

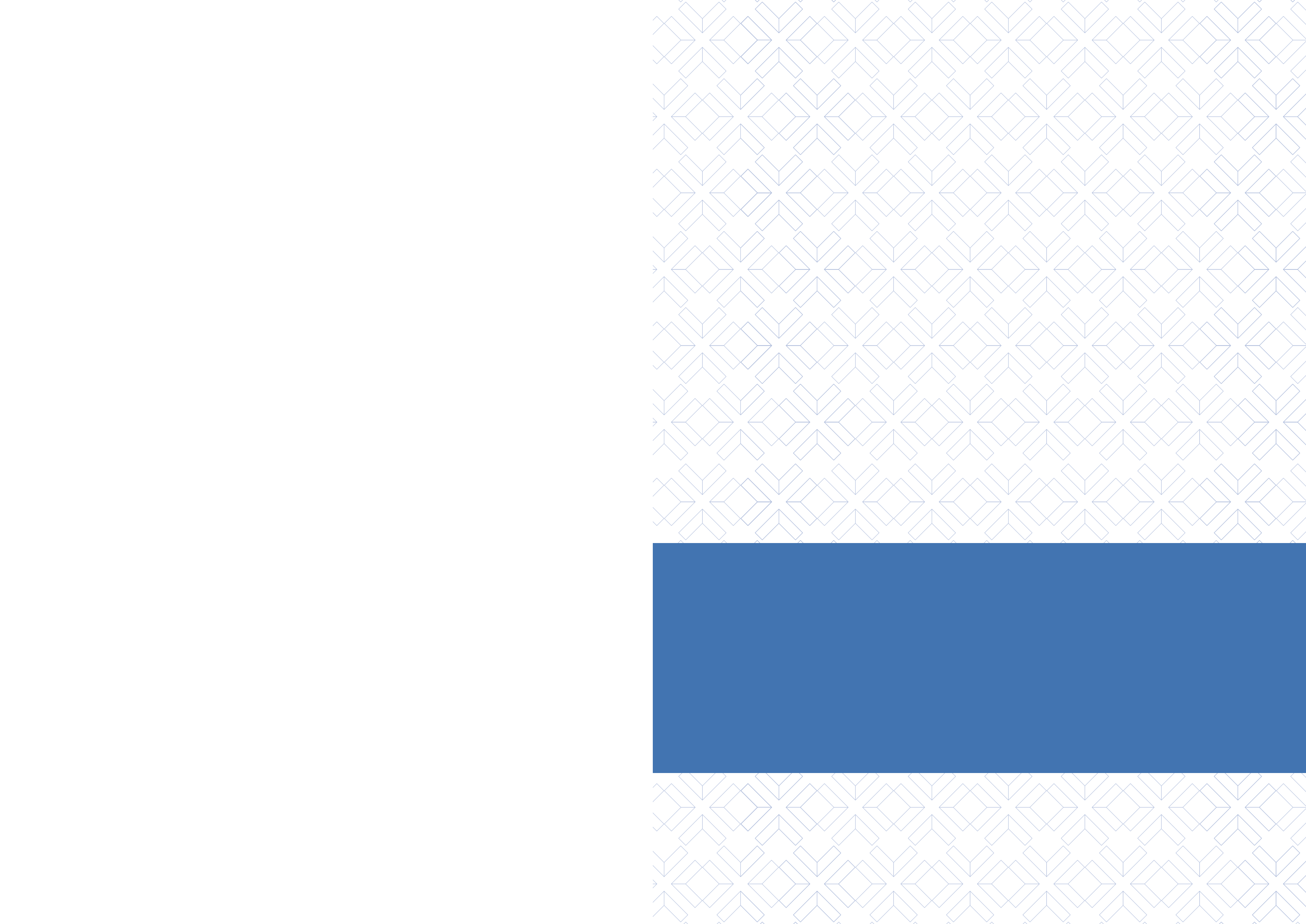
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The Manila Galleon and the first globalization of world trade

BY **Borja Cardelús**

The route that united Asia, America and Europe





THE LONG CONQUEST OF THE PACIFIC

The persistence of Spain of the 16th century made it possible to conquer **an ocean as untamable as the Pacific**, a century in which it faced two types of conquests, all equally astonishing. One was the terrestrial, that of America, achieved **in the surprising period of only fifty years**.

The other one was such of the Pacific, where the enemies were not arrows, nor indigenous ambushes, nor poisoned darts, **but the horrific circumstances of an ocean that extends to almost 20,000 km from East to West**, which harbors 25,000 islands and atolls. It occupies one third of the globe and is known for its extremeness, when improbably calm as well as with its overwhelming storms, **having been the tomb of many Spanish ships and sailors** that succumbed to the savage harshness of the immense ocean.

The first one to spot it, the great discoverer of the Pacific, was **the Extremaduran Vasco Nuñez de Balboa** who, after crossing the inextricable jungles of Central America with a handful of men, peered from a hill to that blue lake that extended with no limits towards the South, and that is why **he baptized it as the South Sea**.

