



*discover more about historical Queensland*

## Q150 Digital Books – Section Details

**Name:** *Triumph in the Tropics, 1959*

**Section name:** Part One, Chapter II, Distant Prelude to Discovery

**Pages:** 6–13

**Printing Notes (Adobe Acrobat):** For best results “Page Scaling” should be set to “Fit to Printable Area”. “Auto Rotate and Center” should also be checked.

**Licence for use:** This document is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 2.5 Australia licence. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.5/au>.

You are free to copy, communicate and adapt the work, as long as you attribute the authors.

**Return to Q150 Collection:** <http://www.oesr.qld.gov.au/q150>



## CHAPTER II

### DISTANT PRELUDE TO DISCOVERY

#### *Accidental Factors*

As far back almost as recorded history goes there had been speculation about the existence of a great "Southland" extending to the South Pole to balance the great land mass of the North. Some asserted that the men of the North could never pass to the south because of the burning tropics; others scorned the idea of any "Southland" as illogical and impossible. Pundits are equally peremptory and as often mistaken in their opinions in every age of history. But history is not a record of regular progress in knowledge and welfare; it records the irregular rise and fall of civilisations, with great periods of human advancement and enterprise and great periods of decline ending in collapse and mere traces of forgotten grandeur. Ancient Chinese geographers are said to mention recognisable places in Western New Guinea; the Japanese claim their sailors knew New Guinea, Cape York Peninsula, and the Gulf of Carpentaria many centuries ago; the Malays from Indonesia certainly visited our northern coasts for centuries as they do still. They knew our shores; but we had no contact with them. (2)

For a thousand years after the fall of Rome, though ignorance like a rank growth obscured or distorted all knowledge in Europe, a dim recollection of the opulent East was never entirely lost. The merchant caravans from Asia, indeed, outlasted local wars, revolutions, and the periodical "world wide" conflicts between East and West, including the three centuries of the Crusades. At times, trade revived to respectable proportions. Occasional travellers like Marco Polo brought back exciting and amazing stories of the far eastern world.

From the beginning of the 14th century, however, while the Moslem power declined in the West (in Spain and North Africa)

(2) There are even scanty references from classic times. (a) Pliny in 70 A.D. (nearly 1900 years ago), for example, mentions a Roman freedman blown away by a gale to some land south of the equator (Madagascar?) where "Southlanders had never seen the north polar stars; and had never previously seen their shadows cast toward the north at midday. (b) The historian Lucian, writing a century later, mentions animals "that use their bellies like a pouch; it opens and shuts; there is nothing in it, but it is shaggy and hairy, so that their young creep into it when cold. (Quoted by J. D. Rogers, "Historical Geography of the British Colonies" (Lucas), Vol. VI, p. 2, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1907.)

it revived to a new pitch of fanatical fervour in the Middle East, with the incoming of the Turks. They straddled Asia Minor and Mesopotamia and cut the caravan routes by which Europe was supplied with spices. This provoked a world-wide crisis and, like all such threats to survival or security, revived creative thought and activity.

The best intelligences of Western Europe began to search ancient geographical treatises for a new route to the "Spice Islands," which are the East Indies—Indonesia—lying above the shores of Queensland.

This search for the "Spice Islands" was eventually to result in the charting of all Africa southerly; the discovery of the West Indies and of North, South and Central America westerly; of the Pacific Ocean and its islands behind the unsuspected land mass of America, and, last of all, of Queensland—the first found finger of Australia.

It was Prince Henry the Navigator, (3) a younger son of John II of Portugal, who was actually the initiator of this tremendous era of discovery.

Deeply interested in the rediscovery by his navigators of the fringing island groups of the Atlantic and in the rumour that a great group (the *Azores*) lay a thousand miles to the west of Lisbon in the open ocean, he was also convinced that the Spice Islands could be reached *either by rounding whatever was the south point of Africa; or, by sailing west across the Atlantic*. His shipmasters, taking the easier way first, inched their way, year by year, along the West African coast—reaching C. Bojador in 1434 (30° N.), the Tropic of Capricorn (23½° N.) and then C. Blanco (20° N.) in 1441; Cape Verde (15° N.) and its island group in 1445; Senegal, and the Guinea coast and so far south as the equator. About the same time, their friends and rivals pushing westwards reached the almost equally legendary *Azores*—one third of the way west across the Atlantic, pointing the way to unknown America.

