Ferdinand Magellan, or in Portuguese, Fernão de Magalhães, is well known as the first navigator whose ships circumnavigated the globe (Figure 1). Magellan was responsible for planning the journey, seeking financing, and surviving the subarctic winter of the straits in South America that bear his name; he was one of the first Europeans to set foot in the Marianas Islands and the Philippines. With Rui Falero, a scholar on celestial navigation, he convinced the Spanish king Charles I (later Emperor Charles V) and his Flemish advisors that the Spice Islands, also known as the Western Islands, the Moluccas, or la especiería, lay west of the line of demarcation of the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494) and thus were a Spanish, not Portuguese, possession. Albuquerque had conquered the Malaysian port of Malacca in 1511, explored the islands to the east, and used the Moluccas to initiate trade with China. In Spain, Amerigo Vespucci, Díaz de Solís, and members of the Council of Indies agreed with Magellan's certainty that a strait opened to the South Sea. In the 16th century, these contested territories represented a highly desirable possession because of the abundance of clove, nutmeg, and cinnamon to be obtained there.

The 16th-century Dominican historian Bartolomé de las Casas wrote in his History of the Indies one of the most detailed descriptions of Magellan, including an account of his meeting with the Spanish chancellor Xevres while he was present at Valladolid. In this meeting, he came with a globe in his hand to describe with great certainty a new route to the Pacific that would place the Spanish Empire at a great advantage relative to the Portuguese. With the intervention of the Archbishop of Burgos, the one who had negotiated with the Catholic monarchs on behalf of Columbus, Magellan left with four ships, more than 230 men, and four court officials. The journey, as recorded in the several accounts by its participants, was treacherous. Some of the men took part in a mutiny at San Julián Bay, and most of them eventually died because of starvation, thirst, and scurvy.
After securing the first Spanish contact in the Philippines and the first conversion to Christianity, Magellan died on Mactan Island after a failed attack on a local native king. As with Columbus, the glory accounted in his biographies was largely due to the efforts of others; in the case of Magellan, only two vessels returned to Europe, the *Victoria*, under the command of Juan Sebastian Elcano, and the *Trinidad*, with Esteban Gómez in charge.

Magellan's journals, personal records, and letters written during his journey are lost. The most important narrative that has been translated into several languages is Antonio Pigafetta's *Primo viaggio intorno al mondo*, with maps well known for their inaccuracy. In addition, there are other firsthand accounts of the expedition, including Francisco Albo's *Diario ó Derrotero del Viage de Magellanes*. This account is useful for historians and geographers because it identifies the position of the “Unfortunate Islands” and it established that Amsterdam Island in the Indian Ocean was “discovered” by the *Victoria*. Also important are the anonymous Leiden narrative in Portuguese, printed in Coimbra as *Um Deroteiro Inédito*, and the Roteiro of “the Genovese pilot,” which is known for the details of Magellan's death. Important in any discussions about Magellan's contributions is the Spanish cosmographer Diego Ribero’s 1529 map that shows the extent of the Pacific Ocean, which Magellan named.

Magellan's contributions are key to the history of geography and trade in many ways. For the history of cartography, besides improving map accuracy and demonstrating the great distances between Europe and the Pacific islands, his journey stimulated the production of terrestrial globes that eliminated the edges of the world. With further exploration and conquests, the economies of the empire were

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strengthened. Magellan's expedition to the Spice Islands initiated the Spanish exploration of the Pacific Ocean, whose islands became a central stopping point in the newly expanded trade of the Indies with the new route from Manila to Acapulco.

See also
Columbus, Christopher, Exploration, Human Geography, History of

Further Readings

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