

Ferdinand magellan

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Ferdinand Magellan was born in Portugal circa 1480. As a boy, he studied mapmaking and navigation. By his mid-20s, he was sailing in large fleets and was committed in combat. In 1519, with the support of King Charles V of Spain, Magellan set out to circumnavigate the globe. He assembled a fleet of ships and, despite huge setbacks, his own death included, proved that the world was round.

Fernão Magalhães (Ferdinand Magellan is an anglicized version of his name) was born in approximately 1480 in the small Portuguese town of Villa de Sabrosa. As the son of the mayor, he led a privileged childhood, and at an early age he went to the royal court in Lisbon to serve as page to the Queen. He was very well educated, studying with some of the finest tutors in Portugal, and from an early age showed an interest in navigation and exploration.

Early Life

Ferdinand Magellan was born in Portugal, either in the city of Porto or in Sabrosa, circa 1480. His parents were members of the Portuguese nobility, so after their deaths, when he was just 10 years old, Magellan became a page for the queen. Magellan studied at Queen Leonora's School of Pages in Lisbon and spent his days poring over texts on cartography, astronomy, and celestial navigation—subjects that would serve him well in his later pursuits.

Navigator and Explorer

In his mid-20s, Magellan joined a Portuguese fleet that was sailing to East Africa. He soon found himself at the Battle of Diu, in which the Portuguese

destroyed Egyptian ships in the Arabian Sea. He also explored Malacca, located in present-day Malaysia, and participated in the conquest of Malacca's port. It is possible that he sailed as far as the Moluccas, islands in Indonesia, then called the Spice Islands. The Moluccas were the original source of some of the world's most valuable spices, including cloves and nutmeg. The conquest of spice-rich countries was, as a result, a source of much European competition.

While serving in Morocco, Magellan was wounded, and walked the remainder of his life with a limp. After his injury, he was falsely accused of trading illegally with the Moors, and despite all of his service to Portugal, and his many pleas to the king, any further offers of employment were withheld from him.

In 1517, Magellan moved to Seville, Spain, to offer his skills to the Spanish court. In the three years following his departure from Portugal, he had religiously studied all of the most recent navigation charts. He had also benefited from the mistakes and discoveries of several other explorers—Christopher Columbus's "discovery" of North America and Vasco Núñez de Balboa's march across the Panamanian isthmus to the Pacific Ocean were just two of the many events that inspired Magellan's bold quest for an all-water passage to farther-flung, spice-rich lands.

Final Years

Magellan devised a plan for circumnavigating the globe, and King Charles V of Spain gave it his blessing. On September 20, 1519, he set out with a fleet of five ships, beautifully named but hardly adequate to sail the distances he

proposed. The fleet sailed first to Brazil and then down the coast of South America to Patagonia. There, an attempted mutiny took place, and one of the ships was wrecked. Despite the setback, the crew continued on with the four remaining vessels.

By October 1520, Magellan and his men had entered what is now called the Strait of Magellan. It took them over a month to pass through the strait, during which time the master of one of the ships deserted and sailed back home.

In March 1521, the fleet anchored in Guam.

It is a lesser-known fact that Magellan became involved in a local war in the Philippines, where he was killed in battle on April 27, 1521. It's also largely unknown that it was the remaining members of his crew, namely Juan Sebastián del Cano, who actually completed the circumnavigation of the globe. The following year, on September 8, 1522, despite having almost lost their lives in their efforts, the remainder of Magellan's fleet returned to Spain, thus proving that the globe was in fact round.

Legacy

Magellan is credited with being the first to circumnavigate the world in spite of two somewhat glaring details: first of all, he died halfway through the journey and second of all, he never intended to travel in a circle: he simply wanted to find a new route to the Spice Islands. Some historians have said that Juan Sebastián Elcano, who captained the Victoria back from the

Philippines, is a worthier candidate for the title of first to circumnavigate the globe. Elcano had begun the voyage as master on board the Concepción.

There are two written records of the journey: the first was a journal kept by Italian passenger (he paid to go on the trip!) Antonio Pigafetta and the second was a series of interviews with the survivors made by Maximilianus of Transylvania upon their return. Both documents reveal a fascinating voyage of discovery.

The Magellan expedition was responsible for several major discoveries. In addition to the Pacific Ocean and numerous islands, waterways and other geographic information, the expedition also sighted a great many new animals, including penguins and guanacos. The discrepancies between their log book and the date when they returned to Spain led directly to the concept of the International Date Line. Their measurements of distances traveled helped contemporary scientists determine the size of the earth. They were the first to sight certain galaxies visible in the night sky, now aptly known as the Magellanic Clouds. Although the Pacific had been first discovered in 1513 by Vasco Nuñez de Balboa, it is Magellan's name for it that stuck (Balboa called it the "South Sea").

Immediately upon the return of the Victoria, European sailing ships began trying to duplicate the voyage, including an expedition led by surviving captain Elcano. It wasn't until Sir Francis Drake's 1577 voyage, however, that anyone really managed to do it again. Still, the knowledge gained immensely advanced the science of navigation at the time.

Today, Magellan's name is synonymous with discovery and exploration. Telescopes and spacecraft bear his name, as does a region in Chile. Perhaps because of his untimely demise, his name does not have the negative baggage associated with Christopher Columbus, blamed by many for subsequent atrocities in the lands he discovered.