Meanwhile the irresistible Turks pushed on against the West in Asia Minor and invaded Europe; Constantinople and the remnant of the Byzantine Empire fell in 1453, and the Roman Empire of the East was extinguished. The eastern trade of the western world was effectively stalemated, by the "iron curtain" of Islam, on land.

At sea, the Portuguese, undaunted, pushed on continually—far south of the equator, to Cape Cross in S.W. Africa (21° 50' S.) and Diaz Point (at 26° 38' S.—almost the latitude of Brisbane).

Finally, on 3 February 1488, Bartholomeu Diaz de Novaes rounded the Cape of Good Hope and reached Mossel Bay. *The Portuguese*

(3) His mother was Philippa, sister of Henry IV of England, for whom he was named.

had found a way round Africa to the Indian Ocean whose further waves washed the shores of India and Ceylon north-north-east; and of the Spice Islands north-east. Directly below the Spice Islands, although they did not yet know it, lay Australia, the northern land mass of the legendary "Southland."

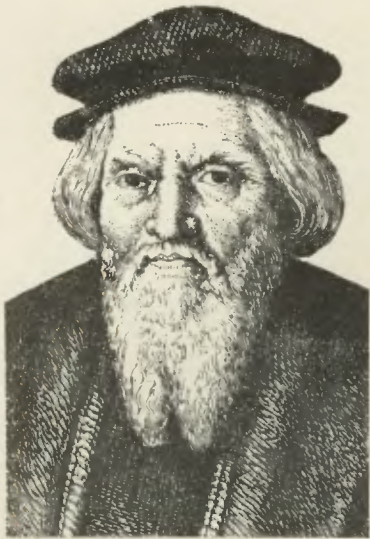
To follow Diaz, round the great barrier of Africa, in the Portuguese thrust *easterly*, King Manoel commissioned a grandee of Portugal, Vasco da Gama (9 July 1497) to round the Cape of Good Hope, and to press on to the East until he reached South Asia. In the "San Rafael" he succeeded in his mission and, between 1498 and 1512, the Portuguese established themselves in India (at Cananor, Diu, and Calicut—not Calcutta); in Ceylon; in Sumatra; in Malaya; and in Java; and finally reached the fabulously rich Moluccas. Beyond these, they saw the western end of New Guinea and, above this, what was actually the *western edge of that vast unknown sea that was soon to be known as the Pacific Ocean*. They had won the race to the Spice Islands. The Spaniards, meanwhile, had pushed westerly unaware that the huge mass of America stretched almost from pole to pole across their path.

Columbus (an Italian from Genoa in the service of Spain) had reached Watling Island, near Cuba, on 12 October 1492, and believed he had reached Asia. He was followed by many who made landfalls on the mainland, and a year after the Portuguese had sighted the *western edge of the Pacific* (to be exact, on 29 September 1513) Vasco Nuñez de Balboa,<sup>(5)</sup> who had crossed the mountainous isthmus of Panama at its narrowest part in four weeks, saw the *eastern edge of that same Pacific Ocean*, named it the Southern Sea, and took possession of it for Spain. This vast ocean, as little anticipated as America itself, lay as a second barrier between avid Spain and the Spice Islands.

The Portuguese were, however, already steadily consolidating their hold on the Spice Islands and exploring the shores of Indonesia, Western New Guinea and, indeed, Northern Queensland, too.

Magelhaens (Magellan) was one of the explorers and pilots who had mapped the Spice Islands for Portugal between 1506 and 1512. Later, serving in Morocco, he had been falsely accused of trafficking with the Moors, and, furious at these baseless charges, he had then renounced his allegiance to Portugal, and, like Columbus before him, sought service with Spain. He swore that he would find his way round the southern tip of South America; would reach the

(5) A young red-headed adventurer whose brilliant exploits attracted the envious hatred of the contemptible Viceroy Pedrarias Davila, who caused him to be seized on a trumped-up charge of treason and, after a mock trial, beheaded in Acla in 1517.



**SEBASTIAN CABOTO**  
with his father Giovanni Caboto (John Cabot) reached American mainland in "Mathew" of Bristol, England, 24 June 1497.