After that achievement came **the prodigious feat of Magellan**, that convinced the Emperor Charles V to find a path through the American continent that, crossing the Pacific, arrived to the coveted Spice Islands, the quarry of cloves, rhubarb or pepper. The Portuguese nationalized

as Spanish sailor, serving the Spanish Crown, found the desired path and sailed the ocean for the first time, but **he died in a skirmish with natives in the Filipino archipelago**, when he had already accomplished most of his feats. It was completed by Juan Sebastian Elcano aboard the ship Victoria, full of spices, and when arriving to the Iberian Peninsula, after the long voyage, **he had completed the first travel around the world**, and reliably demonstrated its sphericity.

But the enormous expansionist momentum of the 16th century Spain that **just came out full of energy from the Reconquer** would not be limited to the discovery of that immense ocean. Charles V decided that it was needed to link it to the Crown sovereignty **to open a route through the Pacific to the Maluku Islands**, the heart of the Spice Islands, that was challenged by Portugal, a nation that already had its own African and Atlantic route to trade with spices.

But neither the Emperor nor the Spanish authorities knew about the fearsome nature of the new ocean that they tried to master, and one after another failed as many were dispatched for this: Jofre Garcia de Loaysa, Sebastian Caboto, Alvaro de Saavedra, Hernando de Grijalva, Rui Lopez de Villalobos, Gonzalez de Espinosa, Ortiz de Retes... **great captains, brilliant armadas that departed to win the enormous ocean for Spain and failed in their endeavor**, because the Pacific showed its irascible character: its winds, its currents, its storms left a sinister trail of shipwrecks and sailors buried under its untamed waters.

Despite all that, the final balance of all these misfortunes and frustrations was not entirely negative because **the navigations allowed to examine the climates and contours of that unprecedented ocean full of islands and atolls**, and above all its most relevant characteristic, for the purposes of the Spanish claims to master it; although the trip through the Pacific from America to Asia was easy due to the favorable push of the trade winds, **the return trip, the return voyage, was revealing impossible**. The winds and currents circulated in the opposite direction to navigation, and the ships ended up at the bottom of the sea, defeated by the elements.

So the Pacific ocean did not allow itself to be conquered, because it could only be navigated in one direction. The return was not feasible. **But there was one person that knew its secret, the key to the conquest of the Pacific, the secret for the return voyage**.

The persistence of Spain of the 16th century made it possible to conquer an ocean as untamable as the Pacific, a century in which it faced two types of conquests, all equally astonishing. One was the terrestrial, that of America, achieved in the surprising period of only fifty years.



ANDRES DE URDANETA

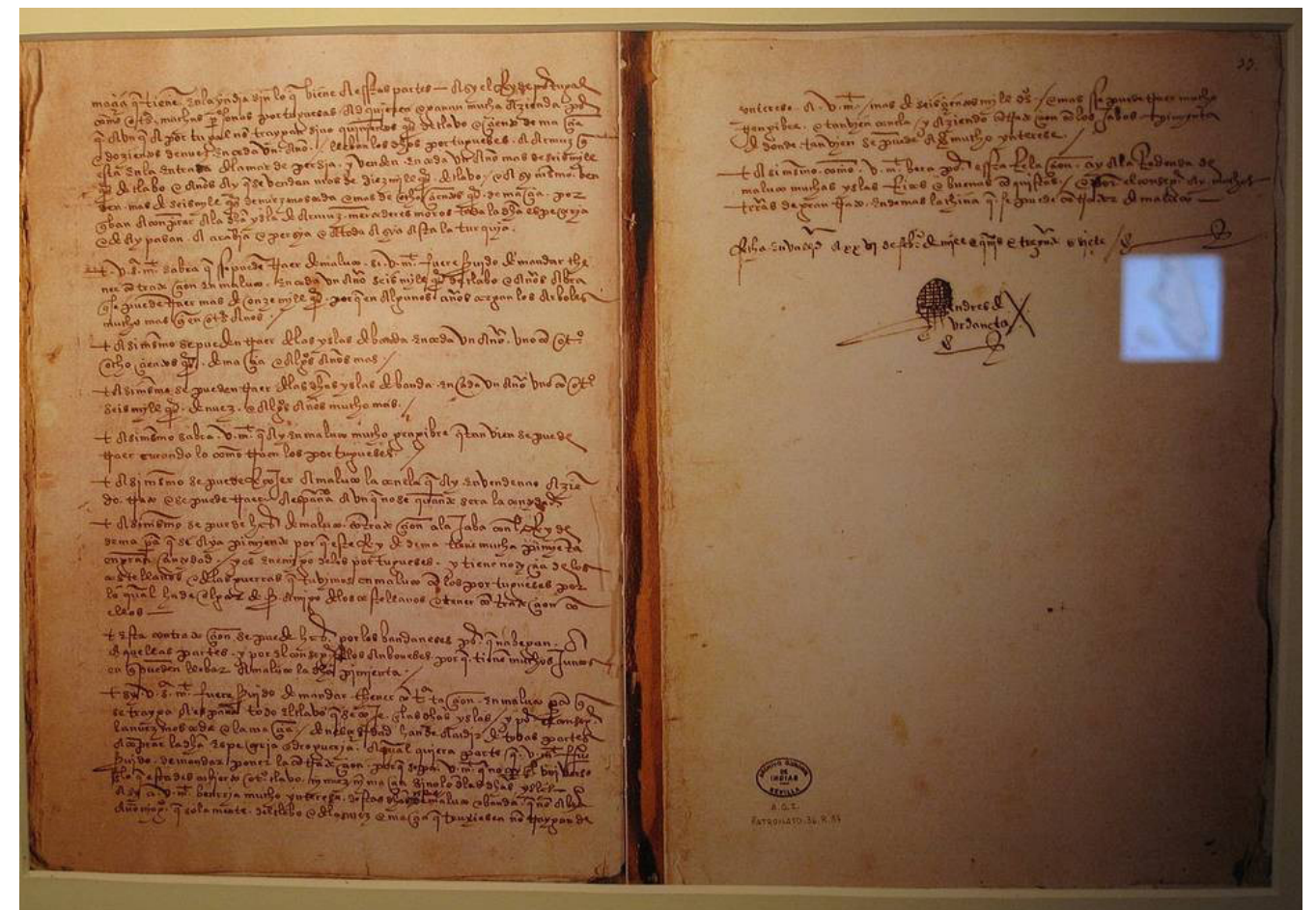
Andres de Urdaneta was a born adventurer, hardened in thousands of wars and seafaring, and even that he also accompanied Pedro de Alvarado in the Guatemala conquer, his main stage was always the Pacific, where he sailed for the first time as a cabin boy at the service of Loaisa. He stayed for a long time in the political hornet's nest of the Maluku, where the interests of Spaniards, Portuguese and local kings competed, and in many cases his life was at true risk, needing to hide for several months in the malicious jungle of the treacherous Portuguese Governor Pedro de Meneses. Until the Treaty of Zaragoza put an end to the Hispanic-Portuguese rivalries, and it was when he left the Maluku and, old and tired after so many changes and filled with a religious vocation, decided to be ordained Augustinian and to shut himself away in a monastery in Mexico and spend the rest of his life praying and retired.

