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Magellan's voyage—Official accounts by Peter Martyr

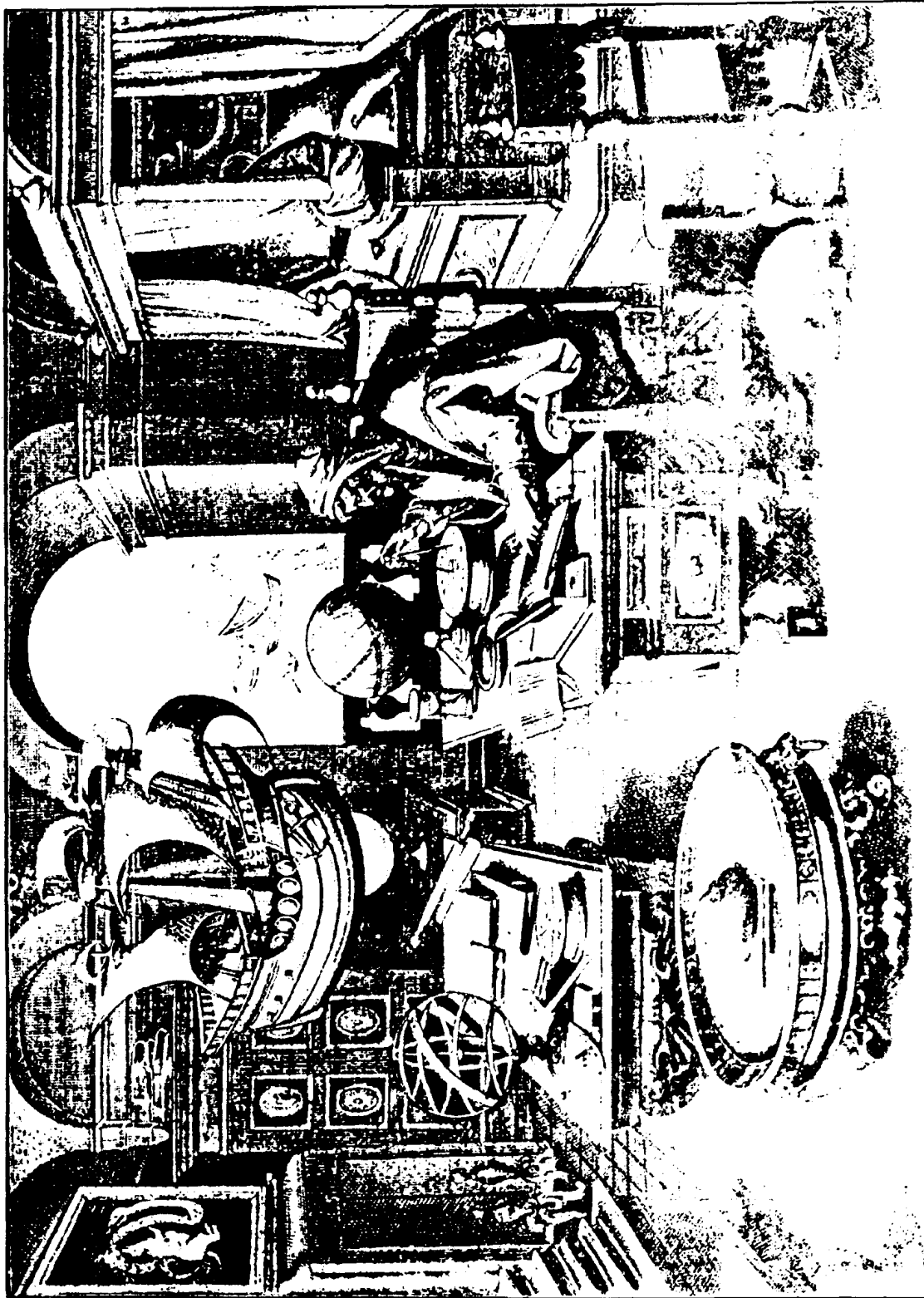
*Sources: Pietro Martire d'Anghiera [1455-1526], or rather Peter Martyr of Anghiera, was an Italian priest and scholar in the retinue of Emperor Charles V. He wrote an account of Magellan's voyage similar to that of Maximilian Transylvanus. His good friend, Pope Adrian VI, had requested a copy for publication. However, the Pope died before the report arrived at Rome in 1523 and this original was lost in the sack of Rome.¹ Hence, Peter Martyr had only his draft copy left. However, for years, he had in fact been compiling a major history of the period of European discoveries and keeping notes. This history was published in a series of eight books, each covering one decade. This voluminous work is entitled: **DE ORBE NOVO** or *The New World*. It was printed partly during his lifetime, and partly after his death which occurred at Granada in 1526. An English translation of the first three Decades was made by Richard Eden (London, 1555). Although a translation of this Latin text was also made in modern English by Francis A. MacNutt in 1912, I have preferred to make my own translation into English from a more scholarly translation into modern French made by Paul Gaffarel and printed in Paris in 1907. In addition, one short letter by Peter Martyr has been reproduced from his **Opus epistolarum**.*

FIFTH DECADE, CHAPTER VII

To His Holiness Adrian about the voyage round the world.