**VASCO DA GAMA**  
reached India in "San Rafael" 1498.



**VASCO NUNEZ DE BALBOA**  
Crossed Isthmus of Panama and discovered Pacific Ocean, 29 September 1513.



**FERNAN MAGELHAENS (MAGELLAN)**  
reached Pacific Ocean through Magellan's Strait on 28 November 1520.

THE MEN WHO OPENED THE LAND AND SEA BARRIERS BETWEEN SPAIN AND THE SPICE ISLANDS.

Moluccas from the East; and would, moreover, prove that they lay within the Spanish zone as defined by the Pope. (6)

On 21 October 1520 he found and entered, tentatively, the eastern end of the 360-mile-long strait which he hoped separated South America from "Tierra del Fuego" and, after thirty-eight dangerous days, passed Cape Deseado (Cape Longed-For) and on 28 November 1520 burst into the Pacific at its *southern edge*.

Swept north for hundreds of miles by winds and currents, and then west along the equatorial current, he reached Guam on 9 March 1521—having in ninety-eight sailing days seen no land in all that vast sea except two trivial islands. (The thousands of islands of Oceania, and Australia itself, lay, unsuspected, west and south of his course.) From Guam he sailed west to Samar of the Philippines—which, too, he was the first to discover. He annexed them for Spain and, there, in a petty conflict at Mactan, he was killed in April. His westerly course had overlapped by a few knots his easterly explorations with Diego Lopez de Sequeira and Antonio d'Abreu (1509-1512), so that he had, piecemeal, actually circumnavigated the globe. But he had done something more—he had achieved what Columbus had planned: he had—first of all men—reached East Asia from western Europe by direct transit by sea, and thus put a girdle round the world. Within a few years Spanish ships were plying regularly from western Mexico to the Philippines along the Equatorial line, sighting nothing south except New Guinea occasionally, and mapping the northern shores of its archipelago piecemeal, while, on the opposite course sailing easterly around South Africa from the west, Portuguese vessels now regularly reached India, Ceylon, Malacca, and the Moluccas, and every year explored Indonesia more widely. Undoubtedly they reached the shores of Australia, but only indirect evidence exists regarding these early explorations, for a reason that will be obvious: the only valuable part of Australia according to the Pope's line of demarcation—the east coast—was thought to lie within the Spanish zone. The Portuguese suppressed all record of it—they already had a law making liable to the penalty of death any pilot who betrayed new sea-routes or discoveries. Within a few years, however, infor-

(6) Prince Henry the Navigator had won from the Pope a grant of all the lands discovered or to be discovered between the Azores Islands and India. After the discovery of America, the Pope had allotted to Portugal all lands east of a line 100 leagues west of the Azores or the Cape Verde Islands; and to Spain all lands west of it. (They were wrongly supposed to lie in the same longitude.) By the treaty of Tordesillas (1494), Spain and Portugal set this line 350 leagues west of the Azores and drew another line, later, at the opposite side of the world. At that time, there was no adequate method of determining longitude (though latitude could be fairly accurately estimated), and both countries claimed that the Spice Islands and their immense treasures lay within their territories. Magelhaens intended to fix a positive line of demarcation for all time. (See plate Ib.)

mation seeped across the borders and a series of maps appeared in France which are exceedingly important in the history of Queensland. These maps could only have originated in Portugal. Deliberately displaced 25° west (which brought their land masses well within the Portuguese zone) and with the north coast of the Northern Territory of Australia correlated with the shoreline of northern Java (made known by Lopez and D'Abreu); and with Cape York peninsula of Queensland approximated to Timor, the maps, nevertheless, so strikingly portray the main features of the north and west coasts of Australia and the north and the *whole east coast of Queensland*, that there can be little doubt they were compiled from several voyages south from the East Indies. (See Plate III.)

The rivalry between Spain and Portugal that was to delay the discovery of Australia for many years reached a climax after Magelhaens' voyage in 1520-21. Spain claimed a monopoly of passage into the Pacific by Magellan's Straits and, although when the Spaniards had reached the Moluccas from the east they had found the Portuguese well established in possession, Spain claimed a monopoly of trade there, too, on the basis of Magelhaens' assertion that the Moluccas would be proved to lie within the Spanish zone.

