ENCOUNTER BETWEEN THREE WORLDS

500 Years After the First Circumnavigation of the Earth
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Cover of the translation of the contract and agreement Ferdinand Magellan made with King Charles I of Castile, 1518. Collection: Torre do Tombo National Archive, Portugal.
INTRODUCTION

The first ever circumnavigation of the globe by Ferdinand Magellan represents a landmark in the history of humanity, as well as bringing together various aspects worth highlighting on the 500-year commemoration of this event.

After the voyage was completed, it was demonstrated that the Earth was round and that five continents existed, inhabited by a large variety of the people with profound cultural differences between them. From this point on, history would be the tale of the encounters and mis-encounters between these different ways of conceiving, inhabiting and understanding the world. That is, a universal history.

The voyage was the epic accomplishment of a handful of men, completed thanks to the bravery and sheer force of will that enabled them to overcome much suffering and many extreme events. But the achievement was also possible because the voyage benefitted from the principal scientific advances of the age, as well as from innovations in shipbuilding techniques and design. These contributions came from different groups of people and cultures, frequently hardened enemies, and were incorporated on the ships and in the knowledge and experience of those who manned them.

For Chile, the voyage of Ferdinand Magellan is a moment worthy of commemoration. It constitutes what was in practice the first sighting of our national territory by Europeans, and points to the profound influence that the southern territories and ‘maritories’ (from the Spanish maritorios, or marine territories) would go on to have in the formation of the country’s identity. The encounter between Western adventurers and Chile’s indigenous peoples epitomises the unique nature of Chilean culture, and the need to rescue those elements which have been consigned to oblivion by the advances of modernity.

Put together by the National Library with the invaluable assistance of the Cultural Centre of Spain in Chile and the Camões Institute in Chile, the aim of the exhibition Encounter Between Three Worlds. 500 Years After the First Circumnavigation of the Earth is to share this great adventure with visitors and to highlight how centuries of knowledge, investigation and experimentation all come together in the deeds of a few men, and how it was at the outer edges of our nation’s borders that humanity began to discover itself.

Jaime Rosenblitt
Catalogue and exhibition curator
I. THE GEOPOLITICS OF MARITIME EXPANSION
In the mid-fifteenth century, Europe was a world in transition. The Black Death, which, in the previous century, had caused the death of between a quarter and a third of the continent’s population, also triggered profound transformations in society, the economy and politics. There was a decline in the territories still clinging to the Middle Ages and characterised by rural ways of life, feudal relationships, power fragmented into a mosaic of small estates, and the supreme hold the Catholic Church had over both civil and cultural life. Nonetheless, almost five hundred years of religious war – be it to seize Jerusalem and other holy sites from Islam or to curb the perceived Muslim threat to Europe – meant the Church did still enjoy a considerable measure of political influence.

It was precisely this crusading spirit that sowed the seeds of modernity. The energy required to expel the Muslims from the Iberian Peninsula helped the monarchies of Castile and Portugal to become Europe’s first centralised states, leading them to set out a series of “national objectives” which, little by little, the nobility and the clergy came to comply with. The nascent bureaucratic systems of these states, along with a sustained expansion of trade, were what led to a flourishing of urban spaces, which acted as a meeting point for the interests of the centralised monarchies and the merchant bourgeoisie, as well as the artisans who saw to the material needs of both parties.

The immense changes Europe went through from the 15th century onwards have their roots in commerce. Although medieval society was deeply self-sufficient, it still could not do without imported products and enjoyed trade with the outside world. Pepper from India, cinnamon, cloves, and other spices from the Far East were indispensable for preserving foodstuffs and adding a touch of flavour to what was a rather bland, uniform cuisine. There were also trading relationships amongst the different regions of Europe for the distribution of products such as wine, oil, cereals, wool, wood, and minerals. Such exchanges gave rise to the formation of small towns and seaports, which would go on to attain significant levels of prosperity and development.

Of all the flows of exchange, the most important without a doubt was the one that brought spices from the East, to which other products – such as silks, carpets, wrought metals and precious stones – were added over time, as European tastes and lifestyles became increasingly refined alongside the growth in wealth accumulated by the urban bourgeois. Since antiquity, spice and silk routes had converged in Constantinople or Byzantium, the old capital of the Eastern Roman Empire, located on a strategic passage...
between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. This trade cemented the city’s prosperity, but also turned it into a much sought-after prize for other kingdoms and city-states harbouring commercial and political ambitions.

Byzantine control of trade profited from multiplying dozens of times the price paid by European consumers for products from Asia. This created a space which meant that other trade routes between East and West opened up simultaneously, especially through the Muslim kingdoms in the north of Africa, which traded with Italian cities such as Genoa, Venice and Florence, all of which competed to be the main distributors of Asian products. Meanwhile, ports such as Amsterdam, Antwerp, Lübeck and Rostock developed around trade in the entire northern region of the continent, becoming home to a vibrant bourgeoisie who wasted no time in turning their economic heft into political influence.

The impact of the development of trade between Europe and Asia during the 15th century was particularly well reflected in the explosion of culture in Renaissance Italy. Merchant groups, which were gradually becoming bourgeoisies, built politically autonomous spaces in diverse cities ruled according to trade interests. These republics had sufficient military power to protect themselves from the ambitions of the feudal nobility and external threats, and to situate themselves as serious players in the centre of the geopolitical debate. The republics of Venice and Genoa are a case in point: thanks to the naval support they lent to the Crusades, from 1095 they were able to extend their influence throughout the eastern Mediterranean and, after the Venetian conquest of Constantinople in 1204, managed to establish trading posts in the Black Sea and thus begin to control a large portion of Asian imports into Europe. A not insignificant percentage of the profits obtained by Venetian and Genoese merchants, as well as those from places such as Florence, Pisa, Siena, Padua, Verona and Parma, was invested in financing the fine arts, literature, music, architecture, and in visually enriching cities, giving rise to one of the most glittering periods in the history of humankind, known as the Renaissance.
THE POLITICAL AND COMMERCIAL ORDER UNDER SIEGE

Troubling threats loomed over the development of European trade in the second half of the 15th century. Firstly, the opulence attained by the Italian republics and some of the ports in the North Sea stirred up much envy in kingdoms such as Portugal, Castile and France, which were on their way to becoming centralized monarchies and who looked on in astonishment as these small city-states acquired serious influence in the political and economic life of the continent. And secondly, the long battle against Islam had taken a turn for the worse, and the Byzantine Empire, bastion of Christianity, was on the verge of being conquered by the Ottoman Turks. It was through this empire that the principal routes of exchange between East and West passed; its military fragility was already occasioning tremendous price hikes and disruptions in the arrival of Asian products, but when it fell and a vast territory came under Muslim control, it would lead to the collapse of the trade system that sustained the European economy and the geopolitical relations that had been engineered to keep it running smoothly.

This ill-fated day for Christianity arrived on the 29th of May 1453. After laying siege to Constantinople for two months, blocking its two points of access to the sea to prevent supplies and military assistance from entering from Italy and the Balkans, Sultan Mehmed II’s army managed to tear down the city’s formidable walls and take control of it. In practice, the fall of Byzantium meant that Europe and the Far East passed; its military fragility was already occasioning tremendous price hikes and disruptions in the arrival of Asian products, but when it fell and a vast territory came under Muslim control, it would lead to the collapse of the trade system that sustained the European economy and the geopolitical relations that had been engineered to keep it running smoothly.

This new scenario meant the main hub of European trade shifted from where it had been up until then, in the central Mediterranean, to the Iberian Peninsula, on the western limits of the continent. At the edge of the Atlantic Ocean, the kingdom of Portugal was inhabited by a population whose features were a result of many centuries of racial mixing. The Portuguese nation was made up of Celts, who mixed with the original inhabitants in the first century B.C., the Roman settlers who first arrived in the 3rd century B.C., the Germanic tribes who founded the Suebi and Visigoth kingdoms in the 5th century A.D., and the Arab invaders who occupied almost the entire peninsula from 711 A.D. onwards. At the start of the 15th century, King John I of Portugal was determined to unite Portuguese noblemen around the idea of taking the fight against the Moors to the other side of the Mediterranean. His son Prince Henry, later known as The Navigator, convinced him that in order to achieve this aim he required a naval power superior to that of his Muslim enemies and other Christian kingdoms. To this end, he created a port complex in Lagos in the southern province of the Algarve, which included shipyards, an astronomical observatory and a training centre for mariners and masters.
The first results of this initiative were felt in August 1415 with the conquest of Ceuta in northern Africa, with which Portugal managed to control the trade routes that passed through that city and to obtain resources to finance a project of oceanic exploration that would alter the course of human history. The exploration of the west coast of Africa thus continued to advance, marking out small milestones in the development of the art of sailing far from the coast: the first explorations, under the command of João Gonçalves and Diogo de Silves, which penetrated the Atlantic Ocean, reached Porto Santo and the island of Madeira in 1420 and the archipelago of the Azores in 1427, places which served as pivotal points for future expeditions.

One significant moment was the voyage of Gil Eanes to Cape Bojador in 1434, since the regime of ocean currents prevented the fleet from returning north by sailing close to the coast, which meant that after the fleet returned, many things came into play: an understanding of the tidal and wind systems, an accumulation of cartographic information, improvements in the design of the vessels and a more precise use of navigational instruments. This sum of different kinds of knowledge, which began to be collected, discussed and systematised in the castle at Sagres at the request of Prince Henry the Navigator, allowed the exploration of the African coast to continue throughout the 15th century, until in 1487 the expedition of Bartolomé Dias reached the Cape of Good Hope in the far south of the continent. A decade later, a fleet of three ships captained by Vasco da Gama reached India, thus achieving the main strategic aim of the Portuguese project of oceanic exploration: finding an alternative route to the main trading centres of the Far East, directly
acquiring products in high demand in Europe such as spices, jewels and fabric, and doing away with other intermediaries, such as the Republic of Venice and the merchants of the Arabian Peninsula, which imposed high premiums on Asian products.

The establishment of the route via the Cape of Good Hope was followed by other expeditions that allowed the Portuguese kingdom to make their presence felt in Malaysia, the Indonesian archipelago, China, and Japan. This presence took the form of trading posts or small strongholds equipped with military garrisons, from where more or less friendly relations were established with the surrounding kingdoms in order to facilitate trade. This situation meant that henceforth, Portugal was able to gain an advantageous economic position in Europe and acquired a commercial monopoly similar to that enjoyed a century before by the Republic of Venice. Towards the very end of the 15th century, then, the Portuguese had transformed their project of maritime expansion into economic advantage and political power. It is therefore not surprising that other powers tried to challenge their hegemony, and the best way to do this was to try to find another alternative route to reach the East to that of the Cape of Good Hope.

II.
NAVIGATING THE GLOBE
The certainty that the Earth was round, and the possibility that scientific and technological advances applied to navigation would allow for extensive crossings of the high seas, laid the foundation for those projects that aimed to discover an alternative route to the Far East to the one controlled by Portugal. Of these projects, the most famous is without a doubt that of Cristopher Columbus. Trained in the Portuguese court, the Genoese (according to some – his origins are disputed) navigator had a hypothesis that it was possible to reach the Indies by sailing west. This conviction was based on the astronomical knowledge from antiquity, on sailors’ tales he had heard in Portugal, and in conjectures made after personal observations on the Portuguese island of Madeira, of which his father-in-law, Bartolomé de Perestrello, was governor. Dismissed by King John II of Portugal, perhaps because he aimed to establish a monopoly over the Cape of Good Hope route to get to India, more than because he considered it unfeasible, Columbus took his project to the crown of Castile.

