presidential power in 1920, from Juan Luis Sanfuentes to Arturo Alessandri Palma. Lacking a concrete narrative structure, *La transmisión del mando supremo 1920-1925* imagines the first couple of days in the new president's term as short vignettes. The film opens on Alessandri sitting at his desk; a calendar behind him shows the date of his first presidential inauguration, 23 December 1920<sup>(2)</sup>. Subsequent scenes, relying on allegories and satire, show a palpable enthusiasm from the working class as they receive Alessandri as their new president. Serey further comments on the tasks the new president will have to face during his term as president, starting with a national deficit—cobwebs left behind for Alessandri to clean.

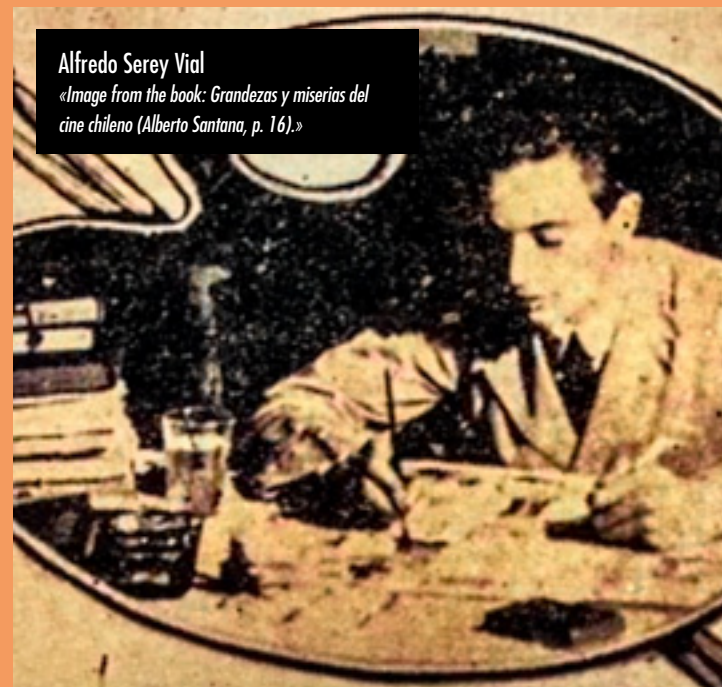
A throughline in the short is the enthusiasm of the people as they await Alessandri's presidential term. Serey repeatedly focuses on this eagerness, emphasizing the hope that surrounded this specific transfer of power. In anticipation of the first screening in Santiago, the newspaper *La Nación* wrote about the film:

*"This national production, in addition to its great artistic value, will have for us the merit of reflecting in its plot a very important moment in our republican life, given that Mr. Alessandri's coming to power represents for our Nation the beginning of a new governmental regime, from which better days for our homeland are expected"* (my trans., *La Nación*, 1 August 1921).

Despite the anticipation surrounding the transfer of power, there was no effort to capture the ceremony on film. When asked about the motivation



Arturo Alessandri at his desk.  
The calendar shows the date of his inauguration, 23 December 1920.  
«Courtesy of Jaime Córdova (Cine Recobrado Film Festival) and Cineteca Nacional de Chile.»



Alfredo Serey Vial  
«Image from the book: *Grandezas y miserias del cine chileno* (Alberto Santana, p. 16).»

<sup>(1)</sup> The first screening in Santiago was originally scheduled the same day as Concepción. Due to unforeseen circumstances, the screening in the capital had to be pushed back by a week, premiering in the Cine Alhambra on 1 August 1921 (*La Nación*, 24 July 1921).

<sup>(2)</sup> Arturo Alessandri Palma would return as president two more times. First between 20 March 1925 and 1 October 1925, following the so-called “ruido de sables” and subsequent coup d’état. His final term as president took place between 24 December 1932 and 24 December 1938.

Teatro Central de Concepción.  
Held the first screening of the film on 25 July 1921.



Cine Alhambra in Santiago.  
Held the first screening in the capital  
on 1 August 1921.

behind his film, Serey cited this as a significant factor: “as I noticed no one bothered to film the most anticipated ceremony of all our presidential transfers of power, and, being already late, I decided to make it as a cartoon” (my trans., *La Nación*, 1 August 1921). Allegedly, the resulting film pleased the newly inaugurated president so much that he invited Serey and Martínez Ezquerro to visit him in La Moneda [presidential palace], where he awarded the two filmmakers a check before ordering the film to be screened across the Nation<sup>(3)</sup>.

