

The Manila Galleon

Description of the Manila Galleon by British Captain George Anson, who circumnavigated the globe and seized the galleon during a war with Spain, from ship's log, 1740 – 1744 CE

Though Spain did not acquire the property of any of the spice islands, by the enterprising labors of Magellan yet the discovery made in his expedition to the Philippine Islands, was thought too considerable to be neglected; for these were not far distant from those places which produced spices, and were very well situated for the Chinese trade, and for the commerce of other parts of India; and therefore a communication was soon established, and carefully supported between these islands and the Spanish colonies on the coast of Peru: So that the city of Manila, (which was built on the island of Luzon, the chief of the Philippines) soon became the mart for all Indian commodities, which were brought up by the inhabitants, and were annually sent to the South-Seas to be there vended on their account; and the returns of this commerce to Manila being principally made in silver, the place by degrees grew extremely opulent and considerable, and its trade so far increased, as to engage the attention of the court of Spain, and to be frequently controlled and regulated by royal edicts. In the infancy of this trade, it was carried on from the port of Callao to the city of Manila, in which voyage the trade-wind continually favored them; so that notwithstanding these places were distant between three and four thousand leagues, yet the voyage was often made in little more than two months: But then the return from Manila was extremely troublesome and tedious, and is said to have sometimes taken them up above a twelve-month, which, if they pretended to ply up within the limits of the trade-wind, is not at all to be wondered at; and it is asserted, that in their first voyages they were so imprudent and unskillful as to attempt this course. However, that route was soon laid aside by the advice, as it is said, of a Jesuit, who persuaded them to steer to the northward till they got clear of the trade-winds, and then by the favor of the westerly winds, which generally prevail in high latitudes, to stretch away for the coast of California. This has been the practice for at least a hundred and sixty years past, for Sir Thomas Cavendish, in the year 1586, engaged off the south end of California a vessel bound from Manila to the American coast. And it was in compliance with this new plan of navigation, and to shorten the run both backwards and forwards, that the staple of this commerce to and from Manila was removed from Callao, on the coast of Peru, to the port of Acapulco, on the coast of Mexico, where it continues fixed at this time.

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