Columbus’ project was embraced by the Catholic Monarchs of Spain and was provided for in the Capitulations of Santa Fe in April 1492, once the Granada War was over. Ferdinand and Isabella agreed to sponsor the search for a new route to the East and the installation of a commercial centre that might ensure permanent trade with China and India, which would help consolidate their position of political, economic and military power in Europe.

The success of Columbus’ enterprise represented an important moment in the history of humanity, as it challenged all the notions that up until then had been held about the known world, and increased the power of the Crown of Castile, which now boasted possession of extensive unknown territories and whose sovereignty was guaranteed by the authority of the Catholic Church and the treaties of Alcaçovas and Tordesillas, signed by the kingdom of Portugal in 1479 and 1494 respectively. More than Amerigo Vespucci’s geographical speculations or the influence of Christian or ancient legends, which alleged the existence of ‘lost worlds,’ the first explorations – conquests of populations that were totally unknown and the sighting of the South Sea in 1513 by Vasco Núñez de Balboa – were what confirmed the presumption that towards the West lay a continent and an ocean both as yet unexplored and which separated Europe and Asia, and on which the culture of Spain was to make its lasting mark.
Diego de Ribeiro, Carta universal en que se contiene todo lo que del mundo se ha descubierto hasta ahora (general chart containing the whole of the world that has hitherto been discovered), London, W. Griggs, 1887 [Seville, 1529]. Collection: National Library of Chile.
THE SPICE RACE

Nonetheless, the main objective of the Spanish oceanic undertaking was still pending, since the route to the spices of the East remained under Portuguese control. Portugal had in the meantime sent other expeditions that managed to strengthen its presence in India (1505) and to reach Malacca (1511) and the Moluccas or the Maluku Islands (1512), now part of Malaysia and Indonesia, respectively. Combining war and negotiation with local kingdoms, the Portuguese adventurers created new trading stations giving them access to valuable Asian products, thus increasing the commercial monopoly of their kingdom in Europe. As such, the only way for the Kingdom of Castile to become an economic and military power was to find a passage within their own territories to the remote regions that produced these spices.

To this end, the crown of Castile commissioned Bishop Juan Rodríguez de Fonseca to coordinate a series of voyages of exploration, among which were several Andalusian initiatives: the expedition of Alonso Vélez de Mendoza, who, in 1500, reached the edge of the Tordesillas demarcation at Cape of Saint Augustine (on the Brazilian coast) and the last two voyages of Christopher Columbus 1498 and 1502. This experience created a wealth of scientific, geographic and cartographic records which, from 1503 onwards, began to be collected and systematized by the House of Trade, created in Seville with the aim of training navigators and cosmographers and equipping them with relevant, reliable information in order to achieve Castile’s strategic aims.

Juan de la Cosa, Mappo mundi, 1500. Reprint [1900-1940]. Collection: National Library of Chile.
Martín Fernández de Enciso, *Suma de geographia q trata de todas las partidas y provincias del mundo...* (Sum of geography that covers all the areas and provinces of the world) Seville, Juan Cromberger, 1530. Collection: National Library of Chile.

Martín Cortés, *Breve compendio de la sphera y de la arte de navegar...* (brief compendium of the globe and the art of navigating), Seville, Antón Álvarez, 1551. Collection: National Library of Chile.
The results of this policy and associated efforts began to crystallize on the 8th of October 1515, when a fleet of three caravels set sail from Sanlúcar de Barrameda, under the command of the pilot Juan Díaz de Solís and furnished with a plan for the voyage in which very few aspects of navigation were left in the hands of fate. After stocking up on the Canary Islands and in the bay of Guanabara (modern-day Rio de Janeiro) the expedition sailed south along the Brazilian coast until it reached the estuary of the Río de la Plata on the 2nd of February 1516. Not realising this was a body of freshwater, they sent the smallest caravel on a reconnaissance mission. At some point along the coast, presumably the island of Martín García, Solís and seven crewmembers disembarked to explore the territory and, in an unfortunate encounter with a group of Guaraní people, met with a terrible death. After their captain’s tragic demise, the expedition returned to Spain.
In 1517 the project to reach the Far East by sailing west neared completion when the Portuguese sailor Ferdinand Magellan appeared before the young king of Castile Charles I in Valladolid. Accompanied by the cosmographer Rui Faleiro, Magellan claimed to have proof of the existence of a passage connecting the Atlantic with the South Sea, within the area that the Treaty of Tordesillas assigned to Spain. Although initially the idea was not supported due to the scepticism of Cardinal Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros, eventually, the favourable opinion of Juan Rodríguez de Fonseca, who since Columbus’ first voyage in 1492 had experience of maritime endeavours, and the likely prospect that the merchant Cristóbal de Haro would be able to raise private funds to finance the voyage, did convince the monarch to accept the navigator’s proposal.

Magellan was a member of the minor Portuguese nobility, presumably born in Porto, and who as a child worked as a page in the court of King John II, and later took part in the main Asian expeditions dispatched from Lisbon. In November 1511 he formed part of the Portuguese fleet that conquered Malacca (in modern-day Malaysia), where, as well as the spoils of war, he acquired valuable oceanographic and astronomic information and a slave, Enrique, who had advanced experience as a pilot in the seas of Java and Sumatra. Bound for the north of Africa in May of 1514, he was accused of trading illegally with the Moors in Morocco, after which his services ceased to be required. Plunged into disgrace and accompanied by Faleiro, he set to studying the most recent nautical charts, concluding that it was possible to find an interoceanic passage by navigating southwards, ultimately reaching the islands of the Spice Trade.

When he set sail from Seville on the 10th of August 1519, Ferdinand Magellan took with him the geographical knowledge accumulated over almost a century by Portuguese navigators in the castle at Sagres, along with prior knowledge provided by Spanish expeditions from Christopher Columbus onwards. This information combined provided quite accurate knowledge of the west coast of Africa and the location of the Azores and Cape Verde, which served as stopping points on the transatlantic routes.
References to the northern coastline of South America, however, were a little vaguer: different attempts at conquest here had surveyed the territory between the Gulf of Darién (Panama) and the mouth of the Orinoco River (Venezuela), and of enclosed spaces, such as the Gulf of Cariaco and the Paria Peninsula, but their cartographic outline remained imprecise, and they were referenced in relation to the better-known Caribbean islands such as Cuba and Hispaniola. Nevertheless, the certainty existed that it was a continental shelf, and so it was collectively named Tierra Firme, although the size and features of Central America were completely unknown. To the south of the Orinoco Delta, in territories within the Portuguese hemisphere established at Tordesillas, the coast had been traversed a few times as far as the Río de la Plata, a bitter memory after Díaz de Solís’ ill-fated expedition of 1516.
The known world before the voyage of Ferdinand Magellan. Cantino Planisphere, 1502. Collection: Estense University Library of Modena, Italy.
Setting sail from Sanlúcar de Barrameda on the 20th of September 1519, the fleet commanded by Ferdinand de Magellan was made up of the ships Trinidad, San Antonio, Concepción, Victoria and Santiago. The 265 men of the crew formed a diverse, complex human group, which gave rise to conflicts due to disputes between the Spanish and Portuguese sailors. There were Spanish noblemen on board, too, who questioned Magellan’s authority and conspired to foil the enterprise, one which, if successful, would make Magellan adelantado1 and governor of the discovered territories, according to the capitulación2 in his favour signed by the monarch of Castile. Also on the voyage was the Venetian geographer Antonio Pigafetta, who survived to the end of the voyage and immortalized it in his chronicle The First Voyage Around the World.

After making landfall in the Canary Islands and passing through the islands of Cape Verde and the coast of present-day Sierra Leone, the ships reached Guanabara Bay on December 13th 1519, where they rested and took on fresh food. They then continued southwards, first inspecting the mouth of the Río de la Plata in March 1520 and then continuing until San Julian Bay, which they explored in search of the coveted passage to the South Sea. Faced with the coming winter, Magellan decided to camp out there and wait until Spring. The inclement conditions of the place combined with the uncertainty around the fate of the venture led to a mutiny, which Magellan managed to quash ruthlessly. The leaders of the revolt, Luis de Mendoza and Gaspar de Quesada, were executed, while Juan de Cartagena was marooned on land. A minor punishment, perhaps in consideration of his position as Inspector General of the fleet, and of the fact that his uncle, archbishop Juan Rodríguez de Fonseca, presided over the Council of the Indies.

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1. The monarch directly granted adelantados the right to become governors and justices of a specific region, which they were charged with conquering.
2. A royal contract or licence granted to an individual to organize, finance, and undertake the conquest of unexplored regions, in exchange for wide-ranging political and economic privileges, or mercedes.

The voyage was resumed on August 21st, 1520. A month later, as it explored the Patagonian coastline, the Santiago became shipwrecked, and so its crew was distributed amongst the remaining ships, while its captain, Juan Serrano, was placed in charge of the Concepción. On November 1st the fleet reached a promontory they named ‘The Cape of Eleven Thousand Virgins.’ Since they still did not know they were at the eastern mouth of the strait, they split up to survey the labyrinth of canals and islands before them, and to investigate further south where there was what appeared to be a large island, which the Europeans called “Tierra del Fuego” (meaning ‘land of fire’) due to the numerous bonfires that were lit there at night. In the course of these explorations the crew of the Nao (or carrack) San Antonio mutinied, deposing the captain Álvaro Mezquita, and set sail for Spain again, leaving the rest of the fleet in a difficult situation, since this vessel was where all the reserve provisions were stored.

On the 27th of November the expedition found the outlet to the South Sea, which they named the Pacific Ocean due to the particularly peaceful conditions of the weather and the water on that day. This feat did nothing to mitigate the tragic, sombre atmosphere hanging over the crew, crippled at that point by hunger and scurvy. The torment ended on the 6th of March 1521, when the ships reached the Mariana Islands, where they were able to rest on land and obtain fresh food. After a few days they continued the voyage in search of the Moluccas Islands, arriving at an archipelago which would later come to be known as the Philippines. In the course of the reconnaissance, they allied themselves with the ruler of the island of Cebu, who requested military assistance to suppress a rebel tribe on a nearby island. It was while carrying out this engagement that, on the 17th of April, Magellan lost his life in combat with the indigenous people of Mactan.
After the death of their commander, the rest of the expedition decided to burn the Nao Concepción, being of the view that it was in no condition to continue sailing, and the crew members were spread between the Trinidad and Victoria. With the former captained by Gonzalo Gómez de Espinosa and the latter by Sebastián Elcano, the expedition managed to get to the Maluku Islands where it loaded up with spices. In order to return to Spain, the vessels were separated once again. The Trinidad remained in the port at Tidore to be repaired before setting sail for Panama. Meanwhile, the Victoria crossed the Indian Ocean and entered Portuguese territory. With a crew of 18 men, it reached Seville on the 8th of September 1522, thus completing the first circumnavigation of the Earth.
CAPITALIZING ON THE ROUTE BETWEEN THE OCEANS

The news fuelled Castilian hopes to take advantage of the newly discovered route and to obtain commercial advantage by attempting to take possession of and colonize the Maluku Islands. With this aim, the crown of Castile charged García Jofré with preparing a new expedition, which recruited Juan Sebastián Elcano, seven vessels and 450 men. The fleet set sail from La Coruña on the 24th of July 1525, but before leaving the African coast, a storm caused serious damage to one of the ships. Another storm led to the vessel that was being repaired ramming into a second ship, while two more drifted away from the fleet and were lost for two months. In January of 1526 the expedition reached the Strait of Magellan, but it mistakenly entered via shallow waters, resulting in damaged hulls. After retreating and going in again correctly, strong winds caused yet more serious damage to all the ships, leading one to be shipwrecked and another two to be abandoned.
South Sea. In João Teixeira Albernaz, Taboas geraes de toda a navegação, 1630.
Navigating from Europe to the Far East by crossing the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans posed such difficulties that the Castilian Crown was persuaded to try and occupy the Strait of Magellan, creating permanent settlements there which would serve to guide and support future interoceanic expeditions. This process had to be carried out from the nascent Kingdom of Chile, Spain's most southerly possession in the Americas. The first Magellanic exploration dispatched from Chile took place in 1552, when the governor Pedro de Valdivia began to equip two small ships of 50 tons, under the charge of captain Francisco de Ulloa and the pilot Francisco Cortés Ojeda. The fleet set off from Valdivia at the end of October 1553 and sailed around the western coast of Chiloé and the archipelago of Chonos until reaching the Taitao Peninsula on the 28th of November, where the hostility of the inhabitants prevented the crew from remaining on land. Navigation was resumed towards the south, and the ships arrived at the mouth of the strait on the 5th of February, 1554, but were prevented from entering due to strong headwinds. After two weeks of traversing the western channels, the ships were able to enter the Strait and sail further in for around 90 miles. The lack of supplies and the imminent winter persuaded Ulloa to take advantage of favourable currents to return to Valdivia.