Among the figures depicted in the short film are several members of Alessandri’s cabinet, who would have certainly been recognizable to the audience at the time. Among them are Pedro Aguirre Cerda (Minister of the Interior and future president of Chile), Héctor Arancibia Laso (general of the liberal alliance), Juan Luis Sanfuentes (Alessandri’s predecessor as president), and senator Malaquías Concha Ortiz. Various personifications and allegories further populate the screen. Some notable examples include figures representing the working class, a maternal ‘democracy’, and the ‘Republic of Chile’ itself. The protagonist, however, is undoubtedly

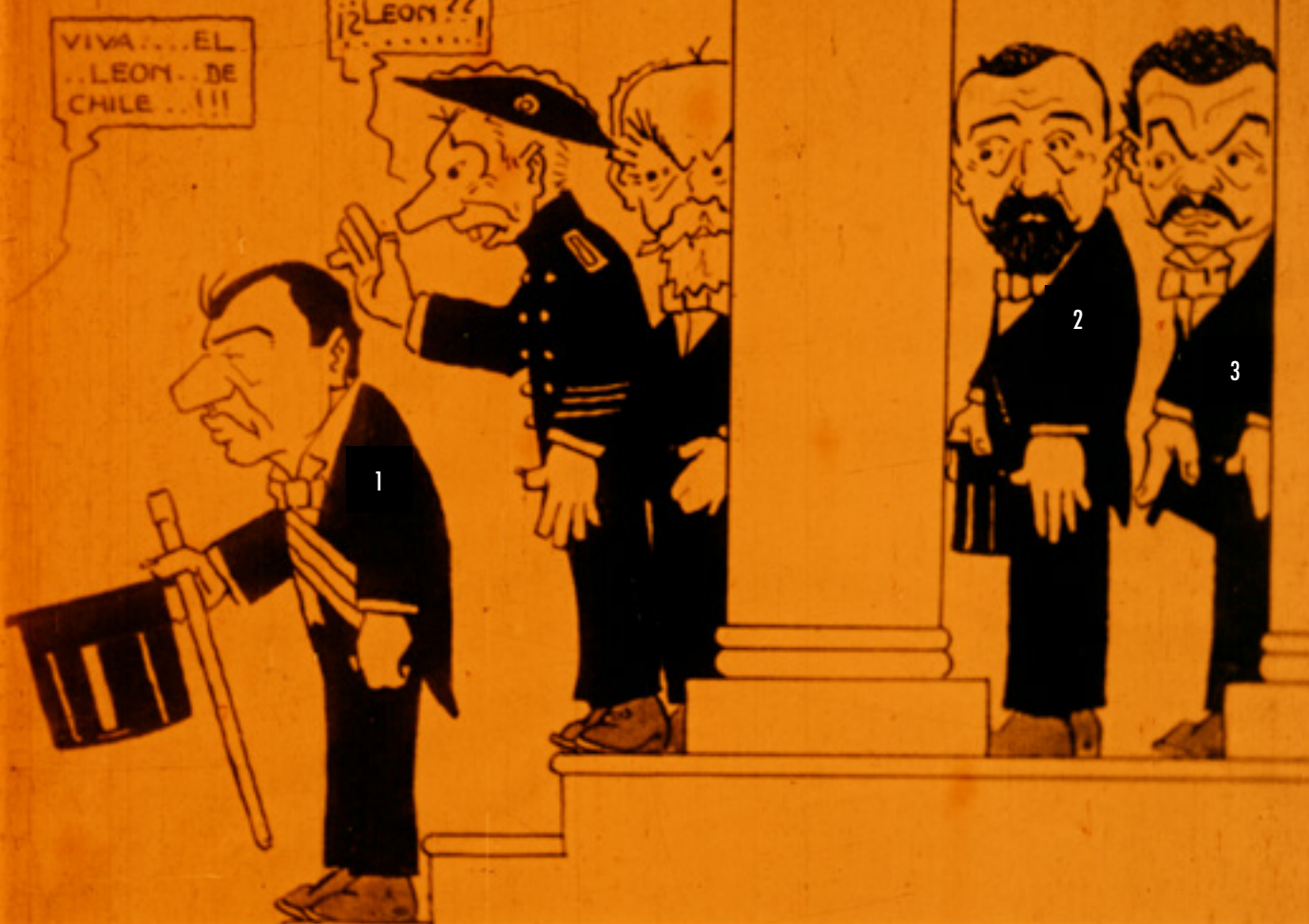
President Alessandri, nicknamed the “Lion of Tarapacá” [“León de Tarapacá”] for the strength of his political discourse aimed at the working class. Serey captures these qualities in a vignette depicting Alessandri as a real lion, the “Lion of the Republic” [“León de la República”], who rules with love.