But public life was not only not finished for Andres de Urdaneta, but also he was about to write his most glorious page, the one that would make him escape from the anonymous list of so many characters to write his name in the history of mankind. During his maritime adventures, he had gathered information and gained experience about the winds and currents in that uncontrolled Pacific Ocean, and he had drawn his own conclusions. He was so confident about them, that he boasted that the return route through the ocean, the return voyage, was such an easy effort for him that he would be able to return "in a cart".

These words would not fall on deaf ears, they flew through impenetrable rough paths in the Atlantic to get to the ears of the King of Spain himself.

Philip II was not happy about the Treaty of Zaragoza signed by his father, Charles I, who had sold the controversial rights of the Maluku to Portugal for 350,000 ducats. It is true that the American silver from Potosi and Zacatecas was overtaking the once coveted spices in regards to value and interest, whose search was the origin of Columbus's voyage and the expeditions through the Pacific, but even so Philip II did not want to surrender the effort of his conquer, despite all the troubles caused such as shipwrecks, deaths and failures. He was aware that dominating the huge ocean signified to protect the western side in America, that was thought to be impenetrable until the predatory intrusions of Drake from the South American side.

In such way the King, as part of his hegemonic geostrategy of Spain, decided to finally control the impenetrable Pacific, what demanded two requirements: to occupy the Philippines archipelago, on the brink of Asia, and to assure the route of the return voyage. For the first, he chose a wise person, Miguel Lopez de Legazpi, Mayor in Mexico at that time. For the second, he personally wrote a dark Augustinian monk retired in a Mexican monastery who was called Andres de Urdaneta.



Last page of Andres de Urdaneta's diary.



THE EXPEDITION OF PHILIPPINES

When Urdaneta received the King's letter asking him to enroll as cosmographer in the Legazpi expedition, he accepted immediately, but with just one condition. **The destination shall not be the Philippines, which he considered included in the Portuguese area after the Treaty of Zaragoza, but he shall head for more South, to New Guinea,** that could also come to be the western base for the control of the Pacific.

A **bitter controversy arose in New Spain regarding the direction to follow**, but as Urdaneta persisted with his conditions and for the Crown his participation was essential, a solution of commitment accepted by all of them was agreed: the official destination would be New Guinea, **but after sailing one hundred miles , a chest locked with three keys shall be opened to find a sheet with the final direction.**



Minor Basilica of the Holy Child of Cebú.