In early May, the expedition managed to cross the Strait and pass into the Pacific, but fresh storms separated the four ships forever. The Nao Santa María de la Victoria was the only one to continue the voyage to the Maluku Islands, where it arrived in October, via the Mariana Islands and the Philippines, after suffering the loss of (amongst others) the captain and Elcano himself.

In the port of Tidore they built a fortress to defend themselves from attack by the Portuguese who had settled in the Maluku Islands. With assistance received from New Spain, they managed to resist until April 1529 when the Treaty of Zaragoza was signed, under which Spain renounced its ambitions in Asia. The 24 survivors had to surrender and were sent to Lisbon, where they remained prisoners until 1536.
The need to explore and occupy the strait led to a new excursion from Chile being organised very soon afterwards. This time with more means at their disposal, the recently arrived governor García Hurtado de Mendoza sent a fleet that was much better prepared to confront the Magellanic challenge than Ulloa’s had been. He deployed two vessels of 450 tons apiece, each with a crew of 60 men. The mission was entrusted to the experienced pilot Juan Ladrillero, in charge of the San Luis, while the San Sebastián was captained by Francisco Cortés Ojeda, a veteran of the first attempt at entering the strait from the Pacific. The ships set sail from Valdivia on the 17th of November 1557 and landed at the Gulf of Penas before entering the Patagonian channels where they were separated from each other never to meet again. The San Sebastián had suffered serious damage and the wreckage was used to build a small brig, which managed to return to Valdivia on the 1st of October 1558.

Meanwhile the San Luis continued navigating through the southern labyrinth and managed to gain access to the strait, exploring it until it found a natural port where it took refuge from March to July 1558. Once the voyage had been resumed, Ladrillero arrived at the eastern entrance to the passage in August and, after making contact with the place’s indigenous people, set off home again. Despite the inclement weather and the navigational challenges, the expedition carried out detailed geographical observations in the strait.


and throughout the southern channels, managing to return to Valdivia on the 15th of January 1559 with less than half the crew they had begun the voyage with. Although Ladrillero’s mission did provide documentation that would help future vessels undertake interoceanic crossings, it failed to establish bases ensuring Spanish control of the route between the two oceans. The exclusive nature of this route remained subject to the difficulties traversing it entailed, difficulties that nonetheless did not guarantee that ships belonging to other powers would fail to reach the Pacific and assail the American coast.
The threat became reality at the end of 1578, when the English privateer Francis Drake managed to negotiate the strait and lay waste to the coasts of Chile and Peru. After various successes in pillaging the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico between 1570 and 1573, which brought him wealth and renown, Queen Elizabeth I personally charged him with attacking Spain’s possessions in the Pacific. The expedition set sail from Plymouth in December 1577 with 166 men and five ships, to which a sixth, a Portuguese vessel captured in Cape Verde, was added. After sailing down the coast of Brazil, past the Río de la Plata and losing two ships, the ships reached San Julian Bay to wait for the end of winter before attempting to cross the southern passage. There they realised that the hull of the old Portuguese ship was rotten and decided to burn it and redistribute its crew amongst the three remaining vessels.

After a stormy crossing of the strait, which destroyed two further vessels, Drake managed to pass into the Pacific on board the Golden Hinde. The principal spoils of war were captured during the sacking of Valparaíso, with the theft of the cargo of a boat anchored in the bay on the 8th of December 1578; and on the 13th of February 1579, with the attacking of a galleon that had sailed from Callao transporting silver and gold. Pursued by Spain’s South Sea Armada and struggling to manoeuvre and pick up speed due to the weight of the plunder in the hold, Drake headed north and took refuge on the coast of California. Once the Golden Hinde had been repaired and the crew were recovered, Drake set off for the Maluku Islands, then headed for the Cape of Good Hope, reaching Plymouth in September 1580, with the glory of a formidable treasure and of being the second mariner to sail all around the world.
Although by signing the Treaty of Zaragoza in 1529 along with Portugal the Spanish crown had resigned itself to being excluded from the spice trade, Francis Drake’s raid on the Chilean and Peruvian coasts alerted Spain to the urgency of fortifying and colonizing the area of the Strait of Magellan in order to maintain exclusive control over the South American Pacific and the wealth in circulation there. This task was entrusted to the Spanish sailor and cosmographer Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa, who had ample experience of navigation in the South Sea and who during Drake’s raids had been commissioned by the Viceroy of Peru to capture the Englishman, at the helm of two ships that were perfectly equipped and armed. Upon returning from this pursuit, he received the order to traverse the strait to identify the most suitable sites to found settlements and position artillery pieces.

The Nuestra Señora de la Esperanza (Our Lady of Hope), captained by Sarmiento, and the San Francisco, piloted by Juan de Villalobos, set off from Callao on the 11th of October 1579. In order to advance more swiftly and avoid sailing against the current, the expedition took the deep-water route that passed through the Juan Fernández Islands and turned east near the 50th parallel south. After surveying the Patagonian channels, on the 21st of January 1580 a storm forced the boats to the edge of the continent, forcing the San Francisco to return to Valdivia. Meanwhile, Sarmiento managed to enter the Strait, determine the sites for future colonies and set up the batteries. He passed into the Atlantic on the 24th of February and headed for Spain to present to the King a plan for the fortification of the Strait.

The idea was embraced by the monarch Philip II who provided an armada of 23 vessels and 2,500 men, including Alonso de Sotomayor and his entourage to assume governance of Chile. The fleet was placed under the charge of Diego Flores de Valdés and Sarmiento de Gamboa was embarked in the role of governor and general captain of the Strait. After one departure was frustrated by a storm, on the 9th of December 1581 they set sail from Cadiz with just 16 ships, heading for Rio de Janeiro, where they arrived on the 25th of March 1582. As they waited for winter to end, many colonisers either perished, victims of disease, or else deserted. One section of the expedition set out for Río de la Plata, where Alonso de Sotomayor and his men set off over land for Chile, while Diego Flores, with five ships in his charge, continued towards the Strait, where he was unable to enter due to bad weather and so returned to Spain.

Sarmiento, who had remained in Río de Janeiro preparing a fresh foray, managed after one attempt frustrated by bad weather to enter the strait with 5 ships on the 11th of February 1584. In a sheltered anchorage three kilometres from Cape Virgenes, he founded the town of Nombre de Jesús. From there he dispatched four ships back to Spain and on the remaining one, the Santa María de Castro, he embarked 50 settlers to found Rey Don Felipe on the 25th of March, close to what is now Punta Arenas. On the 24th of May Sarmiento began the return journey to collect indispensable supplies for the survival of both colonies. His first two attempts, however, failed due to storms off the Brazilian coast, and on the third he was captured by an English squadron, which sent him back to London as a prisoner.
When at last Sarmiento returned to Spain at the start of January 1591, the planned colonisation of the Strait of Magellan was a resounding failure. In January 1587 the English privateer Thomas Cavendish landed at Rey Don Felipe and found eighteen survivors clothed in rags, with barely any food left and absolutely no hope. When he left the place, he took with him the artillery and one of the settlers and renamed the place ‘Port Famine’ (Puerto del Hambre in Spanish). Three years later, the last survivor was rescued by an English ship called *The Delight*. From this point on, with no chance of remaining under Castilian control, the Strait of Magellan route was left open for other powers to attempt to navigate it, whether to challenge Spanish sovereignty in America, or to organise trade ventures between Europe and Asia.
A FAR BETTER PREPARED ENEMY

Along with the pirate raids encouraged by the English Crown to assail Spain's American possessions, various expeditions organized in Holland began to pass through the interoceanic passage. Driven by the traders and mariners on these expeditions, the Dutch began to create a colonial empire by establishing settlements in the Americas, the Indonesian archipelago (the Maluku Islands), and India. Behind this impulse was the war of liberation that Holland was fighting against Spain, and the possibility of taking control of the trading posts in Asia, since the unification of the kingdoms of Castile and Portugal in 1580 turned the Portuguese into direct enemies. Although they could count on the favour and patronage of the House of Orange, the Dutch fleets were private initiatives with commercial purposes, but equipped and drilled to engage in combat and piracy whenever necessary or convenient. Under these criteria the Dutch East India Company was set up in 1602 and began by taking control of some of the Portuguese trading stations, until the founding of Batavia in 1627, on the island of Java.

The settlement became a dynamic hub for the global trade in spices, silver and cotton, coordinating the activities of the company’s enclaves in America and Asia and the European headquarters.

Throughout the first half of the 17th century six fleets left Holland which, with different aims and levels of equipment and preparation, managed to complete the crossing from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific. In 1598, the expeditions commanded by Jacob (Jacques) Mahu and Olivier van Noort set sail two months apart. The first aimed to acquire contraband silver in America and exchange it for spices in the Maluku Islands. It consisted of five vessels, three of which managed to enter the Pacific on the 3rd of September 1599 – without Mahu, who had died before reaching the strait. After landing at the Chonos Archipelago and resisting attack from the indigenous people there, the rest of the expedition, now commanded by Baltazar de Cordes, disembarked on Chiloé Island where the crew allied themselves with the native Huilliche people to take control of the settlement of Castro in April 1600. After sacking this city (and to avoid a reaction from the Spanish), the assailants boarded one of the ships in which they crossed the Pacific and headed to Tidore, where they were captured by the Portuguese in January 1601 and sent to Goa.

The expedition headed by Van Noort had been organised by a society of merchants in Rotterdam, which hoped to take part in the profitable circuits of exchange of American and Asian products. Formed of four ships and 248 men, the fleet suffered very early on from desertions and confrontations with Portuguese settlers on the coast of Africa and Brazil. On the 4th of November 1599, three ships reached the entrance to the strait and managed to enter the Pacific on the 29th of February 1600, leaving behind another vessel and almost half the crew. After landing at Mocha Island, close to Concepción, and acquiring provisions from Mapuche hostile to the Spanish, Van Noort’s fleet laid waste to the coasts of Chile and Peru until July. Then, after seizing the treasure they found in five ships anchored in Callao, the expedition (which had been warned of a Spanish squadron pursuing it) embarked on the Pacific crossing and reached the Mariana Islands in September.