As this article alludes, Serey was not an animator by trade, but a cartoonist for the daily *Las Últimas Noticias*<sup>(4)</sup>. The film is therefore primarily understood as an experiment by the artist, as well as an extension of his work as cartoonist. This connection transcends Serey’s singularity as animator, instead representing progress across the Nation born from individual experiments from isolated artists during Chile’s early 20th century era of modernization. Arturo Alessandri himself is seen as representative of this time (Espinoza Guerra, p. 155). *La transmisión del mando supremo 1920-1925* thus showcases a symbiosis between political satire and the emerging medium of animation, indicating clear interest in the technological, social, and political development of the country.

<sup>(3)</sup> It’s difficult to confirm the veracity of this story, offered only as an anecdote by Alberto Santana in “Grandezas y miserias del cine chileno” (p. 40). What is true, however, is that newspapers such as *La Nación* and *Las Últimas Noticias* celebrated the film’s success and reception (*La Nación*, 2 August 1921).

<sup>(4)</sup> Chile had no real trade of ‘animators’ in this time period. Despite other countries already having established animation industries, Chilean animation mostly consisted of isolated experiments by artists like Serey.





From left to right: Arturo Alessandri Palma (1), Malaquías Concha Ortiz (2), Pedro Aguirre Cerda (3) and Héctor Arancibia Laso (4).  
 «Courtesy of Jaime Córdova (Cine Recobrado Film Festival) and Cineteca Nacional de Cine.  
 Photographs: Biblioteca de Congreso Nacional de Chile.»







Sequence showing animation superimposed over Serey's drawings.  
The original dialogue is briefly visible underneath (3rd image).

«Courtesy of Jaime Córdova (Cine Recobrado Film Festival) and Cineteca Nacional de Cine»



Lacking sound and musicalization, Serey utilizes various creative workarounds. Dialogue is contained in speech bubbles that remind not only of his career as a cartoonist, but also of other animated shorts of the time, particularly the North American characters of *Mutt and Jeff*<sup>(5)</sup>. Diegetic sounds are equally depicted graphically, exchanging the auditory for the visual. For example, in the absence of songs and sounds, musical scores and notes are depicted.

A question that persists around the short film comes from the presence of animation superimposed over the original drawings. Apparently painted over the finished film, various sequences include a different style of animation; words and abstract shapes in red and black ink appear over Serey's drawings, occasionally even surpassing their complexity. They do not detract from the animation they cover, however, instead emphasizing it by highlighting dialogue and giving characters motivated gazes.

The label of the "first Chilean animation" can be better contextualized when considering the global state of animation at this time. While difficult to

identify the first animation ever made, Émile Cohl's *Fantasmagorie* (1908) is frequently named as such. It's important to note that various animated experiments precede Cohl, most notably the chalk drawings of *Humorous Phases of Funny Faces* (1906) or brief segments in stop motion in *The Haunted Hotel* (1907), both directed by J. Stuart Blackton. *Fantasmagorie*, however, stands out as the first modern cartoon (Crafton, p.60). A decade after *Fantasmagorie*, Quirino Cristiani's *El Apóstol* [*The Apostle*] was released in Argentina in 1917. Considered to be the first full-length animated film in history with an estimated runtime of 70 minutes, the lost film tells the story of Hipólito Yrigoyen, then president of Argentina. As the president sleeps, he is transformed into a spirit with the appearance of an apostle (Bendazzi, p.53). He is then transported to Mount Olympus, where he convinces the gods to help him purify Buenos Aires with a destructive fire that would then allow him to rebuild the capital after his policies. When he finally wakes up, the motivated Yrigoyen immediately begins work on manifesting his vision of the Argentinian capital.