All the above stories had been written and were ready in my office, but secretaries were not available [to transcribe them], because we were separated by vast distances and the communications were not secure.

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- 1 Ed. note: Giovanni Battista Ramusio [1485-1557], who published Transylvanus' letter in Vol. I of his **Delle navigationi et viaggi** in 1550, tells us the following: "The voyage was described in minute details by Peter Martyr, who belonged to the Council of the Indies of His Majesty the Emperor, and to whom was entrusted the duty of writing this history; and by him were examined all those who remained alive of that expedition, and who reached Seville in the year 1522. However, as it was sent to be printed in Rome, it was lost in the miserable sack of that city; and its present whereabouts are unknown. And he who saw it, and read it, bears testimony to the same."



A 16th-century cosmographer at work in his study. Peter Martyr lived in similar quarters while writing his *Decades* entitled "De orbe novo". (From a drawing by J. Stradan, 1520. BN Paris)

Suddenly the ocean brings forth new marvels and recent miracles. I will therefore finish this work with two appendices, that will be more important than all that preceded them. Firstly, I will speak about the voyage around the world, and the discovery of the islands that produce the spices; it is an extraordinary event that is hard to believe...

It was in Barcelona, when the Emperor was presiding over the parliament of Cataluña, and that Your Holiness was in charge of our imperial Council of the Indies¹ that, You will recall, there was given to the Portuguese Fernão Magalhães, who had abandoned the service of Portugal, the mission to visit the Moluccan Archipelago, where the spices grow. Magellan had indeed resided for seven years in Cochín, Cananor, Calicut, in Chersonesia which is also called Malacca, and he knew the position of those islands.² By sea, they are located not too far from Chersonesia, i.e. Malacca, and the other markets. Our Council, then chaired by Your Holiness, therefore entrusted this mission to Magellan, who left [Sanlúcar de] Barrameda, the port in the mouth of the Guadalquivir, on 20th of September 1519. He led a fleet of five ships: the flagship was called **Trinidad**, and the others **San Antonio**, **Victoria**, **Concepción**, and **Santiago**. They were manned with 237 men.³ Only two of those ships ever returned to Spain. One of them, after having abandoned the flagship, returned without having done anything.⁴ The second one⁵, three years after having left Spain (it was, indeed, on 6 September 1522 that she returned to her port of departure), re-appeared loaded with precious wood and spices. As for the crew, few of them survived and the admiral himself perished in one of the islands of the archipelago, at Mactán, killed by the islanders. We will give an account of this below. There exists between Spaniards and Portuguese an ingrained hatred. Magellan, under various pretexts he fomented himself, had on many occasions

1 Ed. note: The future Pope Adrian VI was born Adrian Dedel in the Low Countries, and was nicknamed Floriszoon. When he was dean of the University of Louvain, he became the tutor of Prince Charles, the future Charles V. In the summer of 1519, when he met Magellan, he was Cardinal of Tortosa, a member of the Council, but not yet its President (who was Bishop Fonseca of Burgos). Adrian later became Pope for only one year (1522-1523).

2 Ed. note: See Doc. 1519D.

3 Ed. note: As we have seen in previous documents, the planned complement may have been 237 or so men, but there were so many supernumeraries, including Pigafetta, that the final total on board the five ships numbered about 280 men.

4 Ed. note: The **San Antonio** deserted the expedition in the Strait of Magellan and arrived back in Spain on May 6, 1521. Since the **Santiago** was shipwrecked in the Strait, Magellan had only three ships when he crossed the Pacific.

5 Ed. note: The **Victoria**.

some Spaniards slain, because they refused to obey him. I will mention it at the appropriate place. For now, I will concentrate on the narrative of the voyage.

First, they touched at the Fortunate Islands¹, then they came in sight of the Gorgades Archipelago, which their present owner, the King of Portugal, call the Cape Verde Islands. They then steered to the right [i.e. westward], turning their back to our continent, towards this great promontory that the Spaniards call the Cape of St. Augustine, and the Portuguese soon after called Cape of St. Mary. This promontory is situated at 5 degrees beyond the equinoctial line. They then proceeded southward as far as the gulf where, as I have narrated in a previous decade, Captain Solis, who had visited these shores with our fleet, was killed by the natives with some of his companions and eaten by them.² This gulf is located at 38° south of the equinoctial line. It has been baptized St. Mary's Bay; sometimes it is simply called the Bay.