They remained there very little time as they were attacked by the native population and fled to the Philippines halfway through October. When they reached Manila Bay, they noticed a Spanish fleet was waiting to ambush them, and so Van Noort opted to wait, gather information and organise an effective attack. Such an attack took place on the 14th of
with the same aim of sending a fleet to the Pacific to exchange goods for silver and then obtain spices in the Maluku Islands, in 1614 the Dutch East India Company, with the patronage of the government of the United Provinces (today the Netherlands), organised a formidable fleet of five galleons of between 600 and 300 tons, two slightly smaller brigantines and nine tenders; between sailors and soldiers there were around 1,200 men on the voyage, and the five main ships were heavily armed. Heading this armada was Joris van Spilbergen, an admiral of German origin who had led commercial expeditions on the African coast (1602) and successfully fought the Spanish fleet in Gibraltar (1607). With information from Mahu and Van Noort’s raids, Spilbergen received the order to sound out the reaction of the American authorities to being offered merchandise, which they had on board in abundance, and then to gauge the possibility of establishing a naval base in the south of the continent, which would pave the way for future expeditions to Asia.

The fleet set sail from Texel on the 8th of August 1614. In Brazil it faced altercations with the native population and uprisings of the crew, which led to the loss of 30 men, one brig and two launches. In April 1615 it reached the Strait of Magellan, and on the 6th of May it entered the Pacific, with less damage than previous voyages. The ships headed for Mocha Island to take fresh provisions on board and on the 29th of May, they disembarked on Santa María Island, where the admiral parleyed with the Corregidor to persuade him to enter into a commercial relationship. The intent failed, and a small ship managed to flee and alert the Spanish authorities to the presence of the powerful Dutch armada. The news meant the Pacific ports were prepared for an attack, that the wealth deposited there was safely removed far from the coast, and that the Viceroy of Peru, the Marquis of Montesclaros, was able to dispatch the South Sea Armada to cut off the invaders.

Warned of the Dutch Armada’s progress via Brazil and its intentions to reach the Pacific by negotiating the Strait, Montesclaros had sent a fleet to patrol the Chilean coast and organised a military presence in Arica, to protect the shipment of silver being loaded in that port, destined for Callao and Panama. By the time he found out that Spilbergen had landed at Santa María Island, his naval forces (under the command of his nephew Rodrigo de Mendoza) were scattered, so he only managed to muster two
galleons, two ships, one tender and two armed merchant vessels, with 1,240 men “of war,” among whom were various merchants and dignitaries from Lima, enlisted as volunteers. On the 17th of July 1615, the viceregal squadron found the enemy ships anchored in the shelter of Cerro Azul, in the vicinity of Puerto de Cañete. At around nine PM, the artillery and musket fire began. The combat took place in very confusing surroundings, with a combination of darkness, lack of wind and persistent currents, which drove four minor Peruvian vessels away from the action. Due to the sails and rigging of both friendly and enemy ships being entangled for several hours, a large part of the confrontation took place on the decks. At dawn on the 19th, the viceregal armada’s vice admiral ship left the scene with serious damages, leaving behind a galleon and a tender boat, both sunk. Spilbergen’s squadron, meanwhile, recorded damages to the vice admiral ship, but still had sufficient forces to turn up in Callao the following day, where it seized a few minor vessels, but did not dare challenge the batteries and the armed mob waiting for them to land.

Spilbergen continued around the Pacific coastline, pillaging and smuggling, until they reached Mexico. In October he arrived at Acapulco Bay with the aim of seizing the Manila Galleon, but a squadron organised by the governor of Mazatlán kept him occupied while the merchant fleet headed for the Philippines. Spilbergen followed the same course as New Spain’s vessels; near Manila he took a few prisoners and then, when the year was up, arrived at the Dutch East India Company’s trading station in Batavia. He then headed west towards the Cape of Good Hope and completed the fifth circumnavigation of the world in August 1617.
In June 1615, ten months after Spilbergen’s departure, a far more modest expedition set sail from Texel, with only two vessels. This was an enterprise called the Australian Company, established in the city of Hoorn and headed by the merchant Jacob Le Maire, with the mission of finding an alternative interoceanic passage to the Strait of Magellan to vie with the Dutch East Indies Company for exclusive access to this route to the Spice Islands. After crossing the Atlantic, the ships, piloted by brothers Willem and Jan Schouten, sailed southwards to the Strait of Magellan and passed through Tierra del Fuego and Staten Island via a channel they named the Le Maire Strait. On the 16th of January 1616, with one ship less after it was lost to fire, they reached the tip of the continent and rounded the cape, which they christened Cape Horn in honour of the wrecked Hoorn. After crossing the Pacific at a latitude close to the Juan Fernández Archipelago and visiting various islands in New Guinea and Micronesia, they reached the Maluku Islands on the 12th of September and Batavia on the 28th of October, with 84 of the 87 original crew members from both ships. Dutch officials in Java did not credit the discovery of a new passage between the oceans and accused Le Maire of infringing the monopoly of the Dutch East India Company; Le Maire was arrested and he and all his men were sent back to Amsterdam in Spilbergen’s fleet. Le Maire died en route; his father, Isaac, challenged the Dutch East India Company in court and was awarded a substantial sum in compensation, as well as being granted his son’s diaries and a license to trade via Cape Horn.
Tipus Freti Magellanici; quod Georgius Spilbergius cum Classe iustravit, Amsterdam, 1646.
Collection: John Carter Brown Library, Brown University, United States
Unlike the first endeavours at interoceanic navigation that set off from Holland, which claimed to have commercial aims, the Dutch East India Company was established in 1621 with the express purpose of laying siege to the South American Pacific in order to seize from Spain the silver it was obtaining from the mines in Potosí, as well as establishing a colony and laying the foundations for a future conquest. This would happen once hostilities between Spain and the Low Countries resumed, with the ascension of King Philip IV of Spain to the throne and the end of the Twelve Years’ Truce. The fleet, made up of 11 ships, a little over a thousand crew members, 600 soldiers and commanded by Admiral Jacques L’Hermite, set sail from Amsterdam in early April 1623. On the 29th of that month, it assembled off the coast of Senegal to then head for the strait, which it began to cross in January 1624, with a significant portion of the crew, including the commander himself, who was sick with dysentery. Once in the Pacific, they reached the Juan Fernández Islands in early April to recover from the crossing, repair the ships and prepare the attack on Callao, the expedition’s main objective.

When the Dutch Armada turned up at the port of Callao on the 9th of May, the Marquess of Guadalcázar, viceroy of Peru, had already been warned of its presence in the Pacific and so the Dutch found the port’s defences and the coastal batteries reinforced, as well as two thousand armed men deployed along the coastline prepared to prevent any attempt at landing and the fleet with its load of treasure already heading for Panama. With Peru’s principal port surrounded, the invaders focussed on capturing smaller ships with cargoes of wine and fresh food, crucial to bring relief to a good proportion of the sick men they had on board. Obliged by the Peruvian artillery to remain at a good distance from the beach and prevented by the militia from undertaking a terrestrial attack, the blockade lasted until early September. L’Hermite died before this, struck down by scurvy and dysentery. The new commander, Vice-Admiral Gheen Huygen Schapenham, ordered his men to continue to New Spain, with the expectation of taking new prisoners and then going on to Batavia and finally returning to Texel, which they reached on the 9th of July 1626, completing the ninth circumnavigation of the Earth.
Strait of Magellan and Tierra del Fuego (Spanish map insert from 1690), signed by Francisco Seixas y Lovera. In João Teixeira Albernaz, Taboas geraes de todo o navegação, 1630. Collection: U.S. Library of Congress.
KNOWLEDGE AS A WEAPON

The liberty with which Spain’s enemies were crossing from the Atlantic to the Pacific led to a vulnerability of its colonial possessions in America, which was endlessly worrying to the monarchs. With no hope of colonising and fortifying the interoceanic passages, they sent reconnaissance missions, perhaps thinking that, once endowed with better quality nautical information, their fleets would improve their chances of winning battles in the southern labyrinths. One of the expeditions of this sort was that of the brothers Bartolomé and Gonzalo García de Nodal, who, in September 1618, set sail from Lisbon each in charge of armed caravels, their mission to survey the new passage discovered by Schouten and Le Maire. Midway through January 1619, they reached the western entrance of the Strait of Magellan, continued south, rounded Tierra del Fuego, then re-entered the Strait before passing into the Atlantic and heading for Europe. This route around Tierra del Fuego was mapped by the pilot and cosmographer Diego Ramírez de Arellano.

One valuable contribution for Spanish sailors who had to undertake the interoceanic route and move through various ports of the Pacific was made in 1690 by Francisco Seixas y Lovera, with the publication in Madrid of Descripción geográfica y derrotero de la región austral magallánica (geographic description and pilot chart of the southern Magellanic region). Although Seixas never made the crossing between the Atlantic and the Pacific under the Spanish flag, he did so several times while serving on Portuguese and Dutch fleets, and between 1674 and 1686 in a private trading company, a joint venture with other navigators of various nationalities. In that year he placed himself at the service of the monarch King Charles II of Spain, helping to train new mariners. Seixas’ work is a navigation manual for the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian oceans and offers particularly detailed information and guidelines for crossing the Strait of Magellan and Cape Horn in both directions and at different times of the year, derived from the analysis of previous expeditions.

Bartolomé García de Nodal, Relación del viaje que por orden de su Mag. ...hizieron los capitanes Bartolomé García de Nodal y Gonçalo de Nodal ... al descubrimiento del estrecho nuevo de S. Vicente y del de Magallanes [account of the voyage which by order of his Majesty ... the captains Bartolomé Garcia de Nodal and Gonçalo de Nodal did undertake ... upon the discovery of the new strait of S. Vicente and ... that of Magellan], Madrid, 1621. Collection: National Library of Chile.
III.
THE INHABITANTS OF THE END OF
THE WORLD AT THE MOMENT OF
ENCOUNTER WITH THE WEST
When, thanks to Ferdinand Magellan’s voyage, the European world learned of the interoceanic passage and began to use it, the southern region of South America was inhabited by aboriginal peoples whose cultures had been evolving for over 10,000 years. The geography of this complex territory, which had one of the most extreme climates on the planet and was made up of fragile ecosystems, determined the way of life of these communities. In the central part, to the east of the Patagonian cordillera, a chilly plain buffeted by strong winds stretches out, and surrounding this, a maze of islands, channels, bays, peninsulas, and fjords all washed with the ice-cold waters of the Antarctic and ceaseless rain.

In this territory with little available food and, as such, a limited threshold of demographic growth, two environments in particular stand out: the archipelagos and southern channels inhabited by Kawésqar and Yaghan communities devoted to fishing and gathering; and the Patagonian and Tierra del Fuego steppes, ranged over by groups of hunter-gatherers from the Aónikenk and Selk’nam communities. Here we reproduce a few descriptions made by European chroniclers in the century that followed Magellan’s voyage, before contact with the West transformed the way of life of these indigenous people, ultimately wiping them out. Notable in these observations is the narrators’ admiration at the ways of adapting to such a hostile environment, although in some cases this attitude was not enough to
grasp the meaning behind many customs and practices, which often seemed shocking to 16th and 17th century Europeans.

It is difficult to calculate the total number of inhabitants in the Magallanes Region at the moment of encounter with the West, since the very first observers do not offer any figures. Taking into account the fragility of the southern ecosystems, the limited availability of sources of nutrition (which meant that, as subsequent archaeological and anthropological investigations showed, the life expectancy of the indigenous people here did not exceed 40 years) and that despite a high birth rate there was a high rate of infant mortality, the historian Mateo Martinic has estimated that the indigenous population of the Magallanes Region in the 15th century was between 10 and 12 thousand inhabitants. This figure would come to be used as the demographic threshold of ethnic groups in the region.
The first Magellanic residents to have contact with Westerners were the Aónikenk, sighted on the northern coast of the strait in January 1526, by García Jofré de Loaisa’s expedition. Spread across the frozen Patagonian plains, between the Santa Cruz River and the Strait of Magellan, they formed small groups that covered the territory’s Atlantic coast, hunting guanacos, rheas and other edible creatures. They made temporary camps in sites protected from the strong winds and with access to resources such as wood and water, close to areas favourable for hunting.

