THE SEEDS

At the end of the XV century, Portuguese and Spanish sailors began to sail all around the globe, which was a core aspect of European Renaissance. Europeans of the time wanted to overcome the fear of the unknown, know the whole planet and trade with all the peoples of the world. Marco Polo’s travels to Asia fed their imagination and the rule of the Ottoman Turks over the Middle East prevented the land trade between Asia and Europe.

They were helped by the continuous improvement of navigating instruments: ships, charters, astrolabes, compasses, and more. Going East, Portuguese sailors dared to arrive at, and managed to cross, the Cape of Good Hope. Going west, the Spaniards crossed the second largest ocean in the world, the Atlantic, and stumbled upon America, a New World which no European ever dreamed existed. The Spaniards also arrived on the western shores of America, thinking they were seeing yet another sea, which they named the South Sea; however, it was actually the largest and deepest of all the oceans in the world, the Pacific Ocean.

To avoid conflicts between themselves, Portugal and Spain agreed to establish two zones of influence with the bilateral Treaty of Tordesillas (Spain) of 1494.

They accepted as a divisory, a line located 370 leagues West of Cape Verde. The Portuguese would sail to the East of that line, direction Africa, and the Spaniards to the West, direction America. They both had the hope that the famous Spice Islands, the Moluccas, in present day Indonesia, were in their respective zones of influence.

Magellan proposed to the King of Spain the opening of a trade route to the Moluccas navigating always within the Spanish zone of influence agreed by Spain and Portugal: sailing towards the West and returning via the same route. Magellan was appointed head of the Crown trade mission. Juan Sebastián Elcano was appointed second in command of one of the ships. Manuel I, King of Portugal, who was at odds with Magellan, failed in all his attempts to prevent the organisation and departure of the fleet.

Magellan succeeded in crossing the Strait which bears his name. But he failed to achieve his goal: he died in the Philippines before reaching the Spice Islands. Thanks to Elcano, elected as new leader of the expedition, the fleet succeeded in arriving at the Spice Islands and to buy great quantities of spices, especially cloves. Above all, it made a dream come true which had seemed impossible: to succeed in making the first ever circumnavigation of the world.

THE FRUITS

This unique deed had enormous scientific consequences which utterly astonished its contemporaries:

Definitive proof of the roundness of the Earth. Almost nobody doubted the sphericity of the Earth, but there was no experimental proof to confirm it.

Very approximate knowledge of the size of the Earth and the oceans, including the understanding of the Pacific Ocean as an ocean and not as a sea. The general belief in Europe was that the Earth was much smaller, even six times smaller than it really is.
Confirmation of the existence of the Antipodes, which many Europeans denied then because they said - it would mean to walk upside down.

Change of time zones and days according to movement orientation; nobody had thought that when going around the Earth towards the West, the sun passes one time less over your head, and going towards the East one more.

Possibility of navigating great distances without stopovers, with the material resources that were then available, opening the widest horizons for international relations and international trade. It is considered the first genuine drive towards international globalization.

**THE FLEET**

The Crown trade expedition was formed by about 250 crew members on 5 ships: San Antonio, Concepción, Trinidad, Victoria and Santiago. Although it was a fleet of the Crown of Spain, the crew came from several countries, unique among the expeditions of the time: about 150 Spaniards, 30 Portuguese, 25 French, 25 Italian, 7 Greek, 5 Flemish, 3 German, 2 Irish, 1 English and 1 Malay.

Among other supplies, the fleet carried: 253 wine barrels; 417 wineskins; 21 thousand pounds of biscuits; 2,800 pounds of cheese; 7 cows and other animals; bacon, dried meat, dried fish, ham, rice, lentils, beans, chickpeas, plums, marmalade, jam, sugar, honey, vinegar, dried fruit, quince, garlic, etc.

The fleet had many of the best navigation devices available for that period: 23 navigation charts; 35 compasses; 6 pairs of compasses; 21 quadrants; 7 astrolabes; and 18 sandglasses, among other instruments.