After bitter controversy, that flickered on the edge of war for years, a compromise was reached: by the treaty of Saragossa in 1529, a new line of demarcation was drawn setting it about 147° E., i.e. east of Cape York; the Kings of Spain and Portugal married each a sister of the other; Spain retained the Philippines; and Portugal retained the Moluccas but sulkily paid a heavy indemnity in cash to powerful and intransigent Spain.

*In any case, however, the day of the Portuguese was done.*

In 1580 the throne of Portugal having fallen vacant, Spain seized and held it till 1640, and with it, laid claim to the colonial empire of all the world! But it was not Spain who was to be the successor to failing Portugal—it was the joint power of England and Holland.

The peremptory policy of Spain was fatal to her progress and ultimately wrecked her power. She had a mania for gold and despised trade; Portugal had a passion for trade but farmed out her subsidiary trade to the Dutch, who had become her intermediary for the distribution of the spices of the East throughout all Europe. Often enough English and Dutch scholars, sailors and adventurers, had been pilots and map-makers for both Portugal and Spain. In 1584 Philip II, who, as mentioned previously, had seized the vacant throne of Portugal in 1580, closed Lisbon to the Dutch and forbade them to trade in any Spanish or Portuguese territory, hoping by economic necessity to break the spirit of that proud and courageous nation, which had rebelled against his authority as Emperor and

successfully established its independence. Moreover, he threatened and finally attacked England.

### *The English and Dutch accept the Spanish challenge*

The rising young nations of the world—the English and the Dutch—were little inclined to permit him to enjoy universal dominion, or to accept annihilation by his might. Drake in 1577, scorning the monopoly of navigation of Magellan's Straits proclaimed by Spain, sailed through them in sixteen days; was, like Magelhaens, swept north later by wind and sea; attacked the Spanish cities and their treasure ships along his route; crossed the Pacific to the Philippines and the Moluccas, and, ultimately, reached England again in September 1580—the first Commander to circumnavigate the globe in his own ship<sup>(7)</sup>—the "Golden Hind" (formerly the "Pelican").

The defeat of the Spanish Armada in its attempt to subjugate the England of Elizabeth I (1588) tremendously heartened all the nations striving to maintain their independence.

The Dutch promptly attacked the possessions of Spain and Portugal throughout the East. In thirty years they virtually captured the whole of the strategic centres. In 1598 Cornelius Houtmann, who had himself been a pilot in the service of the Spaniards, sailed for the East Indies, taking with him, as specialist navigator, Captain John Davis, an Englishman, formerly engaged by Robert, Earl of Essex, "for discovering the eastern parts of the world, for the service of Queen Elizabeth and the good of England," etc., etc. The Dutch sent fleet after fleet to the East Indies after Houtmann's first successful expedition, and, moreover, destroyed the fleets of their rivals in Malacca in 1606, and at Gibraltar Bay where, in 1607, a great Spanish "Armada" was annihilated by a small Dutch squadron under Jacob van Heemskerck.<sup>(8)</sup> They supplanted the Spaniards (including the Portuguese) everywhere and most rapidly.

They came, not only from the west round the Cape of Good Hope (which they soon seized), but also from the east by Magellan's Straits or round Cape Horn (named by the Dutch) in the track of Drake and Cavendish. Mellish, the pilot of Sir Thomas Cavendish, sailed with the Dutch under van Noort who tried their skill, force and guile against Spain. By royal charter (and with part of the

(7) Magellan had five ships; one of them the "Vittoria," ultimately returned to Europe—the first ship to circumnavigate the globe in one voyage. The ship was brought home by del Cano, a survivor after Magellan's death at Mactan and after Serrano (second in command) and some other senior officers had been captured by treachery by the Filipinos. (Perhaps they were the white men who were recorded in Chinese histories as being sold as slaves in South China about that time.)

(8) Cf. the name of one of Tasman's ships in 1642, which Flinders in 1798, in recognition of that great explorer, gave to one of the mountains in Tasmania first sighted by Tasman.

£10,000,000 worth of treasure seized by Drake from the treasure ship "San Felipe") the East India Company was incorporated by Elizabeth I in 1600; the Dutch East India Company was set up by the States-General of Holland in 1602. Among the spoils from the Portuguese and Spaniards the Dutch had found many a vital map and geographical record.