Before being culturally influenced by the early expansion of the Mapuche towards the south, one of the best descriptions of the Aónikenk is that given by Juan Ladrillero in 1558, after finding and trying to communicate with a group in one area of the northern banks of the Strait:

"The people that I found at this mouth of the Strait in the part of the North Sea [...] The men go naked and wear as capes flayed guanaco skins, with the wool on the inside next to their bodies, and their weapons are bows and arrows made of flint and sticks for clubs, and it is their custom to paint their faces and bodies with a white powder like lime: the women wear the flayed skins of guanacos and sheep, the wool on the inside, and these they wear in the manner of the Indian women in Cuzco, the skins on the outside and reaching to below their knees; they wear shoes of the same leather that come up to their ankles and are stuffed with straw inside for [fear] of the cold and they are smeared with that same lime as the men; and as far as I could gather they have no established base; they are close to the coast of the strait: they are very few from what I could tell: their houses are made by driving sticks into the ground and placing over these guanaco and sheep and deer hides, and here they take shelter from the wind, and inside they put straw because it is warm, and also where they lie down and sit so as to be more protected; because it seemed to me that it must rain little close to this North Sea in this strait, although in this month of August it snowed the days that we were here."

This account summarises the ways the Aónikenk adapted to the harsh environment of the southern steppes and tundras. The flayed skins with the fur on the inside and the footwear reinforced with straw allowed them to protect themselves from the cold; in addition to the bows, arrows, clubs and spears, they also used various stone tools, bone utensils and straw baskets. Just as the simple portable dwelling of branches and hide described by Ladrillero was perfectly functional for the Aónikenk’s nomadic lifestyle, its triangular shape elegantly resisted strong winds and, at around 20 square metres, it could house two families or the equivalent of ten people.
Further south in Aonikenk territory, on the other side of the Strait, the bonfires the Selk’nam kept lit all through the night attracted a considerable amount of attention amongst Magellan’s expedition, and the enormous island steppe they inhabited came to be known as Tierra del Fuego, or Land of Fire. The Selk’nam’s first encounter with Westerners in 1599 was utterly disastrous, as the members of Oliver van Noort’s expedition opened fire on them and showed no interest in observing or describing them. The first record of the Selk’nam’s characteristics dates from Bartolomé and Gonzalo García de Nodal’s expedition in 1619. While sparse, the account does reveal the cultural peculiarities of these Fuegian hunters:

“… the Indians came to us, and since we saw that they had no weapons of any sort, and were dressed in animal skins, naked: some wore headdresses of white bird feathers, others ram skins, with long wool like those from Spain, and a ram’s hide which they exchanged for a hooded cloak, and ram’s wool thread, and leather belts tanned with red ochre; they came with open arms and shouting out in their fashion a, a, a, and throwing down their headdresses in a sign of friendship, with this we reached them and a short while after another three arrived: they all looked most carefully at our attire, and we saw they had a liking for those with bright-coloured garments, and asked for them using signs. We gave them glass beads and shoelaces, and other silly trinkets. They were most presentable, none of them with a beard, and all had their faces painted with ochre and white; they seemed quite swift at running and jumping; they had little trust in us, for they did not approach unless it was to take something, and would then pull back, particularly the youngest…”

The description provided by the Nodal brothers reveals various similarities between the Aónikenk and the Selk’nam in terms of their appearance, physical skills, adaptation to the environment and hunting habits, although their dress differs in that the Selk’nam tended to wear their animal skins with the fur facing outward, as they were in the habit of imitating animals. Their mobile homes were very simple, too. To protect themselves from the prevailing wind on the tundra they would dig a circle of between 20 and 30 centimetres, protected by a leather canopy supported by a structure made of branches, which, in more wooded areas, they would turn into a small pyramid where a family of four or five people could shelter from the rain. Another unique feature of the Selk’nam is that they would paint their faces and bodies white, black and red, both for practising ceremonial rituals and for expressing states of mind. These dyes were made by mixing natural pigments with earth and guanaco fat, which also provided protection from the cold.

The Selk’nam’s material culture is characterised by the variety and quality of their weapons and tools. For hunting on land, they had highly effective bows and arrows, which they made with the Fuegian wood at their disposal, and with guanaco tendons, nerves and leather, stones of different shapes and sizes, sealion bones, and feathers. They also used slings made with guanaco leather. To fish, they used harpoons of various sizes worked in wood and sealion or whale bones. They also used whalebone to make traps for birds, as well as whale nerves and tendons to make fishing nets and lines. From stones they made a range of knives, scrapers, mortars, wedges, and awls. And they used wood and various vegetable fibres to make cots, baskets, trays, toys, decorations, and countless other domestic items.

"The size of most of the giant Patagonians, and from one end to the area of the feet, is large".
Excerpt from Guillermo Blaeu, Mapa del estrecho de Magallanes que incluye el paso de Le Maire, 1635. Collection: National Library of Chile.
Unlike the Aónikenk and Selk’nam whose hunting area was focussed on the steppes, the aboriginal people in the southern archipelagos specialised in hunting sealions and collecting shellfish, giving rise to relationships between man and nature and thus some very special cultural relationships. The Kawésqar, who used canoes to travel the channels and fjords between the Gulf of Penas and the Strait of Magellan, had to adapt to a cold, wet environment and to changing climactic conditions, which made navigation a dangerous activity. Although they were sighted by Magellan’s expedition and the ones following it, the first Westerners to approach these people were the crew of the San Luis, captained by Juan Ladrillero in 1557-58:

“The people that are in the aforementioned cove, are Indians who fish […] they eat raw fish and sealion flesh, or birds when they kill them, and sometimes they roast them. They have no pots nor other receptacles; and we have not found any salt amongst them either. They go about dressed in the hides of sealions and other animals, with which they cover their backs and which come down to their knees, and a cord they tie around their neck in the style of the liquiras [shaws] which the Indians of Cuzco wear […] They are very strong. For weapons they have whalebones they use as daggers, and sticks like lancets […] They use canoes made from the bark of cypresses and other trees. They have no settlements or houses, but rather are here today, elsewhere tomorrow, and wherever they go, they carry with them slender wooden stakes, which they put into the ground; and with tree bark, which they carry in the aforementioned canoes, to make their little huts, like simple shacks, which they go into and take shelter from the heavens and the snow.”

Ladrillero’s observations, not so positive when compared with his notes on the land-based hunters, highlight that the Kawésqar’s lives took place almost completely on board their canoes. This is why they went naked and smeared their bodies with sealion fat, to keep out the cold and the damp, typical of their rainy, maritime habitat, in which every item of clothing represented a hindrance since it could not be kept dry.

In the Kawésqar’s mobile way of life, the canoe played a fundamental role, allowing them to move nimbly through the entire maze of islands of the Magellanic Pacific, fishing, hunting, and gathering. The craft was made from coihue bark, cut into pieces eight or nine metres long, stitched with vines and caulked with mosses, grass and mud. The edges were stiffened with branches tied at the ends, and the entire structure made rigid by way of rods placed cross-wise and tied at the sides.

When they did disembark, the Kawésqar sought out sheltered spots with sources of freshwater, where they put up sealion hide tents held up by a frame of interlacing branches, forming a circular dwelling, roughly three metres in diameter and two metres high: the vault was open at the top so a fire could be lit inside, and branches and hides were strewn on the floor to keep out the damp. These dwellings, which could hold up to five people, were erected alongside other larger ones for accommodating multi-family groups, around one larger tent, with two fireplaces, demonstrating the existence of an internal hierarchy.
Of their weapons, the most important were the harpoon and a versatile spear with a serrated tip made from whale or sea lion bone, which could be fixed to but was also detachable from the wooden shaft. In this last case, the hunter kept hold of the tip with a leather cord. They also had wooden darts with sharpened stone tips, bows and arrows, mallets, slings, and wooden daggers with stone tips. For tools they had knives made from shells, bones or stones, which were also used to make wedges, spatulas, scrapers, awls, pins, axes and mortars. With tree bark they also made buckets to store water, and baskets, using the same sewing and caulking techniques for making canoes. Other tools of theirs included fishing nets made of plaited leather and pebbles.
In the most southern part of Tierra del Fuego, around the Beagle Channel and on Navarino Island, lived the Yaghan, the most remote and isolated indigenous group in the Americas, with cultural characteristics and methods of environmental adaptation very similar to those of the Kawésqar. The first Europeans to encounter them were members of the Dutch fleet led by Admiral Jacques L’Hermite in 1624, which gave us this keen description made by Vice-Admiral Gheen Huygen Schapenham:

“The inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego […] daub their bodies and paint them in many different ways: some decorate their faces, legs, arms and hands with red paint, others have one half of their body red and the other white; so that each one is painted in his own particular way. They have a handsome figure, with well-proportioned limbs, and their height similar to that of a European. They have black hair, which they wear long and stiff to seem more fearsome; their teeth are sharp like knives. The men are completely naked, not covering their privates, but the women cover themselves with a small piece of leather, paint themselves like the men, and decorate their necks with a necklace of shells. Some indigenous, although very few, cover their shoulders with sealskin, which provides little protection from the cold, which is so extreme in this region that it is a wonder they can survive the winters. They build their little houses or huts with tree trunks: round at the base, they come to a point, like tents, with an opening in the highest part to let the smoke escape. These shacks are secured in a ditch of two or three feet dug into the ground, and the outer part covered with earth. In them nothing is found save a few rush baskets in which they store their fishing implements: lines with ingeniously carved stone hooks, from which they hang mussels; in this way they fish as many fish as they want. They have several kinds of weapons. Some carry bows and arrows with stone tips in the shape of a harpoon, made with great skill. Others arm themselves with long spears whose tip is a sharp bone with barbs, the better to stick into the flesh. They also use cudgels and slings which they operate most effectively, and well-sharpened stone knives. They carry their weapons with them always for, as far as we can understand, they are always at war with another clan that lives a few miles to the East in the Paso Goree and near to Isla Terhalten; this clan paints themselves black, while the ones in the bays of Windhon and Schapenham paint themselves all colours. Their canoes are worthy of admiration. To build them, they take the bark of a thick tree; they sculpt it by cutting certain parts and stitching them together again, so they acquire the shape of a Venetian gondola. They work them with great skill, placing the bark over pieces of timber, as is done with boats in the shipyards of Holland. Once the shape of a gondola has been obtained, they reinforce the canoe by covering the base from one end to the other with criss-crossing rods,
which they then cover with bark also; then they sew the entire construction together. In these canoes, which measure 10, 12, 14 or 16 feet long by two wide, seven or eight men can sit comfortably, and they navigate as effectively as they would do in a rowing boat...”

In the account left by Schapenham, although he does frown upon some customs, what stand out are the compliments he pays to the ingenuity of the Yaghan in making use of nature to fashion all kinds of tools for successfully adapting to an extremely harsh, hostile environment. In broad terms, the cultural system created by the Yaghan at the start of the 17th century has some elements similar to that of the Kawésqar: in terms of the nomadic life organised around fishing and gathering, and the combination of weapons and tools, it was almost identical, while one difference between the two was their dwellings they made, not to mention the languages they spoke.

Schapenham’s account makes evident the fact that the Yaghan’s main raw material was tree bark and that, because they lived in more sheltered areas it might be deduced that this group had a more sedentary lifestyle. Nonetheless, archaeological research has shown that the ákar, or Yaghan shacks, both the conical and the vaulted designs, were as transitory as the leather canopies of the Kawésqar. Beyond the materials they were made of, then, the settlement styles between each canoe society differed in that, while the Kawésqar set up their shelters by the sea, the Yaghan did so a few dozen metres inland. The unique nature of both groups was confirmed by anthropological studies in the 19th century, which verified the existence of two completely different languages and, in the 20th, showed that their arrival in the Magellanes Region was due to various migration patterns.