Only one ship managed to return after circumnavigating the world: the Victoria lead by Juan Sebastián de Elcano, 17 sailors of 6 nationalities (Spaniards, Portuguese, French, Italian, Greek and one German), “as worn out as any man has ever Juan de Zubieta, pagebeen”. The day after their arrival to Seville they left the ship to go on pilgrimage, barefoot and with torches, to the churches of Santa María de la Antigua, then patroness of sailors, and to the church of Nuestra Señora de la Victoria (Our Lady of Victory).
The names of the brave men were:

Juan Sebastián Elcano, captain
Francisco Albo, pilot
Miguel de Rodas, pilot
Juan de Acusio, pilot
Antonio Lombardo (Pigafetta), chronicler
Martín de Yudícibus, sailor
Hernando de Bustamente, sailor and barber
Nicolás el Griego, sailor of Nauplia, Peloponnese
Miguel Sánchez, sailor of Rhodes
Antonio Hernández Colmenero, sailor
Francisco Rodríguez, sailor, portuguese from Sevilla
Juan Rodríguez de Huelva, sailor
Diego Carmena, sailor from Bayona
Hans de Aquisgrán, artilleryman
Juan de Arana, cabin boy
Vasco Gómez Gallego, cabin boy
Juan de Santander, cabin boy
Juan de Zubieta, page

European navigations in the 15th and 16th centuries

TIME FRAME

Wednesday, 10 August 1519: Departure from the harbour of Las Muelas, Seville, on the Guadalquivir river.

Tuesday, 20 September 1519: Departure from Sanlúcar de Barrameda, Atlantic port.

13 December 1519: Arrival at Rio de Janeiro.

Sunday, 21 October – Saturday, 27 October 1520: Crossing of the Strait of Magellan after a 7-month stop in Argentina. It is the first time a European discovered and crossed this strait. Description of Magellanic cloud. Naming of the Southern Cross. The ship Santiago sinks. Due to
a failed rebellion, several expeditionaries are executed or abandoned on islands. The San Antonio ship deserts the expedition, with more than 50 crew members.

16 March 1521: Arrival in the Philippines, previously stopping in the Mariana Islands (Rota and Guam) on the 6th of March, 1521. In the crossing of the Pacific more than 70 crew members die.

Saturday, 27 April 1521: Magellan dies in a confrontation taking sides in a foe between local chieftains. The Concepcion can no longer be used. There are only two naos left: Victoria and Trinidad. Elcano becomes the captain of the Victoria.

9 July 1521: Arrival at Borneo, North of the Island. Warm welcome from the Sultan of Brunei.

Thursday, 15 August 1521: Juan Sebastian de Elcano becomes head of the expedition.

Friday, 8 November 1521: Arrival at Tidore (Indonesia), the main producer of cloves in the world. Important commercial exchanges.

Saturday, 21 December 1521: Elcano departs from Tidore with the ship Victoria and another 46 crew members. They had decided to return to Spain via Africa, South of the "portuguese route", in spite of the risks of being captured by the Portuguese, as they would sail through their zone of influence.

The ship Trinidad does not accept this and tries to return to Spain via the Pacific. The ship was later captured by the soldiers of the King of Portugal and its crew was imprisoned; they were not able to be released until 1527, when they returned to Spain, where the King rewarded them generously.

Second week of January 1522: The Victoria arrives at Timor. Important commercial exchanges.

8 February 1522: Departure from Timor. Two crew members desert the expedition and stay behind. Start of a non-stop navigation of 5 months through the South Indian Ocean.

Thursday, 8 May 1522: The Victoria arrives at the Great Fish River. Strong storms begin.

Friday, 16 May – Monday, 19 May 1522: They cross the Cape of Good Hope. Since the 8th of May, 5 crew members died. The topmast of the ratchet and part of the yardarm break. On the 22nd, the worst of the storm ceases.

9 July 1522: Arrival in Santiago, Cape Verde. They managed to get supplies by making the Portuguese rulers believe that they had come from America. Since the departure of Cape of Good Hope, 22 crew members have died.

14 July 1522: The Portuguese troops discover the deception and capture a boat with 13 Spaniards. The Victoria manages to escape from the 4 Portuguese ships that chase them. Three crew members die.

Saturday, 6 September 1522: The Victoria, with 18 crew members, arrives at Sanlúcar de Barrameda. On the 8th of September, the survivors arrived at the harbour of Las Muelas, Seville.
Fernando de Magallanes

Born in Portugal in 1480, Magellan took part in several Portuguese military expeditions in Africa and Asia and lived in India. The King of Portugal accused him of selling items to the enemy and refused to reward his deeds. Magellan then emigrated to Spain in 1517. He naturalised as a Spanish citizen, and established himself in Seville where he started a family.

Eager to reach the Spice Islands, he proposed a trade mission to the King of Spain, Charles I: to reach those islands navigating within the Spanish zone of influence agreed to by Spain and Portugal with the treaty of Tordesillas, sailing towards the West. The king fully and generously gave his support and on the 22nd of March 1518 the agreement was signed in Valladolid. The king financed 75% of the expenses and a group of Spanish traders, 25%. The expedition departed from Seville in 1519, in spite of the great efforts of the King of Portugal to prevent it.