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Once the chest was opened, the final decision was acknowledged: the expedition that left Mexico on the 17th day of November of 1564 of New Spain in control of Legazpi, **would not go to New Guinea but to the Philippines.** Urdaneta got very upset and said that "having known or understood on the ground that this was to be defeat, the day would not come." But as good vassal of the Spanish monarch, he finally accepted it and **the expedition continued its path with no further discussions.**

Once they stopped to replenish the water supply in the Mariana Islands, **which would be a mandatory stop in the subsequent expeditions,** the expedition reached port in Cebu, where Spaniards found a statue of the infant Jesus, the Holy Child, left there by the Mallegan expedition, and deeply venerated since then by the Cebuanos. There, Legazpi founded Villa San Miguel, **the first milestone on the occupation of the Philippines archipelago,** which was executed wisely and in an exemplary way, putting the Philippines under the sovereignty of Spain. And it was then when the second objective established for the expedition was undertaken, **to find the route for the return voyage, the task failed by all the other sailors.**



THE RETURN VOYAGE

With great ceremonies the Captain General Lopez Legazpi dismissed Andres de Urdaneta, **entrusting him the mission of the Crown to find the route back through the Pacific**. He was entrusted with the 500-ton ship San Pedro, the best of the three vessels of the Legazpi's expedition, the one that had been the captain, and this time was commanded by a completely trustworthy person for Legazpi, his grandson Felipe Salcedo, and Urdaneta was traveling as the cosmographer and technical director of the expedition.

It was time to demonstrate if the speculations of the pilot from Villafranca de Ordicia were right or were mere bravado of an adventurer who had been given excessive confidence. **It was the moment to disclose what was after the "Urdaneta's secret"**.

The sailor left in the San Pedro ship on the first day of June of 1565, technically the most appropriate moment as the monsoon that pushed the vessel into the sea was starting to blow, and if it had been done later, they would have impeded navigation. After navigating for several weeks, the maze of channels of the archipelago, he arrived to open sea through the San Bernardino strait, **starting what would later be the final route**.

The crew was convinced that once again the fixed direction would be the same as in the inbound, **the Ecuadorian current where the opposite trade winds blew**, the same that had been followed by previous sailors, with the disastrous known result.

But it was then when the Basque sailor ordered a surprising turn. **He wanted to escape, no matter what, from these trade winds that opposed constantly to navigation, being that the cause of the previous failures**. And for that, it was needed to head North, despite the risk of cold intensification.

But Urdaneta was not daunted by this, but rejecting the usual route, **decidedly headed North, an unknown path that took the San Pedro ship very high**, "until there was ice in the rigging", to position in latitude 39° 40', at the position of Japan, where he found new winds, this time favorable, and a new current, that of Kuroshivo, that traveled in the direction of navigation, just what the cosmographer was looking for. If that was not enough, this current was warm, **which neutralized the cold at such a high latitude**.

From that moment on, the voyage was easy despite the well-known problems of a long maritime voyage. **Thirst and the feared scurvy appeared**, which caused the death of the pilot Esteban Rodriguez and the master Martin de Ibañez, in addition to 16 of the initial 44 crew members.

The Kuroshivo current gently pushed them towards the North-American coast, and two months later, approximately where Rodigruez Cabrillo, the first Spanish and European to set foot on California, had died, **they came across floating debris that indicated the proximity of the coast**. From there, they continued sailing



round and descending in latitude, and finally, going past the point of departure, the port of Navidad, **they arrived in Acapulco 130 days after the departure from the Philippines**.

Urdaneta had found the return of the west, the route of the return voyage, **tracing the route that would be taken two hundred and fifty years later by the famous Manila Galleon**, writing and drawing valuable documents and itinerary letters, that he gave to the Spanish authorities. After that, he traveled to Spain, where he met Philip II twice, who was interested in knowing insider the navigation details. And after his high mission was accomplished, **he retired again to his Augustinian monastery to savor until death all the experiences of his passionate life**, finishing with the glory of mastering the Pacific ocean.

Urdaneta had found the return of the west, the route of the return voyage, tracing the route that would be taken two hundred and fifty years later by the famous Manila Galleon.



THE SPANISH LAKE

While the great sailor Urdaneta was in the meeting with the monarch, Lopez de Legazpi was finishing his settling mission in the Philippines, **what he carried out through admirable peaceful methods that included dialogue with the local tribes, of whom he gained his trust** by his kindness and strict observance of his word. After founding the city of San Miguel in Cebu, he founded in the Cavite bay what would be the capital of the new province and the future Filipino State, Manila, based on plans designed by the architect Juan de Herrera. **During the following years, he dedicated himself to laying the foundations**

for the settlement of Spain in the Philippines, whose sovereignty would last for the next three and a half centuries. When he died, just a few coins were found in the private chest of this illustrious, honest and scarcely known Spaniard.

Philip II had fulfilled his effort to control the Pacific in its western and eastern capes; and besides, he had managed to master the return route, the legendary return voyage, what had been impossible until now. Since then, **the immense Pacific Ocean would be colloquially know as the Spanish Lake or the Spanish Sea,**



Detail from "Maris Pacifici" (1589) by Abraham Ortelius.



and no foreign ship was authorized to penetrate and plow through it without the license of Spain.