Some men sent by Magellan went up the river that empties into this gulf. They had with them one of the ships and one boat. They saw three half-wild men, all naked, who exceeded the normal height of men by two cubits³. One of them, trusting us, boarded the boat. Our Spaniards, treated him well, thinking that they would thus attract his companions towards the fleet. He was therefore given some drink, food, clothing, and then let go, but he was never seen again, nor any of his people. However, some trees were discovered that had been marked with our axes, and a cross had been erected on top of another tree, but nowhere [else] was there a sign of our countrymen. This river is gigantic. Marvellous things are being said about it, just like this Marañon, located in Paria to the north, about which I have already spoken.⁴ They went up this river for about 20 leagues, and there were still 17 leagues from shore to shore. Its mouth is huge, it is true that many other rivers come to augment its volume. Far off shore, the water is still fresh.

When the Spaniards left this gulf, they found, a few degrees more to the south, a marked curving of the continent westward, and another great gulf they named St. Julian. There was in this gulf a secure port. The admiral ordered the ships to anchor there. At that time, the sun was on the way towards us and was leaving those lands. The cold became very intense when the sun crossed the constellation of the Capricorn; that

1 Ed. note: Not to be confused with the Unfortunate Islands in the Pacific, the Fortunate Islands are the Canary Islands in the Atlantic.

2 Ed. note: Three years earlier, Juan de Solis and 60 of his men had stepped ashore after entering Rio de la Plata. They were captured by the Querandi Indians who used a terrible weapon, later called "bolas" by the Spanish. Some of them were roasted and eaten in full view of those who had remained aboard ship.

3 Ed. note: This is what Gaffarel says in French, but Torres Asensio has said in Spanish the equivalent of "two palms".

4 Ed. note: He means the Amazon River. Paria is probably a transcription error for Darien.

is what happens at home when it is in the middle of the constellation of Libra. In this port, and for more than five months in a row, at the time we enjoyed summer, our men were delayed by the cold and by storms inside huts and shelters they had built upon the shore. It was, indeed, in April when they entered this port and they did not come out of it until September 9th.¹

It was also during their stay there that Magellan used severity against Captain Cartagena.² He was a confidant of the Bishop [Fonseca] of Burgos who, by royal assent, had been given to Magellan as a colleague and named second leader of the expedition. Under the pretext that he had conspired against him to kill him, Magellan put him ashore, along with a priest³, and gave to both of them⁴ only a little bread and only one sword. He would have liked nothing better than to punish with death the mere thought they had had of killing him, but he feared the grudge of the Spaniards already excited against him, and did not dare undertake this responsibility. This deed has been reported in various ways; for all the other events the accounts are in agreement. According to some, Magellan acted properly in doing that; he did not, according to some others, and, if he showed such severity, it was because of old hatreds that were taking roots between the Spaniards and the Portuguese.

They were able, during this stay, to examine the huts of the natives. They are savages, without strength.⁵ They have only pelts for clothing. They are nomads, without a fixed residence, without any laws; very high in size. They called them Patagons.⁶

They left the port of St. Julian at the time the sun was coming back to the horizon; it was on September 9, 1521.⁷ At first, the direction of the antarctic pole was taken, and that for another 14 degrees.

I must digress once more. When Magellan was only a boy, he had vaguely heard some Portuguese speak about the existence in those seas of a strait, but the entrance was difficult to find, so that he did not know where to turn. Pure chance gave him what reasoning could not. A storm arose that was so terrible that it lifted one of the ships⁸ and threw it whole upon the rocks in the vicinity. The crew was saved, but the ship was broken up into pieces by the waves. Here was already one of the five ships in the fleet lost. At that time, on the left, there was the immensity of the sea, and on the right, there were mountains covered with snow. One of the ships, whose draft was smaller and that was looking for a harbor, was pushed by the fury of the waves very near the coast. Those

1 Ed. note: Torres Asensio has translated "24 August" thus correcting Martyr to agree with Alvo's logbook. Apparently, the 9th day of the kalends of September is in fact 21 August.

2 Ed. note: The captain of the **San Antonio**.

3 Ed. note: Father Bernard Calmette, N° 104 on my crew list, who was a Frenchman.

4 Ed. note: "To each of them", translates Torres Asensio.

5 Ed. note: This word "strength", or "force", can mean either physical body strength, or else arms, army, or fort.

6 Ed. note: The Patagonian Indians wore bits of *guanaco* pelts around their feet in winter. That is why they were called "pata cão" or "dog foot" by the Portuguese among the sailors.