Under the leadership of Magellan, the expedition made the first ever crossing of the strait at the tip of South America which bears his name and that joins the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans. An attempted rebellion during the crossing was harshly punished by Magellan. In addition, one of the ships deserted the expedition and returned to Spain, and another sank.

After crossing the Pacific Ocean (renamed by Magellan, replacing the name of “South Sea”) the expedition stopped at the Philippine Islands in 1521. Magellan got involved in a rivalry between two local kings: Humabón and Lapu-lapu and died trying to beat the 1,500 to 2,000 soldiers of Lapu-lapu with only dozens of his own soldiers.

Magellan failed to achieve his dream of a commercial return trip to the Spice Islands via the West, he didn’t even reach the islands. However, the continuation of the journey achieved an even bigger dream: under the leadership of Elcano, the expedition did reach the Spice Islands, and accomplished the first ever circumnavigation of the world, returning back to Seville in 1522.
THE PATRON

Charles I, King of Spain
Charles I was born in 1500, in Gent (Belgium). He was sworn in as King of Spain when he was only 17 years old. He abdicated in 1556 and died in 1558 in the remote Monastery of Yuste, Spain.

He became the most powerful ruler of Europe as King of Spain (and her territories in newly discovered America), King of Naples, Sicily and Sardinia, duke of Milan, lord of the Low Countries, archduke of Austria and Emperor of Germany.

He was both a man of action and a visionary, who strived for the unity of Europe and the spread of Renaissance ideals. Significantly, his motto was “Plus Ultra”, which means: “Further on”. He personally fought in the battlefield and travelled extensively and continuously all over Europe and the Mediterranean. He is considered to be the last European king-medieval knight.

In his very first year as king, he supported Magellan wholeheartedly and generously. Later on, he fully understood the importance of the first circumnavigation of the world by Elcano and lavishly rewarded him and all the other sailors who managed to return.
THE HERO

Juan Sebastián Elcano

Of Elcano, we know the basics of a person born for a mission. He was born around 1487 in Guetaria, Vizcaya, one of the Basque Provinces of the Kingdom of Castile. Guetaria is a port and its fishermen would sail the North Sea searching for tuna and whales. Elcano’s family were sailors and so was he. He earned a lot of prestige fighting against pirates in the Mediterranean.

One day he sold his own ship to foreigners, which was forbidden at that time. To redeem himself, Elcano enrolled in the expedition lead by Fernando de Magallanes to trade with the Spice Islands. Elcano was appointed second in command of one of the ships.

When the expedition was in the Philippines, Elcano’s ship became unusable for navigation and he was made captain of the ship "Victoria", which means "Victory". Magellan died in the Philippines, and only 100 sailors and 2 ships remained: "Trinidad" and "Victoria". The surviving ship leaders of the expedition formed a team, naturally led by Elcano because of both his technical and social skills; later he was elected the only leader. Once in Tidore (one of the Spice islands), the “Trinidad” chose to return to Spain via the Pacific Ocean; but it failed and later was captured by the Portuguese. Elcano and his crew chose to return to Spain going around the world through the Indian Ocean, the most desolate ocean of the world, within the Portuguese zone of influence agreed to by Spain and Portugal with the treaty of Tordesillas but avoiding the Portuguese navy who were chasing them, through a route completely unknown to Europeans. They succeeded in everything.

On the same day of his return to Spain, still on board of the “Victoria”, Elcano wrote a short letter to the King of Spain about his odyssey, proudly concluding: "... with the help of God and of Our Lady, after three years ... what we must value and respect most is that we have discovered and navigated around the whole of the world, that going through the West we have come back via the East". The King summoned him so that he could be personally briefed on such an epic deed; granted him a very important yearly endowment; knighted him and granted him a coat of arms with a globe of the Earth and the motto: " Primus circumdediste me ", i.e.: You were the first to sail around me.

Sailor from tip to toe, Elcano sailed as second in command of yet another big naval expedition to the Pacific Ocean. He died on the 4th of August, 1526 in the middle of the Pacific Ocean out of exhaustion and illness. His corpse was given to the seas which had given him so much glory.
THE CROSSING OF THE CAPE OF GOOD HOPE 1522

Pigafetta [the chronicler of the expedition] is right when he considers the Cape of Good Hope as “the biggest and most dangerous cape known on Earth”. He must have lived those days with understandable terror, as so many others sailors and travellers throughout the ages...Today is a sporting challenge; five hundred years ago, the crossing of the Cape was a life or death gamble...