Up until the second half of the 19th century the indigenous inhabitants of the Magallanes Region had little contact with Westerners, and so their life and culture were barely altered. However, the arrival of European, Argentine and Chilean settlers en masse attracted by sheep farming and gold mining triggered their almost total extermination. In the case of the Selk’nam and the Aónikenk, they were dispossessed of their territories by sheep farming companies, which drove the systematic murder of men, women, and children. The Salesian Order and the government of Chile made futile attempts at rescuing the surviving members of these communities from genocide, placing them in reserves on Dawson Island. Meanwhile, the fate of the Kawésqar and Yaghan communities was not that different, as the increase in contact with Western sailors, as well as with missionaries who tried to convert them, put them at the mercy of contracting diseases their organisms were not able to withstand. In the present day, Yaghan communities survive on Navarino Island and in Usuahia, on both sides of the Strait of Magellan, and Kawésqar communities in Puerto Edén and Guarello Island, in the oceanic area of the Magallanes Region.
IV.
DEFENCE OF THE AMERICAN COASTS
Once it had become the key to accessing the riches of the Far East as well as its territories in the New World, the Spanish crown realised that, given the impossibility of controlling navigation via the Strait of Magellan (whether by fortifying the area or organising a war fleet), it had to focus its efforts on protecting its American possessions from raids by enemy fleets that managed to successfully negotiate the difficult interoceanic crossing.
THE ATLANTIC COASTLINE

The first barrier needed to be raised on the south Atlantic continental coast, a territory which, although considered devoid of economic value, could be used by enemies to launch threats to the mining region of Charcas, from where Spain obtained a considerable amount of silver. As such, the decision was made to start colonising the Río de la Plata and the spaces separating it from the mining centres in Upper Peru.

Following this logic, the city of Santa María de los Buenos Aires was founded on the 3rd of February 1536, at the mouth of the Río de la Plata, with the hope of impeding the passage of any expedition hostile to Spain. The place, however, lacked the appeal of exploitable resources and the indigenous population was hostile, so the new inhabitants decided to move to another, more favourable location. The place chosen for the new settlement was several days’ journey to the north, following the Paraná River upstream, where, on the 15th of August 1537, an advance party of explorers founded Nuestra Señora de Asunción in a spot suitable for agriculture and inhabited by friendly, unresistant indigenous people.


View and outline of the mountain of Potosí, and map of the Town of Potosí, 1779. Collection: General Archive of the Indies, Spain.
The lack of any extraordinary riches made it a relatively unattractive destination to Spanish adventurers, and it developed almost outside of the Hispanic colonial system. Starting from Asunción in the centre, the occupation was carried out of inland areas of the pampa needed to protect access to the Viceroyalty of Peru. Thus in 1563, Santa Fe was founded; ten years later, Cordoba; and in 1580, Buenos Aires was permanently re-founded when Francis Drake’s raid on the city made clear the strategic value of Río de la Plata.

Lacking natural resources and a considerable indigenous population, the lure of the River Plate region lay in the possibility of accessing, via this area, the flow of precious metals coming from the enormous silver mines in Upper Peru. More than simply assaulting the caravans that began carrying consignments of silver to the government in Buenos Aires, created in 1610, Portuguese expeditioners actually settled on the north side of the Río de la Plata basin to exchange products made from these metals and, while there, to impinge on Spain’s supposed monopoly over these regions and the wealth circulating around them. This contraband trade reached its climax in 1680 with the founding of Colonia do Sacramento in the so-called Banda Oriental or Eastern Band, within Brazilian territory although with the open intention of attacking Spanish interests. The response to this audacious initiative was the militarization of River Plate society and the formation of a network of Jesuit missions in the interior of the country to halt Portuguese expansion towards the south. To this illicit trade was added the one in which the British began to engage in the areas

Map of the lands allocated to the Chavarana Indians, Paraguay, 1779. Collection: General Archive of the Indies, Spain.

Main square, Ygatimi, Paraguay, 1777. Collection: General Archive of the Indies, Spain.
immediately around Buenos Aires after the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, which meant Britain was granted the right to bring slaves and goods into America. This gave rise to transgressions, abuses, and an increase in illicit trade.

With the arrival of King Charles III to the throne at the end of 1759, Spain adopted a far more aggressive policy to recuperate the empire’s political and military power whilst at the same time combating infringements on its monopoly. In the Río de la Plata this stance took the form of the creation of a new viceroyalty, with a capital in Buenos Aires, with the express task of waging war against the Portuguese and eliminating all contraband coming from Brazil, as well as colonising the Banda Oriental and creating a naval base in Montevideo to guard entry to the estuary and the coast and expel the British from the Patagonian coast and the Malvinas Islands. The defensive system was complemented with a shipyard, the castles and fortresses of Maldonado and San Fernando, and a network of settlements along the Banda Oriental as far as Asunción, which gave rise to a healthy flow of exchange in order to maintain it. Although this mechanism successfully integrated the Río de la Plata region and the south Atlantic coast into the workings of the Hispanic empire, it proved ineffective when put to the test by the British invasions of 1808.
Made up of a network of settlements, naval bases and fortifications, the Atlantic coast defence system was only the first defensive wall in the Pacific basin, site of the jewel in Spain’s New World crown, which was the key to unlocking the riches of the Far East. The protection of this area was to a large extent entrusted to the difficulties of interoceanic navigation.

Lacking any notions that would give him a rough idea as to American geography, in particular the southern region, the emperor Charles V was banking on achieving control of the Strait by occupying the territory using the same formula that had secured Spain’s presence in the rest of the continent. And so, in January of 1539 he granted a capitulación to Pedro Sancho de la Hoz, his former secretary, naming him adelantado and governor of the Terra Australis and any islands that were discovered. To carry out this commission, De la Hoz joined forces with Pedro de Valdivia on the expedition which left Cuzco a year later to conquer Chile.

This association did not end well for Sancho. He had few resources to lend the enterprise in order that his opinion might have weight, he failed to ever get near the area of his capitulación, and the intense ongoing disagreements with Valdivia and his men resulted in him being decapitated. Four decades later, the Spanish monarchy with Philip II at its helm attempted to colonize and fortify the Strait by sending an expedition led by Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa. The initiative was a reaction to Francis Drake’s expedition, and an attempt at sending their enemies a signal of their full might and capacity. But the lack of geographic information and the severe climactic conditions of the southern territory ended in a fresh failure, triggering some deliberation on the part of Spain over the defence of its colonial interests in the New World, given the new reality that had taken shape.

Map showing all the coast of the Kingdom of Chile, with its principal Ports and Islands, highlighting those of the Chiloé Archipelago and the two of Juan Fernández, 1789. Collection: General Archive of the Indies, Spain.
In response to this threat, in 1580 the South Sea Armada was created, a war fleet of varying size charged with transporting shipments of silver, other riches, and merchandise between Arica, Callao and Panama, and with patrolling the Pacific coastline in anticipation of enemy squadrons successfully navigating the Strait of Magellan or Cape Horn. Since the large area that needed protection meant that there were never quite enough material, financial or human resources, the armada did not turn out to be the most effective solution to protecting the security of the American treasure. Spain’s colonial authorities therefore retained this naval power, while simultaneously establishing strategic points that needed fortifying to keep their American riches out of the hands of their enemies.

As a criterium to establish a system of coastal bastions, an enemy fleet that managed to get navigate the interoceanic crossing would enter the Pacific in very bad conditions, in urgent need of finding a tranquil spot with plenty of sustenance where they could repair the ships and the crew could regain their health and energy. The place chosen to erect the first fortification was the estuary of the River Valdivia. This was due to its relative equidistance between the Kingdom of Chile and the southern seas; the setting that offered conditions capable of sustaining an important military and civil contingent; and, in particular, because in 1643 Hendrick Brower’s expedition came very close to establishing a colony there and forming an alliance with Mapuche communities, which would have posed a threat to Hispanic control over the interoceanic passage.

Following instructions from Philip IV to repopulate and fortify Valdivia, the Viceroy of Peru, first Marquis of Mancera, organized a fleet of seventeen galleons and 1,800 men stocked with all the supplies, materials, and provisions necessary to carry out this mission.

The jewel in Spain’s American crown was the enormous mining centre of Potosí, located in the south of modern-day Bolivia. Discovered in 1545, for over 200 years it provided Spain with a quantity of silver so abundant it led to the expression “to be worth a Potosí” being coined. Along with the wealth that contributed to the empire, the exploitation of the Potosí mineral determined the economic and social organisation of the Viceroyalty of Peru, including territories now part of the modern-day republics of Ecuador, Argentina and Chile. Transporting these riches to the Spain also required coordination of resources and efforts. The silver output was sent in mule caravans from the plateau of Potosí to the port in Arica, where it was loaded onto ships and escorted by the South Sea Armada. First it headed to Callao in Peru to remove the wealth destined for financing the Viceregal administration, and then on to Panama, from where it continued via land to Portobelo, there to be re-embarked to Havana. Once there it was added to the Mexican treasure which had been sent from Veracruz, and then the whole consignment would cross the Atlantic and end the voyage in Seville.

The circulation of these riches around the South Sea was an incentive for Spain’s enemies, giving them the opportunity to seize part of the American treasure by sending pirate expeditions to ambush the cargo ships. The imperial administration trusted that the lack of information on how to navigate the Strait of Magellan was an obstacle any enemy fleet would find nigh on impossible to overcome, meaning they considered the Pacific a secure ocean. In 1578, however, the English privateer Francis Drake managed to gain access to the Strait and accumulate considerable spoils from the Chilean and Peruvian coasts. Henceforth, English and Dutch expeditions challenged Spain’s exclusive control over the South Sea.
Mariano de Pusterla, Plan of Niebla Castle in the port of Valdivia approved by His Majesty on the 6th of March, 1761... Collection: National Historic Archive of Chile.

Mariano de Pusterla, Plan of Amargos Castle in the port of Valdivia, 1785. Collection: National Historic Archive of Chile.
Map of Corral Bay, at the mouth of the river Valdivia, 1774. Collection: General Archive of the Indies, Spain.

Ground plan of Callao with its new fortification, 1641. Collection: General Archive of the Indies, Spain.
The expedition reached its destination in February 1645. In command was Sebastián Antonio de Toledo, son of the Viceroy, while the Portuguese engineer Constantino Vasconcelos had a hand in the project’s design and the works’ execution.

The fort system of Valdivia, which would come to be known as the “Antemural of the Pacific”, consisted of a system of artillery castles, which protected enemy ships from entering the mouth of the river by engaging in heavy crossfire. In the middle of the estuary, on Constantino Island – or Mancera Island, as it subsequently came to be called – San Pedro de Alcántara castle was built, equipped with seventeen canons; towards the south, in Corral Bay, San Sebastián castle was built, equipped with twenty-one canons; and towards the north, on La Punta de Niebla, the de la Limpia Concepción castle, with seventeen canons, and San Luis de Alba castle in Amargos. Fourteen kilometres upstream, in the same place as where it was first founded, the city of Valdivia was rebuilt protected by a garrison, walls and ten batteries.