7 Ed. note: The exact date, as I have said above, was probably 24 August.

8 Ed. note: The **Santiago**, a small ship of 75-ton burthen.



A 16th-century map of the Strait of Magellan, looking south. At the entrance of the strait (on the left) is Cape of the Virgins, and Cape Deseado, now called Cape Pilar, is at the exit (on the right).

on board sighted a narrow passage. They went into it and discovered a gulf 4 leagues in width and 6 leagues in length, in accordance with Spanish measures. The ship doubled back and announced that a passage had been found. I skip over many details; here are the general facts. They pretend that, in places, one could hit the mountains on both sides of the strait with stones from slingshots. The country around there is uninhabited. Upon both shores are found mountains with cedar trees. When they had crossed this first passage, they met with another strait a little wider, but still narrow, then a third one, and a fourth, beyond which another gulf opened up. The same way that on European maps we notice toward the Dardanelles two narrow straits that give access to an inland sea, likewise this strait contains three passages giving access to as many open spaces that are bigger. All those straits are full of small islands; that is why the Spanish were sailing with the fear of hitting reefs. Nevertheless, the sea was everywhere very deep...

In the middle of the strait the Spanish anchored in a sea shaped like a square. They found nothing worthwhile there, but it was there that one of the four ships stayed, the one bearing the name of **San Antonio**. The other ships thought that she would follow, but she stayed behind and turned back. She has been back for a long time and has placed many sad accusations against Magellan. We think that such a disobedience will not remain unpunished. There were then only three ships left to proceed forward. They had gone into the strait on October 21st; they left it on the 5th day of the kalends of December [27 November]. During that whole period, the days had been very long and the nights very short; this is understandable, given the shape of the terrestrial sphere.

[The crossing of the Pacific]

After leaving the strait, the Spanish went into another sea, a vast ocean; it is the ocean that is in opposition to our continent. It communicates with the sea which I have called the South Sea in my **Decades**, and which was seen for the first time by Vasco Nuñez [de Balboa] when he was being led by the sons of Chief Comogro.¹

The Spanish narrate that they sailed for three months and twenty days upon this huge ocean, and during this whole time saw nothing but sky and salt water. They suffered a lot from lack of food and from intense heat. During many long days, they had only a handful of rice to eat, only as much as the hand could hold, without the slightest bit of other food. As for water to drink, it was lacking so much that, in order to cook the rice, they had to add one third sea water and, when they wanted to drink it as is, they had to close the eyes, because it was all green, and to plug their nostrils, as it stank so much. While sailing upon this huge sea in a northwesterly direction, they crossed the equinoctial line for a second time and nearby discovered two uninhabited islands. They named them the Unfortunate Islands, because they were useless and sterile.

They then passed through a multitude of islands which they called the Archipelago, because of their similarity with our Cyclades in the Aegean Sea. They landed upon most of those islands which were separated from one another by narrow distances along a space of 500 leagues. They called them the Islands of Thieves and did not want to retain the native name.² The reason for this is because the islanders, although animated by peaceful intentions towards us, were stealing everything they could lay their hands on. They resembled this race of thieves whom the Italians call *Zingari* and who pretend wrongly that they are Egyptians.³ Among the objects that they stole was a boat that our people had used to go ashore. They had hardly turned their back that they made it disappear, but they were made to bring it back after having lost many of their own people. These islanders are naked and half brute. Among them, there grows a tree that bears cocos.

The largest of their islands is called Burneo.⁴ The Spanish affirm without hesitation that it has a circumference of 254 leagues... Around Burneo the sea is strewn with many small islands; two can be noted: Zubo [i.e. Cebu] and Matan [i.e. Mactan]... Magellan was killed with seven of his companions, and 22 others were wounded. Thus this brave Portuguese had his thirst for spices quenched...

1 Ed. note: Across the Isthmus of Panama in 1513 (See Doc. 1513).

2 Ed. note: The native name was left unrecorded. Martyr, like Transylvanus, has confused the Marianas with the Philippines.

3 Ed. note: The Gypsies are now known to have originated in what is today western India and Pakistan, and migrated to Europe through Asia Minor and perhaps Egypt as well. Since they were first called Egyptians, Gypsies is a contraction of that word in English. By the way, when I last visited Rome in 1990, I was harassed many times by groups of modern Zingari children.

4 Ed. note: Martyr did not obviously respect the chronological order of events, mixing the Philippines with the Ladrones, and now Borneo with the Philippines.

[The Moluccas]

In view of the [Philippine] islands, there were the so-desired Moluccas at some 175 leagues toward the equator, i.e. 10 degrees according to their accounting, but I admit that I do not understand their calculations. The ancient philosophers estimated the degree at 60 Roman miles, and each mile consisted of one thousand paces. The Spanish pretend that one league is equal to 4 miles at sea and only 3 miles ashore. If we accept the way Spanish sailors count, each degree consists of 15 leagues; for them, contrary to current thinking, the degree is 17-1/2 leagues.¹ Let the others figure it out; as for me, I give up.