It was in the middle of this storm, just at the moment of crossing the Cape [with the ship Victoria], on the 16th of May [1522], when the bow’s topmast broke: it could never be properly repaired. The legend of the Flying Dutchman – made into music by the mastery of Wagner- was born precisely, as everybody knows- out of a storm on the Cape of Good Hope...At the end of April our sailors were clearly south of the Cape, hoping to sail very far from the area watched over by the Portuguese [who wanted to capture them as they were in the Portuguese zone of influence]; yet strong southwest winds forced them to head northwards...On the 5th of May they were already 36º south, and on the 7th , at 35º...they thought they had already crossed the famous tip...but the adventure was just beginning! On the 8th of May they saw land for the first time in three months...Today it is called...Great Fish River...Nothing enjoyable existed there at the time: the coast was high, rocky, beaten by the waves, and "without any trees". They looked for some refuge and they did not find it; it was impossible to land; which affected them immensely because most of the crew were sick and some were about to die... It was then that the weather worsened, storms broke out, and they felt the thrust of opposing sea currents. Thus, they lived the most dramatic days since they left Timor. For three days they sailed against a threatening wind from the southwest, without advancing practically anything. On the 12th of May they found out that "they were in the same place as the first day "—that is to say, on the 9th. The crew complained about the cold... It is necessary to remember once again that most of those sailors were more used to the tropical seas than to mildly cold waters. They were poorly equipped, and in those days of struggle against the elements "they could not light a fire nor wrap themselves in wet blankets". They advanced a little, sailing close to the wind “from one side to the other”, in continuous zigzags.

On the 13th of May, they found themselves facing the Laguna River [Great Fish River], but landing in those conditions was unthinkable, as the ship was buffeted by the waves and it was already a lot for the [Victoria] to keep itself afloat. On the 15th they thought they recognised Cape Agulhas, the spot that marks the southern tip of Africa—which is not the Cape of Good Hope...It was in the midst of the storm, the ship lurching, when the topmast of the ratchet and a part of the yard broke. A provisional repair could hardly be made, and the control of the Victoria became more difficult than ever just when it became dramatically necessary to control the movements of the vessel.

In those anguishing moments amidst the whistling of the winds, the crashes of the wild waves, the treacherous whirlpools, and the lurching of the boat which had been crippled for two and a half years by three different oceans, a heroic decision was made: the Victoria was loaded with an odd six hundred quintals of clove. If that precious cargo was thrown into the sea, they would be more likely to get out of that hell. We do not know who discussed it, but the truth is that it was, and, apparently, calmly. At last the idea of keeping the load prevailed. If the fleet
sent by the King of Spain would return without having fulfilled the mission which it was supposed to accomplish, it was not only the ruin, it also meant dishonour; the shame of having sacrificed everything for the sake of personal safety. However, that decision sealed the triumph that was going to be final...It is true that the battle was not fought without casualties. On the 12th of May a sailor from Bordeaux died; on the 13th, another sailor, from Guipúzcoa; on the 17th, in the middle of the storm, a cabin boy; on the 18th, a French cabin boy; on the 20th, the sailor Juan de Ortega. Some died of scurvy, others of diseases originated by malnutrition, humidity, and cold. Never had so many casualties been recorded since the ill-fated days of Cebu and Mactan...In spite of it all, the Victoria kept afloat, yet with great difficulty. On the 18th of May they assembled a provisional masthead; the wind blew so strong from the southwest, "that we could not walk forward", and if that was not enough, "the water moved very much" in the opposite direction. Anyhow, Albo [the pilot of the Victoria] calculated to be eight leagues away from the Cape. On the 19th he thought he had crossed it, although it was impossible to see the coast because of the bad weather...On the 21st the wind abated and on the 22nd the sun rose for a while, leading to pleasant weather. Albo "sunbathed", as he did whenever circumstances were favourable; and he found that the latitude was 31º 57': two degrees north of the Cape! They had not seen it, but they must have crossed it...

They did not see—as sometimes people tell us—the spectacular shape of the Cape of Good Hope...but they were undoubtedly in the Atlantic and they were definitively heading north. The toughest battle of the Victoria was over. The vessel lived up to its name. There were still many thousands of miles to travel, but the crew felt free from a nightmare. At last they were on their way home.