But once his project was perfectly executed, **it was needed to consolidate the new Philippine province**, to which contingents of settlers and missionaries began to be sent from the Peninsula, supplied with the necessary tools and knowledge **to lay the foundation of the colonizing and evangelizing work.**

And this was initially the reason to open **a stable route, that would supply the Philippines with people and goods**, and that until it could be self-sufficient it could be supported with public resources, the so called Real Situado, a regular financing from the viceroyalty of New Spain, **that for years supported the functioning of wages and material needs of the farthest regions from the Mexican capital**, such as Florida, Cuba and the Mariana Islands, settlements that were kept thanks to the regular arrival of funds from the Situado.

This, and not the commercial one, was the first reason to open the Galleon route, that would connect Acapulco and Manila to meet the needs of the archipelago, and also the spiritual ones, **because missionaries were moved there**

from the first moment to evangelize the natives. This task was executed so strictly that after several years, the **Philippines became one of the big bastions of Catholicism in the world, the most important in Asia.**

For Spain and its King, other reasons than merely economic ones weighed much more, **but it does not mean that the monarch was not upset about the spice route maintained by Portugal with its colonies in the Maluku Islands**, and that he wished to open a new Spanish route to compete with the Portuguese country. Therefore, in addition to the aforementioned settlement reasons, the new maritime itinerary could serve to exchange products with distant Asia. No one could have imagined that this commercial objective, purely secondary at the beginning, would overflow all that was expected, that **its success would be resounding from the first time, and that it would become more important than all the other Spanish purposes.** And that its because actually the Manila Galleon was making a spider web which threads would reach all the known world, **opening the first economic globalization of the planet.**



THE MANILA GALLEON

It was then born the route of the Manila Galleon, said by an author **“the longest and most extraordinary voyage of all those made in the world”**. It was indeed the first commercial globalization, as it connected goods from three continents, Europe, America and Asia, which was a gigantic effort for the Spanish Crown that with this voyage **completed the triad of itineraries launched after the discovering of the New World: the Route to the Indies**, which through the Atlantic ocean transported silver and all the human and material ingredients of the Spanish settling of America; the Royal Road of the Interior Land, a long group of marquee roads that transported from Mexico to Santa Fe, in New Mexico, people, cattle and goods, **introducing the Spanish culture in the Southeast of the United States**.

The third and the largest route was the Manila Galleon, in the West called the China Ship and in New Spain the Acapulco Ship, as both were departure and destination points. Although **the route strictly speaking started in the port of Seville, where all the European goods were loaded**, and which after arriving by maritime route to Veracruz from many places, crossed Mexico and got prepared in Acapulco to be loaded into the holds of the Galleon direction to Manila. The preparations in Acapulco created an intense activity, **as all the merchants arrived from many points in New Spain to get their cargo**.

The galleons destined to traffic were the strongest ships at that time. They were initially constructed in the shipyards in New Spain, but soon the ones in Philippines would take over it, because of the incredible local wood, the so called

Filipino mahogany, as it was showed in the resistance of the galleons that imperturbable resisted the adversarial shelling. **In general, the galleons were immune to the usual pirate attacks, and only in a few cases gave up against the better prepared English pirate ships**.

Their size was huge, even that the Spanish authorities took actions to limit it to 500 tons, **as the biggest the ship was, the most possibilities there were to introduce contraband goods**. Even so superior ships were tolerated, such as the extreme example of the Santísima Trinidad, which gross register 1,375 tons, with 55 meters of length and 18 of beam. Or the Nuestra Señora del Rosario, which gross register 1,700 tons, an inconceivable size for Spanish ships of the Route to the Indies through the Atlantic, were there was an insuperable bottle neck, the bar of Sanlúcar de Barrameda. **To have an idea of the size of these galleons, it is just enough to say that the universally renowned Santa Maria ship of Christopher Columbus was one hundred tons**.

The galleons were gunships, because initially these ships were destined to war, but **as they were finally used to transport goods some cannons were removed to get more space for the cargo**, what was a risk for ships so juicy for pirates. It was the case that one of the was captured in one attack, because the sixty cannons that it had were reduced to ten to load more and it did not manage to protect itself.



THE VOYAGE

The journey from Acapulco was calm and short, as it should not take more than two months, and there was a stop over the Mariana Islands, **where the Situado was left and the ship resupplied with water and supplies**. Continuously propelled by the trade winds, the voyage continued until Cavite bay, in Manila, where two months earlier all the merchants from Philippines, China and Japan had arrived with their goods, **and a great material and bureaucratic activity lay ahead to legalize all that had been loaded**.

If the outbound voyage was pleasant, the return was different, it took approximately six months and it was full of uncertainty. To begin with, the departure of the Philippine archipelago itself was **a maze of channels, currents, and outcrops, through where it was not feasible to sail at night**, what created delays. After following the coastline of the Luzon Island, the ship gets to open sea through the San Bernardino strait, following precisely the route drew by Urdaneta.



Recreation of the Manila Galleon Route.