Let us go back to the Moluccas. The Spanish finally got there. There are five main ones, which are either under or very near the equator. Each one is almost equal in circumference: four, five or at most six leagues. As a result of a quirk of nature, they are all dominated by a high mountain. It is here that the clove tree grows and ripens naturally. On the south [sic] side, five of the Moluccas are enclosed by a large territory called Gilolo.² The clove tree also grows on Gilolo, but it is acidic and half-wild, as it happens with the chestnut and the olive trees when they are not grafted. However, in all the smaller islands, the clove trees are all aromatic. It is interesting to hear the story of how the clove, according to the islanders, get its aromatic quality. They say that every day and three times a day, early in the morning, at noon, and late afternoon, a certain cloud, which they claim is sent from heaven, covers the peaks of the mountains where the clove tree grows. During that time, one cannot see the peaks of the trees, then after a while the cloud disappears. Thus the clove trees, which are trees that look much like the laurel trees, are fertilized by that air; they give as proof the fact that such a cloud never comes down to the lower parts of the island, and also because the clove trees that have been transplanted away from the hills do not grow well and do not give aromatic fruits.

In each one of the Moluccas, there is a plain reserved for the culture of rice. The Spanish stopped at one of the islands. Its king received them in peace and quite honorably. There were then only two ships left, given that they had destroyed the third, because, after the death of the captain and of their companions at the fatal banquet, there were not enough people to manage her. The surviving ships were named **Trinidad** and **Victoria**.

These islanders are almost naked. They use only some small aprons made of tree barks to hide their natures with. The king of this island told them that he had pleasure in welcoming them as guests, because, a few months before that, he had seen in the circle of the moon some strangers coming in by sea, and he declared that they looked exactly like the Spaniards.

Our people say that these islands lie at 5,000 leagues from Hispaniola, i.e. some 20,000 Italian miles. I think that they are mistaken. They report that the islanders are

1 Ed. note: I have corrected Gaffarel here; he wrote 70 instead of 17.

2 Ed. note: Apparently, the more modern word for this island, Halmahera, means great land. Gilolo is east, not south, of the main Moluccas.

happy, although they do not know about our bread, our wine, and have no meat from neither cows nor sheep. They make do with rice, which they cook in a thousand ways. They have another bread, used by the common people, which is made of the marrow, already old, of some [sago?] palms that have fallen by themselves. It happens indeed that, in thick forests where men do not live, tall trees sometimes fall as a result of hurricanes or because their roots can no longer find soil. Indeed, as the trees grow taller, they need stronger roots to keep them erect. So, for whatever reason, there are many fallen trees in the forest which then rot, turn white [with moss] and are eaten by worms. Indeed they make their common bread from the very heart of this palm. They cut the marrow into square shapes, then they make it into flour, let it dry, then knead and cook it. They have brought back a few pieces of these brick-like cakes. I myself wished to taste it; nothing is rougher nor more tasteless. It must indeed be the bread of the poor people who do not have any field in which to grow rice. It reminds me of what I have seen in the mountains, fields and villages where the inhabitants feed themselves with a bread which is not much better, almost black in color, made with seeds called *centeno* (rye) in Spanish, or else with ordinary or Italian millet, or something worse. Is it not the rule for capricious Nature to feed a few very well and leave the rest suffering from hunger, so that just a few enjoy the pleasures of refined eating? Nevertheless, people subsist everywhere, because nature requires very little and one can survive with almost nothing. All the people there raise goats and domestic birds. They have sweet cane similar to sugarcane. They also have some Carthage apples, which Italians and Spaniards call *granada* [pomegranate], medicinal fruits and all sorts of citrous fruits. Among the latter, the Spaniards recognize limes, lemons, oranges, grapefruits, citrons and a bigger citron, all different. From among the herbs that grow near the springs, why not cite the one I will call simply by the common name in Spanish *berro*, and which in Italy is called *cresones* [water cress]? Why not mention also another herb that grows among the others, that is poisonous, and that incites vomiting, and is called *anapelo* [wolf's-bane or aconite] by the Spanish...

[The coconut tree]

The islanders make some wine, not like ours from grapes because they do not grow in the Moluccas, but with various types of fruits; one of these is more commonly used. Among them, as among the inhabitants of our own continent, grows a tree that resembles a palm tree, but differs much from it by its products. This tree sprouts a dozen or more, up to twenty, bunches, each bunch having stems like a vine with grapes, but the fruits are covered with many layers of bark. When undressed, the fruits look like a small, round, melon, but its shell is almost as hard as a tortoise shell. These fruits are called *cocos*. The coconut is dressed with more layers of clothing than the edible palm nut, with the same woven filaments that bind them to one another, and it takes no less work to take them out of their envelope than with palmettos. Once opened, the coconuts are good to eat, and moreover are full of delicious liquor. A spongy matter adheres to the inside of the nut shell, two-finger thick, that looks like butter or fat on account of its

whiteness and softness, but much tastier. Once this mass had been detached from the inner shell, it is very good to eat. If it is turned over and left in its own shell used as a container for a few days, it melts and is converted into an oil which is sweeter than olive oil, and very healthy for the sick.