In contrast to the resources and efforts put into creating and maintaining the Valdivian fort system, the defence of Lima was not given by colonial authorities the attention its political and economic importance would seem to make it worthy of. Despite the Viceregal capital being seriously threatened by the Dutch (led by Joris van Spilbergen) in July 1615 and by Jacques L’Hermite in May 1624, the city was not walled until 1687. The fortresses protecting the port of Callao came later still, with the construction of the castles Real Felipe, San Rafael, and San Miguel only beginning in 1746 after an earthquake demolished a significant section of Lima’s wall. Despite this wall being rebuilt swiftly and efficiently, the creation of a fort system to protect the main port of the Viceroyalty demonstrates a change in the criteria for the defence of the kingdom: an acknowledgement that the South Sea Armada was not in a fit state to monitor all the pirate raids that might take place in the Pacific, just as it would be difficult for it to emerge unscathed from a confrontation with a war fleet sent by an enemy power. As such, concentrating resources on erecting coastal fortifications was the most efficient response.
Panama was of vital importance for the functioning of the Spanish empire in the 16th and 17th centuries. This was not only because it was through this territory that goods circulated between Spain's possessions in the South American Pacific and the mother country, but also because it was here that a significant portion of the property rights taxed along this circuit was extracted, and here, too, that the flow of wealth according to imperial needs, military situations and strategic projections was regulated. Founded early on, the city of Panama (1519) on the Pacific coast and Nombre de Dios (1517) on the Caribbean fulfilled the function of connecting both sides of Terra Firme, as well as allowing the terrestrial transport of wealth arriving in the Caribbean from Peru en route to Spain. Life in both settlements was difficult, due to the adverse climactic and environmental conditions where they were founded as well as the permanent threat of enemy attacks aimed at seizing the treasure circulating in its docks and storehouses. This led to Nombre de Dios being abandoned in 1597 and replaced by the founding of Portobelo, in a bay that was much wider, although constantly under threat from pirates and corsairs. Subjected to similar rigours, Panama (which had been the point from where conquest expeditions set off towards Peru, New Granada and Venezuela) was sacked and destroyed in 1671 by the privateer Henry Morgan and rebuilt two years later, eight kilometres to the south-east.

For its defence, Portobelo had the Santiago fortress by the port, with the San Felipe castle constructed in 1626 on the opposite bank of the wide bay it was in, where canon batteries were erected with the aim of subjecting to crossfire any attempt at an attack by sea. The new foundation of Panama, meanwhile, having been established on a cliff looking out over a peninsula, had only thick walls upon which batteries were deployed pointing towards the only possible sources of attack, while inside were the royal customs. The Chagres River, meanwhile, was protected by San Lorenzo castle at its mouth, and by Gatún Castle, at the point where it met the lake of the same name. Halfway through the 18th century, and as a consequence of the liberalisation of colonial trade, Panama lost the importance it had had during the reign of Spain's Hapsburg monarchs and its defensive system fell into disrepair.
Another place in the American Pacific under permanent threat of enemy fleets and pirate raids was the port of Acapulco, in New Spain. Although not linked to the transport of wealth from the New World to the Peninsula, it was the point of departure and arrival for the Manila Galleon, the fleet via which the lucrative trade between Mexico and the Philippines took place. Although the Mexican coasts had served since early on as a refuge for many pirates menacing the South Sea coasts during the 16th century, the arrival of the Dutch armada of Joris Van Spilbergen in 1615 moved the Viceroy Diego Fernández de Córdoba to order the construction of the San Diego Fort. Designed by the Dutch engineer Adrian Boot, this fort was located deep in the bay and furnished with five bulwarks, garrisons, and a weapons and ammunition room, with storehouses to resist prolonged sieges and sufficient fire power to protect the port, the neighbouring village, and its population.
V. A WELLSPRING OF RICHES
The occupation of the New World meant Spain needed considerable resources in order to finance the military defence system, as well to attract Peninsular settlers from the mother country. These riches in the service of the empire had to be provided by the new territories and their original inhabitants, and so the first explorers and conquistadors focussed their interest on the search for precious metals. Although initially the gold items obtained from the indigenous people captured the attention of the Europeans, in order to consolidate control of the American territories it was necessary to find veins, develop mining on a large scale, and then to organise the various colonial societies around the exploitation and transportation of these riches.
EL CERRO RICO – THE RICH MOUNTAIN

In the southern region of the Americas, the discovery of silver deposits in Potosí in 1545 allowed for the funding of the Viceroyship of Peru’s administrative organisation, for its defence, and in particular for the regular dispatching to the mother country of surplus metals earmarked for sustaining imperial policy and stimulating the Spanish economy. All the resources that Peruvian society and the neighbouring regions were able to offer were made available for the functioning of this system.

In 1575, after a comprehensive visit around the areas of his jurisdiction, the Viceroy Francisco Álvarez de Toledo implemented his famous decrees or ordenanzas, which jointly dealt with the demands of the encomenderos (colonists granted control of land and Indian workers), the need to limit abuse of the indigenous people, and to provide the mine with workers. Without resolving the first two matters, the lack of labour was addressed by using the old mita system, which the Inca had established and which, adapted to the colonial system, meant that each indigenous community had to provide a certain number of workers to the mine owners every year. While the formula resolved the problem of production, it perpetuated the exploitation of the indigenous people since the harsh working conditions meant the mita was tantamount to a death sentence.

Mountain of Potosí. In Pedro Cieza de León, Parte primera de la Crónica del Perú. Que trata a demarcación de sus provincias... [first part of the Chronicle of Peru. Which deals with the demarcation of its provinces...], Seville, 1553. Collection: National Library of Spain.
Llama caravan loaded with silver from the mines of Potosí in Perú. Engraving by Theodor de Bry, IV. Indícis Ovibus... Collection: Library of Congress, United States.

Just as local people found themselves at the service of the silver mines, so regional economies also directed their resources towards supporting the functioning of the Potosí centre. Peru’s coastal and mountain regions, for instance, provided food and liquor to support the enormous urban agglomeration which grew up around Cerro Rico; the mules used in extracting and processing work were reared in the provinces of Salta and Tucumán; while ropes were sent from Chile to be used in mining work and to make the rigging of ships, which, in turn, were made in Guayaquil, Ecuador, to transport the precious cargo to Panama.

Another considerable problem to do with silver production was the processing of the material extracted from the mines in order to turn it into refined silver. Initially, the method employed was very rudimentary, consisting of smelting the mineral in traditional ovens and separating the slag through flotation. This meant a high consumption of plant-based fuel and scant exploitation of other minerals contained in the extracted material. This procedure was replaced by the use of mercury, also known as quicksilver, which was mixed with the ground silver and spread onto a patio, or shallow-walled, open enclosure where it was left for two months. The resulting amalgam was then washed and melted in an oven, thus obtaining a higher quality silver, as well as some of the mercury, which could be re-used.
Perspective and demarcation of the territory of the City of Truxillo [Trujillo], Peru, seen from the anchorages of Malabrego, Guanchaco, Guanape and Santa..., 1760. Collection: General Archive of the Indies, Spain.
THE INDISPENSABLE MINERAL

The amalgam method using mercury was successfully tested in New Spain in 1554, taken to Peru in 1572 by Pedro Fernández de Velasco and perfected by the cleric Álvaro Alonso Barba. Appointed as a parish priest in the mines of Lípez in 1590, Barba studied the subsoil in Upper Peru and experimented with various ways of extracting silver. These studies led him to develop the “pan process” (also known in English as “pan amalgamation”), so-called because it used copper vessels or pans in which the mineral was mixed with salt, copper sulphate and mercury, which after being melted resulted in very pure silver. He published his findings in a book entitled Arte de los Metales (The Art of Metals), which the Council of the Indies had printed in 1640 and which continued to influence Hispanic colonial metallurgy until the last decade of the 18th century.

The metallurgical method made the provision of mercury a matter of great importance for the silver mining industry, and thus also for the health of the imperial treasure. Imports of the element from deposits in Almadén in Spain and Idria (now Idrija), in what is now Slovenia, were insufficient to satisfy the requirements of Peruvian production and involved high costs. But the solution lay nearby. In the central sierra of Peru, some 2,000 kilometres north of Potosí, was Huancavelica, a deposit of mercury the Inca had used to treat gold and make paints. The Spanish found out about it in 1566 and, five years later, dug extensive tunnels there, eventually creating a city in a steep mountain valley.
Álvaro Alonso Barba, *Arte de los metales, en que se enseña el verdadero beneficio de los de oro, y plata por azogue: el modo de fundirlos todos y como se han de refinar, y apartar unos de otros* (The art of metals, in which the reliable processing of those of gold, and silver by way of mercury, is taught: the method of smelting them all and how to refine them, and separate some from others) Madrid [1729]. Collection: National Library of Chile.

Mine furnace, La Jarilla (Chile), 1764. Collection: National Historic Archive of Chile.

Plate that explains the new amalgamation method using mercury, 1789. Collection: General Archive of the Indies, Spain.
THE DECLINE OF MINING AND EMPIRE

Potosí’s boom lasted until the first half of the 18th century, when the purest seams began to be exhausted, leading to a decline in production. A few decades later, the town of Huancavelica went through a similar decline, not through being exhausted as such, but rather due to the numerous galleries drilled into the hillside causing landslides, floods, accidents and, ultimately, leading to the infrastructure deteriorating and becoming unusable.

Nevertheless, there was no cessation in the American contribution to imperial wealth, and new deposits began to be exploited over the course of the 18th century, while others that were already known about increased production. One new deposit led to the mine in Hualgayoc, located in the northern Peruvian sierra in the district of Chota, Cajamarca province. Discovered in 1771, it made a significant contribution to the viceregal coffers thanks to the quality of the seams found there. In the second case, at the other extreme of the Viceregal district in the desert province of Tarapacá, is the town of Huantajaya, known about since pre-Hispanic times but only intensively exploited since 1746; or, similarly, the mine at Cerro Pasco, also in the sierra of Cajamarca, which began to be worked on a large scale from 1760 onwards. With regards to the mercury, although supplies depended largely on what little Huancavelica was able to provide and on what was sent from Spain, small quantities did arrive from Punitaqui and Andacollo, Chilean deposits also known for their production of copper, silver and gold.
View of the famous mine at Huantajaya, 1807. Collection: General Archive of the Indies, Spain.

Plan of the mercury mine at la Jarilla (Chile), 1783. Collection: General Archive of the Indies, Spain.
VI.
PORTUGAL AND SPAIN’S
COLONIAL EXPERIENCES
IN ASIA
The aim of reaching the Maluku Islands and thus gaining access to the much-prized spices there was what lay behind the projects of maritime expansion undertaken by Portugal and Spain. The first project began to reach completion when Vasco da Gama reached India in 1497 and, twenty-three years later, Castile also found success with the Magellan-Elcano crossing. After these voyages, both states focused on consolidating their presence in the Far East and in transforming their political and military influence into economic advantage. In order to do this, they put into practice models of colonisation that were different to each other and different, too, to the one Spain was simultaneously imposing on the Americas.
AFTER 80 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE-GATHERING...

As they rounded the Cape of Good Hope in November 1497 and entered the Indian Ocean, Vasco da Gama’s fleet arrived in a world that was practically unknown and quite astonishing. Thirty times larger than the Mediterranean and with unknown winds and tidal systems, this ocean was a vast space of free trade where a huge range of refined cultures existed. Goods were exchanged here from the Persian empire, the Arab world, China, Japan, the islands of the eastern Pacific, the Indian subcontinent – even Europe. This unique territory was the source of the much-prized Asian spices, which until then had reached the Old World via routes controlled by Venetian and Genoese merchants through Constantinople and Alexandria.