It seems that the Portuguese had become aware of the great "Southland" that lay below the Indonesian chain about a century before, probably through the Malays who visited it frequently in their *prahus* from Timor and Makassar. But they believed its richer areas lay in the Spanish Zone; only the arid north and west lay in the Portuguese area. The Spaniards themselves had made only perfunctory attempts to discover the great "Southland" and then only for gold and by way of the sea routes of Alvaro de Mendaña. One, in 1567, had discovered the Solomons; and the other, in 1597, discovered the Marquesas. Among Mendaña's officers was a Portuguese in the service of Spain—Fernandez de Quir, known to us as de Quiros. De Quiros, after 1597, was kindling an enthusiasm for discovery that made him the fanatical prophet of an "oceanic empire for Spain in the South Seas" but, it was too late. The Dutch in the East Indies were steadily consolidating their footing throughout Indonesia and were looking towards New Guinea and the "Southland" (of native tradition and Portuguese discovery) with the speculative eyes of the trader and exploiter.

In 1598 Cornelius Wytfliet had written:

*"The Australis Terra is the most southern of all lands, and is separated from New Guinea by a narrow strait. Its shores are hitherto but little known since, after one voyage and another, that route has been deserted, and seldom is the country visited unless sailors are driven there by storms. The Australis Terra begins at two or three degrees from the Equator, and is maintained by some to be of so great an extent, that if it were thoroughly explored it would be regarded as a fifth part of the world."*

In 1606, as mentioned at page 5, the isolated tracks of the earliest recorded Dutch and Spanish explorers, from the east and the west respectively, had crossed at Torres Straits with neither recognition nor sequel.

Perhaps there was a sequel—maybe two.

De Quiros frantically memorialized the Spanish crown to possess itself of "a continent" (of which he felt his New Hebridean discoveries were the northern tip) extending to and round the South Pole—but Spain was indisposed for further romanticism in exploration. The Council of State in Spain, reporting on 25 September 1608, said that new discoveries:

*"withdraw men from Spain, which is so short of men . . . open a way for Your Majesty's enemies to go to occupy them. . . . Besides . . .*

*Your Majesty's Treasury is so exhausted that there will be much strain in retaining what has been discovered . . . and it is not sure if it is possible in good conscience to make conquests of heathens who neither disturb nor attack us. This Pedro Fernandez de Quiros has got it into his head to be a second Columbus and (since) his design cannot be encouraged . . . he should be retained here as cosmographer. . . . In this way everything will be settled, namely not to make known or publish what this man has discovered; nor to drive him to despair; and to avoid the difficulty about his giving information to the enemies of the Crown . . . and to retain him and get from him what profit that may be possible . . . in respect of his profession."*

*It seemed that Spain's day, too, was done!*

The Dutch, brooding over the scraps of maps of all the ages, adopted the general view that had grown from false interpretations of Marco Polo's Locac (Locach Beach); Maletur (i.e. "Maleiur": "Malaya"); the "Regnum psittacorum," or "Realm of Parrots,"<sup>(9)</sup> etc., and all the later jigsaw fragments of discovery, jumbled by mistakes of longitude and distortions of fact and fancy. They accepted the existence of a vast continental "Southland," but, as discovery advanced, they saw it retreat and break into unprofitable pieces in the torrid South, just as Iceland, Greenland, Labrador and the island maze of far north America had emerged as unprofitable pieces from one vast frozen land-mass in the Arctic North.

(9) The "realm of parrots" is cut off from Indonesia by Wallace's Line passing between Bali and Lombok, in the Sunda Chain above Australia. Of the six great families within the order PSITTACIFORMES five are restricted to the Australasian region; and the number of species in this region is almost exactly equal to the total found in all other parts of the world combined. This is truly, therefore, the "regnum psittacorum"—the centre of parrot origin and evolution.



ANCIENT IDEA OF THE WORLD—a great "Southland" balancing the northern land mass with a burning zone at the Equator. Note Taprobane (Ceylon—also confused with Sumatra and Madagascar)—"either a great island or the first part of the 'other world,'" and the blank above the Caspian Sea.



ROBERT THORNE'S MAP OF 1527 sent from Seville to Dr. Ley, Henry VII's ambassador to the Emperor Charles V of Spain. The two sets of crosses at the bottom show Spain's idea of Portugal's claims: the longitudes are incorrectly estimated. If they were accurate either pair would exclude Portugal from the "Spice Is." and leave these in Spain's zone. This was what Magelhaens (Magellan) claimed erroneously in 1520.