Before the 30th of June, the Galleon should have escaped the monsoon winds, the so-called gale, because, **since then it blew contrary to navigation**, so as soon as they reached the ocean, the captain headed for the North, until they arrived at latitude 38°. There, they found the favorable Kuroshivo current that would push them to **the lonely American coasts of California, still isolated of Spanish settling, that would not get there until the last third of the 18th century.**

From the Galleon were seen indications of being close to North America, **the named and longed-for “signs”: groups of dolphins, frigates, seagulls and other marine birds, adrift trunks, grass rafts and floating reeds, the famous “rafts”.** At the height of the Cape Mendocino (thus baptized in honor of the first Viceroy of New Spain, Antonio de Mendoza, in the first expedition along the California coasts of Rodriguez Cabrillo and Bartolome Ferrel) the mainland was sighted, a Te Deum was prayed and there were parties on the ship to celebrate it. **From that moment on, cabotage navigation was carried out along the Californian coastline**, the Cape of San Lucas was bent at the southern point of Baja California, and arrived through the Sea of Cortez to Acapulco, conquering the voyage after a long and hazardous journey non-stop of 17,000km, where there was no place to stop to replenish the water supply.

As it is easy to suppose, if the outbound voyage was comfortable, with the relativity of crowding three hundred people on the deck and the holds of a ship full of goods, **the return to Acapulco was full of uncertainty and dangers**, every time the crew and the passengers faced navigation of six

consecutive months, with limited supplies of water and food to what was stowed in Manila, which always ended up being insufficient. **If the journey extended more than calculated, there were passengers that died of thirst, as the water was rationed sometimes to just one glass per person per day.**

It was also unavoidable that the feared scurvy appeared on board, **a disease caused because of a lack of vitamin C**, that Spain would have solved easily as they had the solution, **but it was not discovered until the 18th century**, when the English found that carrying orange pulp, which houses the vitamin, neutralized scurvy. **Until then, the Spanish sailors suffered from the disease that swells the gums until it is impossible to eat anything.**

And that is why not all the passengers arrived port alive, because the Pacific is an unpredictable and contradictory ocean, since it can stabilize in an exasperating calm of weeks and months without a breath of wind, **as suffered by the one who first crossed it, Magellan, who improperly baptized the immense sea as the Pacific**, being, however, the most threatening and violent on the planet, with overwhelming storms and gales. This gruff and extreme nature of the huge ocean **was lethal for the passengers in several cases**, arising the extreme case of a Galleon that had to be towed because it was drifting close to California, and all the travelers were dead, just as a sinister ghost ship full of cadavers.



THE FIRST GLOBALIZATION OF PLANETARY TRADE

There is no doubt that the great achievement of the route of the Manila Galleon, not enough disclosed yet, **is that it unified for the first time the known world economically.** Because despite there were precedents such as the Silk Road or the contemporary Spice Route, **none of them reached the geographical dimension of the Manila Galleon, that linked three continents, Europe, America and Asia**, with the inherent repercussions and derived from the uniquely commercial, such as the expansion of food and culture.

Clearly, the new route opened by Spain was not limited to the Acapulco-Manila axis, what would have been limited the exchange to Mexico and the Philippines. It was much more than that, because **it involved many nations and regions**, creating a vast fabric that began in European countries such as England, France or Germany, which produced products that were not only of the interest of New Spain, but also Asia. **From the European factories, objects such as weapons, fabrics, tools and many other industrial products were sent to Seville.**

In the port of Seville other products were loaded, in large part food, destined to America, in the famous Route to the Indies, the convoy of merchant ships, **well protected by artillery ships to avoid attacks from pirates that prowled in the Atlantic journey, and over all in the Caribbean**, full of them, and where they had a base on the island of Tortuga.

Veracruz was the destination point of the Indies fleet, where a famous and colorful trade fair was held, both on arrival and departure of the ships. **The products there were controlled and taken to the Mexican capital, from where these were distributed to the rest of the province of New Spain.** But a great part crossed Mexico in wagons through the named Camino Real de Veracruz, heading straight for the road to Acapulco, where the Manila Galleon was waiting ready to set sail.

There is no doubt that the great achievement of the route of the Manila Galleon, not enough disclosed yet, is that it unified for the first time the known world economically.



Aerial view of Fort San Diego in Acapulco, built for the protection of the Manila Galleon.

Acapulco also became a lively economic center, **as merchants from the American viceroyalties met there, not only from New Spain**, as the Galleon was an attractive magnet for everyone, knowing the high profitability that it created.

In the Mexican port were loaded all types of European and American products. Manufactured products such as those mentioned above came from Europe, as well as oil, wine and woolen fabrics, **whose raw material came from Spain and in Holland and England it was transformed into clothing**. From New Spain,

cochineal, Campeche yarn, cocoa, tobacco, hats, soap, plants such as sugar cane, peanuts, tomatoes, pumpkins, bovine cattle and **mainly silver, as ingots and as “pieces of eight” (old Spanish coin), that deserve a separate comment**.

The Asian merchants were very attentive to the arrival of the Galleon, and **arrived in advance to the port of Manila**, because the process of receiving the goods arriving from Acapulco was tedious, and even more the loading of the Asiatic ones, because the capital convened



Oriental objects were highly valued, both in America as well as in refined Europe, such as the delicate fabrics, silk, painted fabrics, muslin and the famous Manila shawls.

