
Document 1521A1

Magellan's voyage — Primary account by Pigafetta, from French manuscripts

Sources: Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris: ms. 5650 and ms. 24.224, translated by R. Lévesque.¹

Crossing of the Pacific

On Wednesday 26 November 1520, we came out of the said strait² and entered the Pacific Ocean, where we stayed for three months and twenty days without taking on any food nor other refreshments, and ate nothing but old crumbled [sea] biscuits, full of worms and stinking on account of the urine filth that the rats had left on them and eaten the best part of them. We drank yellowish infected water. We also ate the raw hides that were on the main yard, to prevent the yard from chafing the rigging. They

1 These two French manuscripts are believed to be copies of a master copy (now lost) presented by Pigafetta to Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Grand Master of the Knights of Rhodes (later of Malta), and to Marie-Louise of Savoy, then Queen Regent of France. Manuscript 5650 is more complete, whereas ms. 24.224 is an expurgated version which omits some details dealing with navigation, warfare and sex. Also at BN Paris is a third manuscript, FR6117, but it appears to be extracts from the Simon de Colines' edition (See Bibliography at the end of this book).

2 Ed. note: The Magellan Strait.

had been made very hard by the sun, rain and wind. We left them for four or five days in the sea, then we placed them for a while upon embers, and thus we ate them. If only we would have had enough saw dust [to eat] and rats, which cost half an *écu*¹ each, but we could not find enough.

Besides the above problems, the one I am about to describe was the worst. It was that the gums of most of our people would swell above and below so much that they could not eat and for that reason so many died, as many as nineteen died²; the other giant died from it³ and an Indian from the said place of Verzin⁴. However, besides those who died, some 25 to 30 became sick from various ailments, to the arms as well as to the legs, and to other places so that very few remained healthy. Nevertheless, by the grace of our Lord, I did not become sick.

During these three months and twenty days we were in an open gulf, where we must have covered four thousand leagues⁵ through this Pacific Ocean, which was properly called Pacific, because during the whole time we had no storm⁶, and saw no land except two small uninhabited islands, where we found only birds and trees. We named them the **Unfortunate Islands**. They are 200 leagues apart; there is no place to anchor because there is no bottom. There we saw many *tiburoni*, a kind of big fish they call shark⁷. The first island is a 15 degrees of latitude south, and the other island is in 9 degrees. With a southerly wind every day we made sixty or seventy leagues or more, sometimes with the wind behind, sometimes by luffing, or otherwise. If our Lord and his Mother had not helped us by giving us good weather to refresh ourselves with food and

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- 1 Ed. note: An old French coin worth from 3 to 6 pounds. However, this is usually taken as a translation of the original word "ducat". Half a ducat was then worth 187 maravedis, about as many dollars today.
 - 2 Ed. note: Only 11 died in the Pacific proper, according to the official count, but the rest died after having reached Philippine waters.
 - 3 Ed. note: A Patagonian Indian who also died from scurvy.
 - 4 Ed. note: Brazil, so called from the name of some wood used in the dye industry, and called "verzino" in Italian.
 - 5 Ed. note: A Spanish league at sea was 4 Roman miles = 5.9 km = 3.2 nautical miles, whereas an English league was only 3 nautical miles = 5.56 km.
 - 6 Ed. note: The word used in the text is "fortune". In Spanish maritime terminology of the period, the word "fortuna" meant strong wind, gale or storm. The word that is found in another French manuscript (the Nancy copy in the library of Yale University, formerly the Phillipp ms. 16,405) is "forte" which can also be interpreted as meaning "storm".
 - 7 Ed. note: That is, they were called *tiburones* by the Spanish.



Sketch map of the Unfortunate Islands as drawn by Pigafetta. *The direction north is toward the bottom of the page on all his map drawings, although in this case the relative position of the two islands is unchanged if one looks at them as shown. The identification of these two reef islets is discussed in Doc. 1521C2. Suffice to say that the first islet they saw corresponds either to Pukapuka or another islet of the Tuamotu Group west of Pukapuka, and the second one corresponds either to Vostok or Flint (S of Vostok). None of the Gilberts or Marshalls were seen.*

[for] other things, we would all have died of hunger in this very big sea. I believe that no man will ever [again] undertake such a voyage.

When we were out of that strait, if we had always sailed westward, we would not have found any land except the Cape of Eleven Thousand Virgins, which is the cape of that strait lying east-west in the ocean sea with Cape Deseado¹ in the Pacific Ocean, both capes being in 52 degrees latitude in the southern hemisphere.²

1 Ed. note: Respectively at the eastern entrance and the western exit of the Strait of Magellan.

2 Ed. note: Pigafetta means that if they had maintained the heading due west, they would, by following the 52° parallel around the globe, returned to the entrance of the Strait.



