

In Pursuit of Longitude: Magellan and the Antimeridian

André Rossfelder

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Although the name Magellan brings to mind an explorer's famous voyage, little is known about the man himself. In the book, *In Pursuit of Longitude*, author André Rossfelder brings Ferdinand Magellan to life as one of the world's great navigators.

Magellan, born Fernão de Magalhães, learned navigation in the Portuguese navy. A contemporary described him as "a short, stocky man, plain and taciturn, with no striking feature other than a limp from a battle wound." Another account states that he "was a man of spirit and valor in his thinking and in the accomplishment of great deeds, although his person did not carry much authority...which led some imprudent people to believe that they could easily control him."

After his military service, Magellan had a disagreement with Portugal's king. He moved to Spain, approached King Charles, and within a month, secured his blessing and financing for a voyage in search of a southwestern route to the Spice Islands, to verify they were in the Spanish hemisphere and to claim them for Spain. Rossfelder tells a tale of adventure and political intrigue between two sea powers, Spain and Portugal. In a period known as the Age of Discovery, 1430–1542, both countries spawned historical figures who found new lands that still carry their names.

Rossfelder, a marine geologist and explorer of the subtropical Pacific, combines diligent research, geographical knowledge, and scientific understanding to present the facts about Magellan's voyage. The crews' logs show that he and his officers faced storms, mutinies, desertions, disappearances, and diseases. Crew accounts of Magellan's leadership vary.

After he reached the Philippines, Magellan died in an apparently senseless battle on April 27, 1521. His crew continued the search for the Spice Islands, arriving on November 8, 1521. Out of the 265 men who departed from Spain, only thirty-six returned.

Rossfelder's search has led him to conclude that Magellan was "the archetype of the early Renaissance Man of two worlds and two cultures...the first navigator to have a very good sense of the true size of the globe,...the first to achieve the extraordinary feat of determining by dead-reckoning within one or two degrees of longitude where he was at any time on the unknown face of the earth."

The book contains a significant amount of scientific, technical, and mathematical information in its discussions of the navigational knowledge available at the time of Magellan's voyage. Rossfelder's clear and detailed writing present a vivid picture of Magellan and the known world in the 1500s.

PAT AVERY (May 18, 2010)

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