European aristocracy and royalty decorated their rooms and dazzled their guests, overall when the porcelain had the name of the host embedded, an elegant detail that was expensively paid.

Spices like cloves, pepper or cinnamon were also introduced, **which shows to what extent the Manila Galleon nets spread throughout the whole world**, because spices were brought from the Maluku Islands.

Once the Galleon, packed with oriental goods, reached Acapulco, they would leave overland or transported by sea for their American or European destinations.

people and products from Philippines, China and Japan and other markets, **making the Galleon a true umbilical cord of Asia with the rest of the civilized world**.

Oriental objects were highly valued, both in America as well as in refined Europe, **such as the delicate fabrics, silk, painted fabrics, muslin and the famous Manila shawls**. Pieces of furniture were demanded from Europe such as desks, screens, or tables, all of them delicately made, some with lacquered wood or finished with ivory and malachite.

The porcelain was the most esteemed. Earthenware jars, dinnerware sets or figurines were very expensive pieces with **which the**



THE SILVER AND THE PIECE OF EIGHT

The most valuable products in the port of Acapulco, and the most demanded by the Asian merchants, **were the silver and the Spanish Piece of Eight coin**. The silver came from the Mexican deposits in Zacatecas or Guanajuato, and from the Peruvian Potosi hill, more proof of how far the tentacles of the Manila Galleon reached.

The Spanish authorities **did not look favorably on this drainage of the silver to the East, since it was needed in Spain**, but it was requested so anxiously from Asia that even

though the limits for the exported silver were regulated, large contingents of American silver left in the galleons.

There is the curious and ironic circumstance that a part of this silver, **despite its clear American origin, came from Europe because European manufacturers had previously imported it, via Seville**, to sell their manufactured products to American Creoles, and these private reserve was re-exported now to demand the expensive Oriental products.



The "Piece of eight" , the first worldwide used currency.



If silver was on great demand, as much or more was the exchange currency, the Peace of Eight coin, to the point that **Chinese and Japanese merchants did not accept any other currency other than Spanish as payment for their merchandise**. It was also called peso duro (strong peso) or just duro, and it was the most important currency in the Spanish Empire and the world of that time. Its weight was consistent: 27 grams of silver, **and on the reverse the coin featured the Pillars of Hercules and the plus ultra, the motto of Spain**. The pillars represented Gibraltar and Ceuta, the two rocks that marked the end of the known world until the late 15th century. When the legendary Hercules performed one of his famous works, the world ended there, it was the non terrae plus ultra, but **Spain overflowed it with the discovery of America, and that is why Charles V coined the motto "plus ultra" for Spain**.

When the time came for the emancipation of the British colonies, **the brand-new United States rejected the English currency and were forced to mint their own currency**. But it was difficult to introduce a new value into the market, and that is why they turned to which then was

extremely valuable in the whole world: **the Spanish Peace of Eight coin, the undeniable currency reference**, so it became the basis for the currency in the United States.

The parity of the American dollar was officially linked to the Spanish currency, **and the Spanish dollar, named like that for a long time, coexisted with the American dollar for many years**. Both currencies, the American and the Spanish, were used equally and with the same value in the United States, and by the way the citizens, being the nominal value the same, **preferred by far the Spanish pesos or duros than the new American dollars**, because Spaniards had more prestige and greater physical silver content. The Spanish currency was in force in the United States until 1857.



THE GALLEON BUSINESS

The business of the Manila Galleon was fabulous, it generated huge profits for those involved in it, **and it can be said that all the society in Manila fully lived off of this traffic.** As it was not a private matter, but of the Crown, as it was the Camino Real de Tierra Adentro in Mexico, **anyone had the right to introduce goods into the Galleon,** after a long administrative procedure.

The cargo unit in Philippines was called package (encomienda in Spanish), and the one in Mexico ballot (boleta in Spanish), and everyone aimed for getting these valued titles **that meant multiplying the value of the goods consigned in the holds.** The net benefit in the other side of the journey was not lower than 87 per 100 and the average was between 100 and 200 per 100, but there were no few cases when the profits reached 300 per 100. **When leaving Manila, a Galleon transported millions of pesos in goods, which would normally double their value when arriving in Acapulco.** The Chinese merchants were known for being excellent longshoremen, real masters installing goods of small size and very high price.

This lucrative business, despite the risks were extremely high, such as shipwrecks and pirates, all of them wanted to participate. If the sailors in the ship, who had right for one trunk, got extraordinary profits, what can we say about the captain or the pilot, who became rich in a single voyage. **Other notable beneficiaries were the widows in Manila, who had right for a space and to resell it,** and the clergy, later limited to the so called Pious Works, such as hospitals or orphanages, who with the management of their rights accumulated considerable profits.