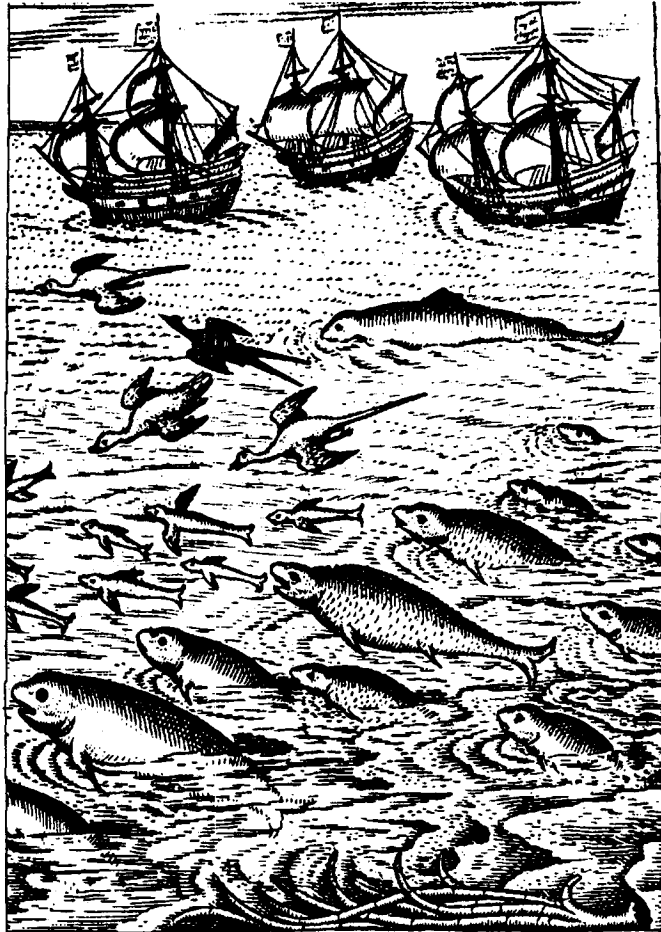
Magellan contemplating the Southern Cross. (*From an engraving by Lamessin, BN Paris*)

The southern sky does not have as many stars as the northern sky, as there can be seen many small stars together that are like two clouds a little apart, and a little fuzzy. In the middle of them are two stars, neither too big nor too bright, that move little; these two stars are the south pole.¹ Our loadstone still pulled toward the north pole, nevertheless not as strongly as when in its own [north] side. Consequently, when we were in that gulf the Captain General asked all the pilots still sailing which course they marked on their charts. They all answered by the course that he punctually gave them. He answered that they marked them incorrectly (which was a fact) and that it was proper to adjust the needle because it did not receive as much force as on its [north] side. When

¹ Ed. note: These stars possibly belong to the constellation Hydra, in the middle of the Magellanic Clouds, as they were later named in honor of Magellan.

we were in the middle of this gulf, we saw a cross of five [sic] very bright stars due west [sic] that are very close to one another.¹

During this space of two months and twelve days, we navigated WNW and NW by W, and NW² until we came to the equinoctial line which is 122 degrees from the Line of Demarcation³ After we had passed the equinoctial line, we navigated WNW and W by N, and afterwards we made 200 leagues westward, changing the course to W by S⁴ until we reached 13 degrees latitude north, so as to get near the land of Cape Gaticara [sic]. This cape (to be corrected by those who have studied cosmography) (because they have not seen it) does not lie where they think it is but toward the north in 12 degrees more or less.⁵



Three lonely ships over a deep gulf... (Adapted from de Bry's "Petits voyages", Part 4. Frankfurt, 1601)

- 1 Ed. note: The four stars of the Southern Cross. Obviously, they had to have been seen due south.
- 2 Ed. note: Ms. 24.224 and the Italian ms. (next document) only say NNW and have omitted "and NW by W, and NW", details which are important to figure out Magellan's route through the Pacific.
- 3 Ed. note: See Doc. 1494.
- 4 Ed. note: The original text is unclear about this heading. Either we retain "*a la carte [du ponnant vers]/(three words that are implied from earlier in the same sentence) le garbin*", which means "W by S", or what ms. 24.224, the unreliable manuscript in matters concerning navigation, says: "*tirant la volte de garbin*", which can mean "southwesterly" or in a south-west direction.
- 5 Ed. note: Ptolemy had placed Cape Catigara (whose modern name is Cape Comorin, the southern tip of India) south of the equator. It is in fact at 8 degrees 27 minutes latitude north.