On the east coast of Africa, Vasco da Gama’s fleet visited city-states that anticipated the complex scenario the Portuguese would find in India. Hindus and Muslims alternated trade and political rule in a harmony the European explorers struggled to comprehend, especially because they assumed the Indians were practising a forgotten branch of Christianity. Continuing their holy war against Islam, the Portuguese attacked the Muslims wherever they came across them, whether on land or at sea. In the African port of Malindi, perhaps to rid themselves of such hot-headed visitors, the local ruler gave them a ship’s pilot to take them to the other side of the Indian Ocean, since at that point the Portuguese sailors had no understanding of the behaviour of monsoon winds.
And so, on the 20th of May 1498, concluding the project began by Prince Henry the Navigator 80 years earlier, the three ships captained by Vasco da Gama reached India, close to the prosperous city of Calicut on the Malabar Coast. There they established tense relations with the Zamorin or local governor, complicated by the ill-mannered attitude of the Portuguese, the modest gifts they brought with them, and the machinations of the Muslim merchants. Despite these difficulties, Vasco da Gama managed to acquire a good quantity of spices and jewels with which to demonstrate back in Lisbon the success of his mission and the magnificent future awaiting the Portuguese kingdom. He left behind a group of crew members tasked with setting up a trading station, preparing new shipments of products, negotiating a trade deal, and securing the Portuguese presence in India.
RADE, COLONIZE AND CONQUER

After a rough voyage the caravel Bérrio returned to Lisbon on the 10th of July 1499, provoking jubilation amongst the population and King Manuel I, who sent emissaries to Spain and the Vatican and summoned the emissaries from abroad to tell of the arrival of their ships to India, to give an account of the riches discovered, and to announce the existence of Christian realms in the East. This was because the Portuguese still had not understood that Hinduism was a completely different religion to that which they practised.

Eager to swiftly harvest the economic fruits of this maritime feat, the monarch dispatched a new expedition to India led by Pedro Alvarez Cabral, famous for having reached the coast of Brazil in April 1500. Once in Calicut, the commander failed to reach a trade agreement with the Zamorin and, after some violent episodes, the Portuguese set up trading stations in Cochin and Cannanore, cities hostile to Calicut. A new expedition led by Vasco da Gama, which arrived in October 1502, virtually brought the relationship with the Indians to a state of war when they realised their religion was not a branch of Christianity. Da Gama’s fleet had to turn tail after finding out that the Islamic empires of Egypt and Turkey had dispatched a joint military and naval force to expel the Portuguese from the Indian Ocean.

With the aim of confronting this Muslim alliance against him and cementing a colonial space in the Indian subcontinent, King Manuel organised an armada of 21 ships and 1,500 men, which set sail from Lisbon on the 27th of February 1505, led by the nobleman Francisco de Almeida, whom he also designated Viceroy of India. Along with this formidable force, Almeida took with him precise instructions for achieving Portugal’s strategic aims in the East: to quash the intervention of its most powerful enemies (the Mameluke sultans of Egypt and the Ottoman sultans of Turkey) by blocking access from the Red Sea by capturing the fortress of Aden, and by occupying Hormuz Island and building a citadel to control the entrance from the Persian Gulf. He had to suppress once and for all the city of Calicut and extend the Portuguese presence as far as Malacca on the Malay Peninsula, a hub of commercial exchange between India, China and the south-east of Asia.


Midway through 1509, Portugal’s strategic objectives in the East had still not been attained. In despair after the death of his son in combat against a Mameluke fleet, the Viceroy Almeida was replaced by Alfonso de Albuquerque. He too failed in his attempt to occupy Aden and Hormuz Island and to quash Calicut, although in November 1509 he did conquer Goa, which from that point on would be the capital of Portuguese India. Two years later he took control of Malacca, although the significant spoils of war seized and the direct access to spices did not excuse him from having failed to carry out the monarch’s instructions.

The trading post in Malacca served as a starting point for Portuguese expansion throughout the rest of Asia, as good relations with Chinese merchants facilitated missions being sent to Pegu (now Bago in Myanmar) and Siam (modern-day Thailand). In November 1512 Francisco Serrao and Antonio de Abreu reached the Maluku Islands (Indonesia), formed an alliance with the Sultan of Ternate, and established a trading station in Tidore. In January 1513, Jorge Alvares
and Rafael Perestrelo arrived in the south of China from Pegu and reached an agreement to trade with the merchants of Canton. In 1543, Portuguese traders reached the south of Japan and were authorised to bring Chinese products into Nagasaki.

The concession was broadened in 1571 to include the sale of firearms. The unification of the kingdoms of Spain and Portugal by Philip II in 1580 signalled the decline of the Portuguese colonial empire in the East. By becoming involved in the Austrian kings’ foreign policy, Portugal made some very powerful enemies, who took advantage of the fragile defences of its Asian enclaves. The mighty armadas of the Low Countries and England thus ended up occupying almost all of Portugal’s possessions in Asia. When it regained its independence in 1640, Portugal’s only remaining bases were those in Goa (India), Macao (China) and East Timor (in the Indonesian archipelago), which it retained until well into the 20th century.
Castile carefully observed how Portugal established itself in Asia, since it was of the view that the Spice Islands were within the territory assigned it by the Treaty of Tordesillas, meaning that backing Magellan’s voyage was an exercise of sovereignty. After failing to impose this position on astronomical or geographical grounds, and to avoid Portugal’s effective position in the Maluku Islands, Spain gave up its pretensions and, in 1529, signed the Treaty of Zaragoza, which left under its influence a large part of the Island of Borneo, New Guinea, and what would later come to be known as the Philippine archipelago.

This group of islands constituted an attractive marketplace, worthy of Spain’s efforts to establish itself there and colonize them. Shipments from China, Japan, Malaysia, Cambodia, and Thailand all converged there. But navigating to reach them was extremely challenging, as demonstrated by the expeditions of García de Loaisa, which set sail from Spain in 1525, and that of Álvaro de Saavedra, which left New Spain in 1527. In October 1542 a fleet of six ships managed to reach the Philippines from Mexico, captained by Ruy López de Villalobos, but the hostility of the indigenous people and the environment took its toll on the crew, forcing the survivors to take refuge in the Portuguese settlements in the Maluku Islands.

Until that point, Spain’s plan at penetrating the region was similar to Portugal’s, that is, merchant fleets were dispatched and trading stations established in precise locations, with the aim of streamlining exchange during the ships’ stay. A new strategy was introduced in September 1564 when the Augustinian friar Andrés de Urdaneta convinced the Viceroy of New Spain, Luis de Velasco, to look for an unobstructed route between Mexico and Southeast Asia in order to provide military backing for a settlement and then begin colonization and evangelization of the neighbouring territory. The fleet of five ships commanded by Miguel López de Legazpi managed to cross the Philippine archipelago, dispatch a return boat to Mexico, establish relations with a few tribes, and found a colony in Cebu.

Description of the Port of the Spanish on Isla Hermosa [Spanish Formosa, now Taiwan], 1626. Collection: General Archive of the Indies, Spain.
Thanks to the reinforcements that arrived from Mexico, explorations in the Philippine archipelago continued. The Spanish maintained friendly relationships with some local rulers, while fighting the Muslims and the Portuguese they came across along the way. On the island of Luzon, they captured an Islamic fort and persuaded the Rajahs in the region to start trading and to permit the evangelization of the native population. This agreement led to Manila being founded in June 1571, the centre of the Spanish presence in the Philippines.
Manila and the surrounding territory had a very different development to that experienced by Spain’s colonies in America. Initially, some Spanish American institutions were imposed on the indigenous population, such as the encomienda system and mercedes or land grants, with the aim of obtaining food and plots of land for cultivation and animal grazing. But this model was not viable at the time because the considerable Muslim presence on the island of Mindanao meant there was essentially a permanent state of war, particularly since one of the aims of the Spanish colony here was to act as the central hub for Christian evangelism.

Life in Manila was based on trade as it was here that products from all over Southeast Asia arrived, such as silk, porcelain, jewels and spices. There were in fact already Chinese and Japanese settlements that combined exchange of these goods with piracy. The Spanish colonists integrated into this circuit, adding silver from New Spain, which arrived annually in the vessels coming from Acapulco. Other American products prized in Asia included corn, wheat, cotton, cocoa and tobacco.
Illustration and map of the river and Province of Cagayan. Made by Captain Don Juan Luis de Acosta, which shows in figures the new church and stronghold made at the new entrance to said province, 1719. Collection: General Archive of the Indies, Spain.
AT A DEMOGRAPHIC, CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS DISADVANTAGE

Trade in Manila moved at a far more dynamic pace than that with which Spanish and Mexican colonists settled here. As a result, they were soon surpassed in number by the Chinese and the Japanese, as well as by native inhabitants and others from elsewhere, who arrived in the city to take advantage of the opportunities offered by its economic activity. This demographic disadvantage persuaded Spanish residents to focus on an exclusive area of the city, protected firstly by walls, and secondly by canons.

Unlike in the Americas, evangelization in the Philippines was determined by the Islamic presence in the large area made up of the islands of Mindanao, Jolo and the Marianas, where the presence of Catholic missionaries was violently rejected. In other parts of the archipelago, friars from different religious orders were sent out. Without the support of nearby settlements or Hispanic authorities to protect them, the preachers established themselves in local communities to attract them to Christianity. As they were effectively the only Western settlers, these priests combined their religious ministry with educational, political, and administrative tasks.
EN ROUTE TO THE GLOBAL VILLAGE

From 1565 and every year for 200 years, a fleet crossed the South Sea completing the round-trip from Mexico and the Philippines. Known as the Manila Galleon, this route transported products from one side of the Pacific Ocean to the other and connected the economies of Asia and Europe via the ports of New Spain and the Caribbean, thus establishing the foundations of world trade. The advances made in navigation during the 18th century made the Strait of Magellan route more secure and enabled a direct connection between Asian and European ports; along with the expansion to the East of the British Empire, which used the Cape of Good Hope route, this ultimately eclipsed the Manila galleon’s commercial influence on global trade.
CLOSING REMARKS

The Magallanes-Elcano voyage represents a landmark in the history of humanity and its implications become increasingly apparent over the course of time. In the immediate term, it demonstrated that the Earth was round, gave an approximate idea of its true size, added the existence of the Pacific Ocean to the Western collective imagination, and dismissed forever the notion of the existence of mythological places and creatures, given that all four corners of the globe were now known to be inhabited by human beings – with broad cultural differences amongst them, but essentially all the same. The discovery of the interoceanic passage then opened up a new era of competition for control of global trade routes, in which various nations had their own periods of splendour and decline, met in battle with great sacrifices on all sides, and, perhaps inadvertently, exchanged and absorbed cultural elements from one another.

The culmination of the oceanic project can be considered one of humankind’s great achievements because it brought together many of the principal scientific advances of the age as applied to navigation, advances that came from diverse cultures, many of which were unrelenting enemies. It is also the result, however, of specific efforts which deserve to be remembered. The accumulation and systematisation of knowledge was an achievement born of the Portuguese naval tradition, established by Prince Henry the Navigator at the start of the 15th century, and which it patiently put into practice via numerous voyages of maritime exploration, taking note of each advance and learning from each failure, until achieving the aim of reaching India by sailing around the African continent. The first circumnavigation of the world completed by the Nao Victoria can be credited to the crown of Castile which, through the dynasties of Trastámara and Austria, supported the geo-strategic project of reaching the Far East by sailing west, a feat which brought together the skill of its pilots, the wisdom of its cosmographers, the vision of its advisors, and the will of its rulers.

Difficult to rank in order, these factors all came together in this venture that expanded the borders of the known world and changed the history of humanity forever. This as-yet unfinished process, which today we call globalization, closely resembles the crossing made by the Nao Victoria, the first ship to complete a full circumnavigation of the Earth: identities and cultures from many different places all came together while manning the same ship, each renouncing their own personal interests to surpass the limits of geography, a feat that nudged humanity towards conceiving of itself as one.
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