That same year, Álvaro Marins' *Kaiser* was released in Brazil. Also lost,

<sup>(5)</sup> *La Nación* celebrated the film as "the first Chilean *Mutt and Jeff*" (my trans., *La Nación*, 30 July 1921).

Example of the political character of the short film.  
A personification of democracy as a maternal figure holds Alessandri and a  
representative of the working class as they shake hands.

«Courtesy of Jaime Córdova (Cine Recobrado Film Festival) and Cineteca Nacional de Cine.»







*Las Últimas Noticias* published a promotional still (right) not present in the film in its current state (left).

«Courtesy of Jaime Córdova (Cine Recobrado Film Festival) and Cineteca Nacional de Cine. Still: cinechile.cl»



the film satirized Kaiser Wilhelm II's political ambitions in the leadup to WWI. Significant to this chronology is also *Vida y milagros de Don Fausto* [Life and miracles of Don Fausto], the first Chilean full-length animation, releasing only 3 years after *La transmisión del mando supremo 1920-1925*. Also lost, the film was based on the North American comic strip Bringing Up Father, following the adventures of Don Fausto and Crisanta, localized names for Jiggs and Maggie, as they encounter various Chilean politicians (Jara, p.165). Combined, these early animated works from Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, prove the political character of South American animation, emerging in the same time period despite their unique national contexts.

While it is likely the exact length of the short film as it was seen in 1921 will never be fully known, there's reason to believe the current runtime of roughly 5 minutes represents an incomplete film. Before its discovery in 2023, writings on the film estimated its length to be 450 metres, a roughly 10 minute runtime (Santana, p.40; Espinoza Guerra, p.157). However, Alfredo Serey himself estimated the film to be closer to 700

metres, or roughly 12 minutes (*La Nación*, 1 August 1921). The absence of opening and closing credits serves as clear indication of missing elements of the film in its current form. Further evidence emerges when comparing a promotional still of the film published in *Las Últimas Noticias*, which shows Alessandri in profile looking at the deficit, a specific perspective of the scene not present in the film. Finally, a review published by *La Nación* the day after the premiere in Santiago mentions a speech delivered by Alessandri in a car (*La Nación*, 2 August 1921), a scene entirely absent from the film today.

104 years since *La transmisión del mando supremo 1920-1925*, it is important to look back at the beginning of Chilean animation and celebrate the singularity of this film as material evidence of a rich legacy. This 25th of July we celebrate the National Day of Chilean Animation, remembering based on this discovery a long history of animation that begins with *La transmisión del mando supremo 1920-1925*. **SM**



# Alerta!

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G. LE ROUGE



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## El RETRATO de Lucrecia Borgia

I

BALTASAR BUXTON,  
COLECCIONISTA

Fritz Kramm, el riquísimo comerciante en cuadros, acababa de almorzar apaciblemente en compañía de su hermano el doctor Cornelius, tan conocido en New York por el sobrenombre de "El Escultor de Carne Humana", cuando un criado le entregó un telegrama; lo abrió, y sonrió.

—Adivina quién me escribe, — dijo al doctor.

—¿Qué sé yo!

—Baltasar Buxton.

—¿El maníático, el coleccionista de cuadros, el hombre del laboratorio?

—El mismo. Hace más de un año que no tenía noticias tuyas. Le creía enfadado conmigo.

—¿Por qué?

—Pretendía que le había hecho pagar excesivamente — esto un vaso de plata, atribuido a Benvenuto Cellini, pero cuya autenticidad duda mucho de estar probada.

—Dices que es muy rico, ¿eh? — preguntó de improviso Cornelius Kramm.



GASTON Le ROUGE

Cover and drawing by Alfredo Serey Vial for Alerta!, crime serial published on 22 September 1936.

«Colección Fundación Chilemonos»







Watch the recovered footage of  
*La transmisión del mando supremo:*  
1920 - 1925

Channel: [YouTube.com/cinerecuperado](https://www.youtube.com/cinerecuperado)

*"Footage rediscovered by Jaime Córdova (Recobrado Film Festival, Valparaíso) and restored by the Chilean National Film Archive."*

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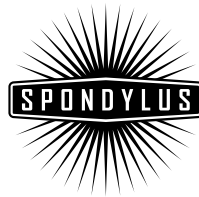
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Magazine

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