It is not the only service that nature has provided with this tree. The trunk [sic] is pierced, where the flowers sprout at the top, and they say that it distills drop by drop into a vessel placed there to collect it a liquor that is good to drink, very tasty and very healthy.

The islanders busy themselves with fishing, as their waters are full of many kinds of fishes, among them one which is a real little monster. It is a little less than one cubit in length, with a protruding belly and raised shoulders that are not covered with scales but with very hard leather. It has a pig's snout. Its forehead is adorned with two bony horns. Its shoulders have two hard lumps.¹

The king, upon whose territory the Spanish had landed, imagining that they had been brought to him by some divine power, asked them what they wanted, what they had come for. They answered: "Spices." He then said: "What we have, you can take." Then he called on his island subjects and ordered them to show to our men what each one had accumulated as far as clove. Permission was granted for our people to carry these piles away, after a suitable compensation had been given. Indeed, when the clove is ripe, the islanders collect it into piles in their houses and wait for the traders, as they do for any other product. From here, aboard big ships called junks, it is then taken to markets in Calicut, Cochin, Cananor and Malacca. The same is true for pepper, ginger, cinnamon, and all these other delicacies that are not necessary, and which make women out of men.

In the five [central] islands of the Moluccas, the only spice that is grown is clove, although they are not far from the islands where the other spices grow. It was the Moluccan islanders who reported this fact to the Spaniards, and they had it confirmed by an act of piracy they committed. Well, when they had left the big island of Borneo and the other islands in its vicinity (where Captain Magellan was killed in one of them), while they were on their way to the Moluccas, they chanced upon one of these big native ships called junks.² This ship was caught off guard. It was full of merchandise, among other things all kinds of spices other than clove, although in small quantities, but they were in excellent quality, as though freshly harvested. These ships do not dare make long crossings, because they are not built with enough craftsmanship to be able, like ours, to withstand storms, and the sailors aboard are not expert enough to sail with anything but a tail wind. The said craft was carrying to a neighboring island some local

1 Ed. note: That is a good description of the *Iactoria cornuta* or long-horned cowfish, also found in Micronesia (See Amesbury and Myers' "Guide to the Coastal Resource of Guam: Vol. 1—The Fishes", p. 131).

2 Ed. note: These native ships were in fact very large double-outrigger canoes, commonly used for long-distance inter-island trading. The Spanish and the Portuguese were to encounter many more of these over the next century or so, and they were in time better described. The word junk became exclusive to Chinese ships.

products: rice, coconuts such as we have described above, chickens, ducks, and many other edibles. A few nuggets of gold were also found aboard. The Spanish indeed had a feast as a result, but it was at the expense of innocent parties who had not suspected their passage.

They therefore decided to load the two remaining ships with clove. Because there was not enough of it in the island where they had landed, its king visited the neighboring islands that are in sight. In fact, out of the five Moluccas, four are in sight of one another. The fifth one [i.e. Machian] is a little farther than the eye can see, but not much more.

There they were, the two ships full of recently-picked clove. They also brought along some branches still bearing their fruits. It was a pleasure for all those at court to see those branches and smell the fruits still clinging to them. It turns out that their smell was not much different than that of clove sold by druggists. I was given many of those branches. I have given away many so far, but I still have a few left to distribute which I will kept in reserve until I hear from Your Holiness if he already owns some.

As I have said, the two ships were loaded with clove. Let me narrate the rest of the voyage. One of them, the **Trinidad**, was worm-eaten, rotten and drilled through by worms which the Italians call *bissi* and the Spanish *broma*, so much so that through her sides as well as through her bottom the water was passing as through a sieve. They did not dare such a long navigation without first repairing the damage. The **Trinidad** was therefore left behind and to this day, we have had no news of her.¹ If she still exists, we do not know. So, out of five ships, only two have returned: the **Victoria**, just now, and the **San Antonio**, last year. As for the crews, few men have returned.

[The return of the Victoria]

What is left to narrate is the return voyage made by the **Victoria**, because she came back to her point of departure by another route. The whole voyage has lasted three years less a few days. Because of a series of misfortunes, all the leaders have been left along the way. But what is unheard of, and had never been tried since the beginning of the world, this ship has followed a parallel and done a complete circuit around the earth.

If this feat had been done by a Greek, what stories their writers would not have invented about it! What exactly was performed the ship of the argonauts, which they say, without shame and in complete seriousness, that it was taken into heaven? If we reflect just a little upon this, it had left the town of Argos to go to the Pontus.² It arrived at Oetes and Medea with its load of heroes: Hercules, Theseus, and Jason. I do not know what they did. The people still do not know what is really meant by the Golden Fleece. As far as the distance between Greece and the Pontus, even the children in the lowest classes have learned about it; it is no bigger than the fingernail of a giant.