Near Guam, the abundance of flying fish surprised them. *Pigafetta* wrote that the pastime and sport of the natives of Guam consisted in going out in their canoes to catch some of these flying fish with some fish-hooks "made of fish bones". (From a drawing inserted in an atlas by Mercator, 1595)

After navigating 60 leagues¹ along this route, in 12 degrees of latitude and 146 degrees of longitude², **on Wednesday 6th of March, we sighted a small island toward the NW, and two [sic] others toward the SW.** One of these islands was larger and higher than the other two. The Captain General wanted to touch at the biggest of these three [sic]³ islands to find refreshments, but it was not possible, because the people of these islands came aboard the ships and stole from us, so that we could not keep them off [although] we wanted to come to an anchor and lower the sails in order to go ashore, [but] with great skill and speed they stole from us the small boat, called skiff, which was tied to the poop of the ship of the said captain. Being very angry about this, he went ashore with forty armed men and burning 40 or 50 houses with many canoes and killing 7 islanders, they recovered their skiff. Soon after, we left following the same route. Before we went ashore, some of our sick people begged us, if we should kill any man or woman, to bring back their entrails because they would soon be cured.⁴

It should be pointed out that when we were wounding one of this kind of people with our [crossbow] arrows that pierced their body, they would look at the arrow, then pull it out with great wonder and soon after died.

1 Ed. note: The Italian manuscript (See Doc. 1521B1) says 70 leagues.

2 Ed. note: Longitude west of the Line of Demarcation. Pigafetta's longitude is 21 degrees in error, because 146°W of the Line is $146^{\circ} + 47^{\circ} = 193^{\circ}$ W of Greenwich, or 167° E of it, whereas the actual position, upon sighting the islands, was 146° E. Also, his latitude was 2 degrees too low, a clue that he was copying positions from a pilot other than Alvo (See Doc. 1521C1).

3 Ed. note: It is quite possible that Guam, when first sighted, appeared to be two separate islands. Many later navigators have reported being at first fooled in such a way, for instance, Golovnin in 1818. Pigafetta simply forgot to amend his first sketch map. Alvo, the former boatswain of the **Trinidad**, and at that time pilot of the **Concepción**, made no such mistake. By the way, those writers who have theorized that the expedition touched at Saipan, Tinian and Aguijan, because Pigafetta showed 3 islands instead of 2, have been fooled into thinking that Alvo could have been wrong on two counts: that his mention of only 2 islands was incorrect, and that his latitudes were in error by more than 3 degrees; both of these contentions are preposterous.

4 Ed. note: Pigafetta does not say if their wish was granted.

(Facing page) **The probable track of Magellan's three ships in the vicinity of Guam in March 1521.** The logbook of the pilot Alvo (See Doc. 1521C1) reads: "*On this day [6 March] we saw land, and went to it, and there were **two** islands, which were not very large; and when we were between them, we turned to the SW, and left one to the NW, and then we saw many small sails coming to us...*"

A — *Rota and Guam sighted on 6 March 1521 when the ships were approximately at position 14° N and 146° E of Greenwich. Only Pigafetta recorded three (rather than two) islands; he probably saw Taipingot Peninsula in Rota as a separate island.*¹

B — *Heading changed to southwest.*

C — *Approached by native canoes and boarded by natives.*

D — *The natives refused to leave the ships and were forced overboard with lances, before the first tack was made.*