The Spanish crown wanted to make the Manila Galleon a clean and transparent business, for what **a meticulous regulation was established, that were successively developed, as the merchants found tricks to evade the regulations.** At the beginning, the ballots and assignments were assigned to governors, but soon arose accusations for favoritism, what made creating Boards, of Distribution and of Appraisal, to make the assignment of cargoes as objective as possible. The authorized holder declared its cargo to the Appraisal Board, which collected a tax and transferred it to the Distribution Board, in charge of distributing the space in the Galleon. If the holder of a ballot could not fulfill his right, it shall be returned to the Appraisal Board to assign it to a third party. **Only merchants and widows had the right to resell their ballot, which presumably gave rise to a great deal of speculation.**

The tricks to circumvent the rigorous regulation were abundant, **and the Spanish authorities continuously legislated to stop it, what was not always achieved.** A common one was to “extend” the trunk, installing a larger capacity one on the ship; It was no less common to smuggle, **with the help of purchased sailors, goods that had not paid the tax;** and any forced stopover on the way out through the Philippine maze was used to bring contraband goods onto the ship.

More dangerous was that by overloading the ship with equipment, important elements were affected on the deck and the topsides, because the ship lost maneuverability, **and that took its toll in storms, and several galleons were shipwrecked for this reason.** Furthermore, as



the Galleon was armed, sometimes cannons were dismounted to load more goods, which diminished its defense capacity.

Corruption expanded to officials in charge of the general inspection on arrival and departure, many times bribed to ignore these irregularities.

THE LOST GALLEONS

It is estimated that around thirty galleons did not arrive to their destination, which is significantly few, **keeping in mind that the route was in force for two hundred and fifty years** and approximately four hundred and fifty voyages were made, since the itinerary was used by more than one galleon.

Most of these losses were due to shipwrecks, almost all of them because of the overloading of the ship, what reduced its ability to maneuver. **But there were several very high-profile cases of the capture of the Galleon by English pirates,** as the galleons, even that these were strong and had their own defenses, traveled by themselves through the sea, unlike the Atlantic convoys with the silver cargo, that traveled escorted by warships.

Wooden Rogers captured the Nuestra Señora de la Encarnacion Galleon in 1709. It departed with another ship, the Nuestra Señora de Begoña, from Cavite bay, but when they reached the California coast the two had separated. **Twice the pirate**

But there were also honest officials, determined to demand strict compliance with the regulations, **such as the case of Pedro de Quiroga, who confiscated a whole ship when he discovered goods infractions during his inspection,** a measure that stirred up dirt and caused the stoppage of the crossing for four years.

tried to seize the Begoña but its sturdy timber resisted the attack and it arrived undamaged to Acapulco, while Rogers seized the other ship.

Commodore George Anson sighted the Our Lady of Covadonga near the Philippines in 1743 and, after a hard fight that resulted in sixty deaths, he managed to capture it thanks to the superior English artillery, **and after seizing the rich booty and selling the ship in Macao, he returned to England.**

The admiral Samuel Cornish obtained the Santisima Trinidad y Nuestra Señora del Buen fin, aka The Powerful, in 1762. **It was attacked by an English ship with sixty cannons and a frigate with twenty-eight,** and since the Spanish pilots had reduced the cannons in the deck, which were in the hold, a 20 per 100 to load more goods, it could not resist and finally surrendered.

But the most famous capture was the one of Thomas Cavendish in 1587, and English adventurer that, **incited by the success of**



Francis Drake in the depredation of the Spanish squares in the Caribbean and the Pacific, from which he returned to England being wealthy, he decided to imitate him. After crossing the Magellan strait, he went upstream by the Pacific littoral, plundering the unready Spanish coastal cities.

But his great robbery was the unexpected encounter with the Santa Ana galleon, which was traveling a long journey from Manila, a ship full of western riches that he captured with barely resistance. Moving the cargo of the Santa Ana to their own ship took several days, and the most serious was not the treasures, **it was that he managed to get the maps that described the Galleon itinerary, which he took to the English marine.**

After returning to England through the cape of Good Hope, he splendidly entered the Thames with an incredible blue damask sails and silk riggings, and the crew members exhibiting silver necklaces. He, himself, richly covered by gold and silver decorations, received the Queen in his cabin, **who promoted and was partner of any pirate enterprise that aimed to reduce the Spanish economic power.**

The Manila Galleon last sailed from Acapulco in 1815, on a voyage that for the first time in two and a half centuries did not return. Curiously, the ship that made this journey was called Magellan, **final tribute to the great discoverer of the oceanic route, which would serve to bring the continents closer** and to make of the dispersed tribes and nations of yesteryear a united universe.

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About the author

Borja Cardelus is the President of the **Hispanic Civilization Foundation (Fundacion Civilizacion Hispanica**, name in Spanish) and has published forty books, half of them about the dissemination of the Spanish work in America. He has directed seventy documentary films for television and three feature films. He has been **Secretary General of the Environment, President of the National Parks Agency and President of Doñana**. He is the author of the **The Hispanic World: a Common Heritage** exhibition, which in thirty panels shows the Spanish work in the Hispanic America, the United States and the Pacific.

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