1 Ed. note: Martyr wrote this at the end of 1522. See immediately below, and also the two letters he wrote about Magellan reproduced at the end of this chapter.

2 Ed. note: The Pontus Euxinus was the Black Sea.

Let us now try and explain how the Spanish have gone around the world, because it is hard to believe. Well then, let us prove it. Let Your Holiness have a globe brought to Him, upon which have been drawn the earth's continents. Let Him begin with the columns of Hercules, otherwise known as the Strait of Gibraltar. By turning left, one comes upon the Fortunate Islands, commonly called the Canaries. Between them and the coast of Africa, by going due south, one finds other islands, belonging to the Portuguese, and called by them the Cape Verde Islands; they are the Gorgades of Medusa in Latin. Here we have to pay attention, because this is the beginning of something admirable. From the Hesperides¹, the Portuguese cross the equinoctial line, and also the Tropic of Capricorn and as far as the last promontory of the Mountains of the Moon which they call the Cape of Good Hope in common language and is located at 34 degrees from the equator; others say it is 2 degrees less. After they have rounded this cape, they make their way eastward, pass the entrance to the Erythrean [i.e. Red] Sea and Persian Gulf, by the mouths of the Indus and Ganges Rivers, as far as Golden Chersonesia, to which they have given the name of Malacca, as I have already said. We have already covered half of the circuit around the globe. All the cosmographers have written that, out of the 24 hours it takes for the sun to complete its circuit, twelve of them have already been used up. Let us now measure the second half. To do this we have to return to the Gorgades.

Our fleet of five ships left this archipelago on the left, and taken the opposite direction, showing their poops to the Portuguese poops. It then coasted that continent of ours whose [eastern] extremity belongs to the Portuguese. It advanced beyond the 50th antarctic degree, as we have already narrated. I do not mention the exact degree, because the estimates differ, although by a small amount. The Spanish followed the setting sun, as the Portuguese have followed the rising sun, and they arrived at the back of the Moluccas, islands that are not far from where Ptolemy has placed Gatinara [Cati-gara] and the Great Gulf. What can I say about the Great Gulf and Gatinara? They say that they did not find them where Ptolemy had placed them. However, I will have another opportunity to come back to this point. Let us come back for now to our voyage around the world. So it is that another route was found to reach the Golden Chersonesia, completely opposite to that taken by the Portuguese. It is by way of the Golden Chersonesia and following the route taken by the Portuguese [in reverse] that this ship [i.e. the Victoria], the Queen of the Argonauts, has returned to the Hesperides.

When she arrived in view of the Gorgades [Cape Verde Is.], she lacked everything. A boat manned by 13 men was sent ashore to ask the Portuguese for some fresh water and food, but not for free. There, the Portuguese officials, who imagine that their right eye is being pulled out when they hear of a prince, other than their own, has made a profit out of spices, seized the boat and its crew. This was contrary to a treaty arrived at when Pope Alexander VI divided the world. The royal officials at the Hesperides were also on the lookout for the ship, and it would have been easy for them to capture her. However, sensing that their companions had been arrested, before the Portuguese

1 Ed. note: The Hesperides of Ptolemy correspond to the Azores, I think.

ships could attack them, they raised the anchor and escaped, leaving in the hands of the Portuguese thirteen of their companions. Out of the 60 who had embarked at the Moluccas¹, only 31 were left. However, the Portuguese later released the 13 prisoners, by order of their King.

If I had to refer to the worries, the dangers, the thirst, the lack of sleep, the fatigue they experienced by having to pump day and night the water that was coming in through cracks and holes, my narrative would become too long. Let me just mention that aboard this ship, with more holes than a well-made sieve, there were 18 men² more tired than the most beaten work horses. They have sailed for so long that they say that have covered by zigzagging here and there 14,000 leagues, although the circumference of the earth is less than 8,000 leagues.³ However, nobody among them knew the exact route to take to reach the so-desired islands by a different route than that taken by the Portuguese.

Plans are being made to pursue an enterprise so well undertaken. What will be resolved, what will be convened with the Portuguese, who complain that they have been gravely harmed by this voyage, I will let You know. The Portuguese assert that the Moluccas are located within the limits that have been assigned to them by His Holiness Pope Alexander VI, with a convention between the Kings (of Castile) and that of Portugal. They say that they [i.e. the Moluccas] are [like] villages, farms and towns bringing their products to the markets of Malacca, Calicut and Cochin, and that everywhere else the peasants bring what they grow and raise to the towns and fortresses. We, on the contrary, contend that it was they who have usurped the Moluccas, given that they are outside of the line going from pole to pole and separating the Orient from the Occident. Your Holiness knows the question well, as it has been discussed before Him so many times.