E — *The skiff of the flagship **Trinidad** was stolen by some natives.*

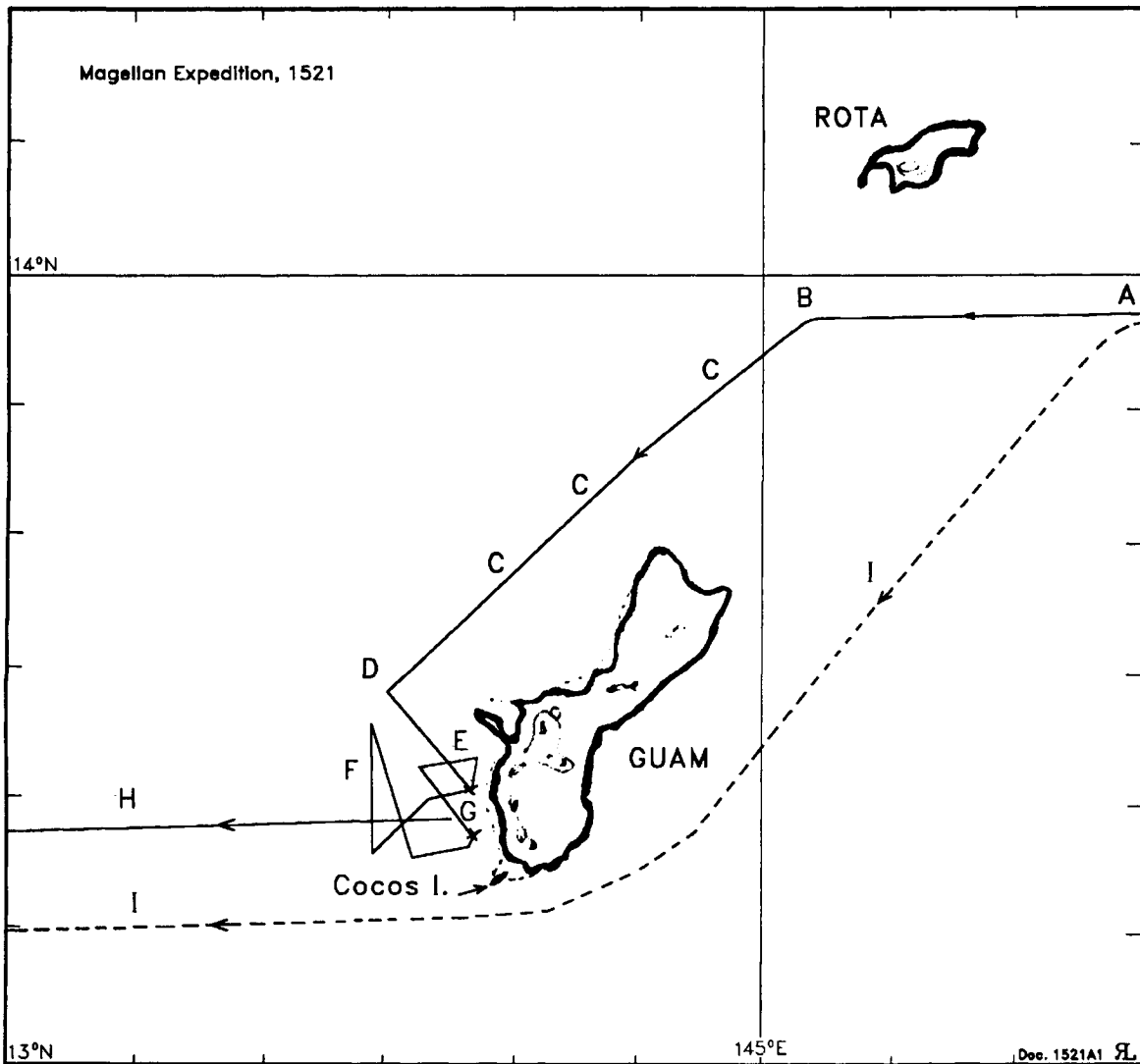
F — *The ships maneuvered all night to stay in the lee of Guam Island.*

G — *On 7 March, the ships anchored off the coast, bartered for food supplies and prepared to send a landing party ashore. On 8 March, a landing was effected and a village burned. More likely, it was Fuña or Fuñai, then the largest village on the island (located where old Agat used to be), rather than Ceti or Umatac.*

H — *Departure for the Philippines, at dawn of 9 March 1521.*

I — *Probable track, according to Guillemard; however, this author confused Guiuan in Samar with Agaña in Guam. In any case, an ordinary captain with a sick crew would not have risked passing to windward.*

1 There are two other likely reasons why Pigafetta recorded three islands instead of two: (1) he saw Guam as two separate peaks at first, and forgot to amend his notes; or (2) he recorded Cocos Island as the third island.





The first marines to land at Guam did so on 8 March 1521. (Adapted from C. Falkenhorst's *Weltentdecker und Weltunsegler*)



Magellan's landing party burned from 40 to 50 houses... They similarly destroyed many canoes to revenge the theft of Magellan's skiff. Opposition by Guam natives resulted in 7 of them being killed. (Adapted from an engraving in de Bry's *Peregrinationes*, 1599)

Soon after we left the said island and followed our route but these people, seeing that we were going away, followed us one league with 100 or more canoes, and came close to our ships showing us fish as if to give them to us, but they would shoot stones at us¹, then flee. While fleeing, they passed with their canoes between the boat we were towing at the poop and the ship going with full sail. However, it was done so quickly and with such a great skill that it was marvelous [to behold]. Seeing some of those women crying and pulling their hair out, we thought it was for the sake of those whom we had killed.²