There is one more thing I should mention that may fill the readers with wonder, specially those who think they have a perfect knowledge of celestial phenomena. When the **Victoria** arrived at the Gorgades, the sailors thought the day of the week was a Wednesday, but it was a Thursday. That is why they say that they have lost one day during their three-year voyage. I told them: "Look, your chaplains have led you in error when they forgot to include that one day as part of their ceremonies, or when reciting their breviaries." They answered me: "What? Do you think that we all fell into the same mistake, particularly the men with courage and experience? It is relatively easy to keep track of the months and days, and many of them had with them some books of hours and they knew perfectly well what prayers they had to say every day. There certainly were no mistakes made about the hours reserved for the Holy Virgin, before whom we knelt at every moment to implore her assistance. Many people spent their time reciting

1 Ed. note: There were 47 Europeans and 13 Asians (See the last page of Doc. 1519F).

2 Ed. note: Not counting the Asians this time.

3 Ed. note: Let me remind the reader that this figure should be 6,300 leagues, at 17-1/2 leagues to one degree x 360°.

those hours and the office of the dead. Well then, you should look somewhere else for an explanation. It is certain that we have lost one day.”

Some would give one reason, others other reasons, but they all agreed on that one point: they had lost one day. “Friends, I said, remember that the year that followed your departure, the year 1520, was a leap year. It is perhaps what has led you astray.” However, they insisted that they had given 29 days to the month of February of that year, although it is usually shorter, and that they had not neglected the *bis sexto* of the kalends of March either. The 18 men who have returned from the expedition are almost all illiterate¹, but, when interrogated one after the other, they gave the same answers.

Being very anxious to solve this puzzle, I went to see Gaspar Contarini², who is ambassador of his illustrious Republic of Venice at the Emperor’s court, and is a better-than-average scholar in many disciplines. We discussed in many ways this event never observed before, and have come up with the following probable explanation. The Spanish ship departed the Gorgades going westward, which is the same direction taken by the sun. Therefore, it followed the sun, and each day was somewhat longer than the previous one, in relation with the distance covered. Consequently, when it completed the voyage around the world, which the sun does in 24 hours, it had gained one full day. Thus, it was one day behind those who had stayed in one place. In the same manner, if a Portuguese fleet were to continue its route toward the east, and follow the just-discovered route, to return to the Gorgades, it is clear that, by losing a little time every day, it would have in fact gained one full day. If, on the same day, a Spanish fleet and a Portuguese fleet had left the Gorgades and poops to poops, one going west and the other going east, and after a while and by different routes, had met once again at the Gorgades on a certain Thursday, the Spanish who would have lost one day would think that day to be a Wednesday, whereas the Portuguese, having gained one day, would think the day of the week was a Friday. Let the philosophers discuss this problem with deeper arguments if they wish. For now, I have given my opinion and nothing else.

I have said enough about the voyage around the world, about the islands where the spices grow, and about new lands. Let us get back to Mexican affairs. I will summarize them as much as possible, because so much work makes me tired, on account of old age³ in whose talons Your Holiness saw me the last time. Old Age is flying me rapidly toward the arms of Decrepitude, his rapacious sister. Nevertheless, I would enjoy spending more time along the pathways here below.

1 Ed. note: Martyr had obviously not met Pigafetta, or, for some reason, chose to ignore his Italian compatriot.

2 Ed. note: G. Contarini [1483-1552] eventually became a cardinal. He was a diplomat and author of political and religious books.

3 Ed. note: Martyr was then 67 years old. He died 4 years later.

Letter from Peter Martyr to the Marquis of Vélez and the Marquis of Mondéjar (his pupils), dated Valladolid 4 November 1522

... Let us talk about something else. It seems to me that you have seen some brief notes about the islands where spices grow, discovered by the Spanish. This matter is gnawing at the entrails of the King of Portugal. He says that they are the suburbs of Malacca, which most people equate with Golden Chersonesia, because they are in the vicinity and from there people go to the fairs of Malacca for island trading. Cesar [i.e. Charles V] will plead the case as a done deal. The King of Portugal will argue that they are within the limits that Pope Alexander VI has marked as his. There will be a question raised: if measuring degrees of latitude is easy, the measurement of the degrees of longitude is on the other hand difficult. There will be discussions and they will drag on. The ins and outs of such important discussion will not be left in the hands of lawyers, nor in the depth of their arguments; their nitpickings are like spider webs.

However, as it took three years for a fleet, about which I think you have received some news, to go completely around the parallel, with their prows always pointing at the setting sun, until one of them returned to the Orient [sic] loaded with spices, and during this voyage they found out that they had lost one day, two things that seem impossible to those of weak minds, you will see some day in the narrative of this event properly discussed. Well then, I am writing my fourth Decade, to follow my first three Decades of the New World that have seen the light thanks to the industry of the printers. This one about these new things, I ought to send to the Pope. That is all for now. Take care.