Description of Guam

These people live in freedom and do as they please, because they have no lord or superior. And they go naked and some of them wear a beard. They have long hair down to the waist-line, and wear little hats like the people of Albania which are made of palm.³ These people are as tall as we are and are well built. They worship nothing. When they are born, they are white, then they become tanned. Their teeth are black and red.⁴ The women also go naked except that they cover their nature with a narrow strip, as soft as paper, that comes from the inner bark of the palm tree.⁵ They are beautiful and delicate, and whiter than the men; their hair is thick, loose, very black and so long that it reaches the ground. They do not go and work in the fields, but they busy themselves at home making cloth and baskets with palm leaves. Their food is from certain fruits called coconuts, and potatoes.⁶ There are birds, bananas as long as one palm⁷, sugar-cane

- 1 Ed. note: They were using slings to throw stones.
- 2 Ed. note: Perhaps, we can speculate that the bodies of some who had been killed were being carried away (to satisfy the request made by some of the sick sailors) or some natives had been kidnapped to work the ship, or both.
- 3 Ed. note: Those were conical in shape, such as those still worn by Guam natives as late as in the 19th century.
- 4 Ed. note: The black teeth came from a paste made from certain herbs and applied to the teeth for cosmetic reasons; Captain Wilson has described such a practice when he visited Palau in 1783. The red teeth came from chewing betel nut.
- 5 Ed. note: The experience of the deserter Gonzalo de Vigo, who lived in the Marianas from 1522 to 1526, was that the women normally did not wear even this minimal amount of clothing (See Doc. 1526A & B).
- 6 Ed. note: The words used by Pigafetta are Italian in origin. *Cochi* is the plural of *cocho* which is pronounced "coco" and means "egg" (in its shell); hence, the origin of the European word for "coconut". *Battate* came from the Spanish "batata" or "patata", a word borrowed from the natives of America; what is meant here is probably some other potato-like tuber, either yam or taro.
- 7 Ed. note: Ancient measure of length, which in Italy was about 25 centimeters.



First map of the Islands of Thieves (Guam and Rota). *Pigafetta sketched them, as usual at that time, with the direction south toward the top of the page. Hence, for comparison with a modern map, the book should be turned around 180 degrees. The mysterious third island shown next to Rota is probably Taipingot Peninsula, which is in fact a highland peninsula linked to the rest of Rota by a low-lying sandspit. (From Ms. 24.224 in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris)*

and flying fish. These women anoint their body and their hair with coconut oil and *giongioli*¹ oil.

Their houses are made of wood covered with shingles made of banana [sic] leaves; they are six-fathom wide and have only one story. Their rooms and beds are furnished with woven mats which are made of palm and are very beautiful, and laid upon soft and delicate palm straw. These people do not have any weapons, but they use sticks that have a fish bone at the tip.² They are poor, but ingenious and great thieves. That is why we named these three [sic] islands the Islands of Thieves.³

The pastime of the men and women of the said place, and their sport, is to go with their canoes to catch some of these flying fish with some fish-hooks made of fish bones. Their canoes are fashioned as depicted below and resemble *fusolere*⁴, except that they are more narrow, some being black, white, and others red.

They have, [on the side] opposite the sail, a big pointed stick with poles going through it and in the water, in order to sail more safely. Their sails are made of palm mats sewn together, and shaped like lateen sails. Instead of a rudder, they have certain oars like shovels for fireplaces⁵. The said canoes do not have any difference between the poop and the prow, and look like dolphins leaping from wave to wave. Those thieves thought, by the signs they were making, that there were no other men in the world but themselves.

On Saturday, 16th of March 1521, we arrived at daybreak at a high island distant 300 leagues from the above-mentioned Island [sic] of Thieves. The said island is called **Zamal**.⁶ The day after, the Captain General wished to go ashore on another island, uninhabited and near the other, in order to be more secure and to take on water, as well as to rest there for a few days. That is where he had two tents put up for the sick and he had one sow killed for them.⁷

1 Ed. note: An Italian word of unknown meaning, but probably beneseed or sesame seed oil.

2 Ed. note: The slings they used to shoot stones could also have been considered lethal weapons.

3 Ed. note: The Ladrones, as they were called in Spanish, had their name changed officially to Marianas only in 1668.

4 Ed. note: Venitian rowing canoes.

5 Ed. note: This could also be translated, less literally, by "peels for ovens", because this is what they looked like in shape.

6 Ed. note: Samar Island in the Philippines. They were near its southern tip at 11 degrees latitude north.

7 Ed. note: This pig must have come from Guam. Other supplies must also have been taken from Guam, even some prisoners. This being the fifth Sunday of Lent, dedicated to St. Lazarus, the Philippines were first given the name of Archipelago of San Lázaro.