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The West Indies Fleet & Manila Galleons: the First Global Trade Route

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Abstract

Essays on the Manila Galleons and the West Indies Fleet, usually concentrate on the respective trade routes across the Pacific and the Atlantic, without assessing the greater, global route that both fleets comprised. The aim of this paper is to reflect on the larger context of the combined West Indies and Manila Galleon trade, a route that spanned from Europe to the Americas, and to Asia-Pacific, making it the first global trade route in history, and the longest in its time. The line covered almost 15,000 miles in its full length from Spain to the Philippines, linking Seville with Veracruz in its Atlantic phase, then Mexico City and Acapulco overland, and eventually Manila across the Pacific.

The Pacific line existed since Andrés de Urdaneta’s discovery of the tornaviaje in 1565, and linked Manila with Acapulco regularly until 1815. Asian goods like silk, porcelain, ivory and spices were carried to Acapulco in exchange for silver from the mines of Zacatecas and Potosi. Part of this merchandise was then carried overland through Mexico City to Veracruz, where it was loaded on the West Indies Fleet or Flota de Indias. The fleet sailed to Seville after calling at Havana, carrying valuable commodities from New Spain, Peru and Asia. This influx of Asian goods for over two centuries led to interesting cultural phenomena in Spain, such as the adoption of the Manila shawl in the flamenco dress, today considered inherent to Andalusian fashion.

In the opposite direction, the West Indies Fleet already sailed the Atlantic between Spain and the Americas since Columbus’ first voyage in 1492. In the mid 16th century a system of regular lines was established with two convoys splitting in the Caribbean, one heading for Havana and Veracruz, and the other for Cartagena de Indias and Portobello. Spanish wines, olive oil, books, decorative artifacts and manufactured goods were shipped to New Spain aboard these fleets. Part of these products were sent to Veracruz, carried overland to Acapulco, and then loaded onto the Manila galleon, together with other American products. The introduction of tools, agricultural products and livestock in the Philippines led to important changes in the way of life of its population. New customs, practices and techniques transformed its physical and cultural landscape.

The regular shipment of goods between Seville and Manila, and the fact that it fell under the single, central jurisdiction of the “Casa de Contratación”, demonstrates the existence of this global trade route that spanned three continents.

This essay will explain that the Manila-Seville route was not only the longest in its time; it was also the first global trade route in history. Other historical routes such as the ancient European-Indian routes, the Silk Road, or the Portuguese and Dutch spice routes were all inferior in length. More importantly, the continental coverage of these other routes was smaller as they were limited to Europe and Asia, sometimes Africa. The Seville-Manila route also linked, and crossed, the American continent.

I. Introduction

The subject of the Manila-Acapulco Galleon is usually studied in a monothematic way. Works usually analyze the route that stretched the Pacific Ocean, describing the trade system, the goods, culture and ideas that travelled both ways between the Philippines and Mexico. Most essays dwell on the exchange between these territories, the origin of these Asian products, and the ramifications of these commercial links in New Spain and Peru. They do not visualize however, the greater, global perspective of the entire trade route that stretched from Manila to Seville, crossing two oceans and linking three continents.

The aim of this paper is to reflect on the larger context of the Manila Galleon trade, a worldwide route that spanned from Europe to Asia-Pacific via the Americas, resulting in possibly the first global trade route in history, and the longest in its time. The line covered 15,000 miles in its full length from Spain to the Philippines, linking Seville with Veracruz in its Atlantic phase, then Mexico City and Acapulco overland, and eventually Guam and Manila across the Pacific. Although the Pacific line lasted until 1815, the full worldwide route operated from the 1566 to 1790.

This work emphasizes the importance of this route as one of the early, if not first examples of globalization, both from a commercial and cultural point of view. The paper does not aim to produce new findings on the Manila Galleon trade, but to propose this wider approach and perspective. We also propose future research aimed at measuring the global dimension of the route by quantifying the goods shipped the entire journey from Manila to Seville, and those shipped from Spain to the Philippines, versus those consumed in the Americas. A study of Filipino influence on Spanish culture would also contribute to understand the implications of this global route.

II. Historical background

In 1521 a Spanish expedition led by Ferdinand Magellan reached the Philippines after sailing around the southern tip of South America and crossing the Pacific Ocean. The ships landed in Homonhon (Samar) in March after discovering Guam and the Marianas, and reached Cebu a month later. The friendly chieftain Rajah Humabon of Cebu, requested Magellan’s help against his enemy Lapu-Lapu in the nearby island of Mactan. The resulting battle led to the death of Magellan and some of his men. Later, Rajah Humabon turned against his allies and killed 21 men of Magellan’s expedition, including the newly-appointed leaders Duarte Barbosa and Juan Serrano. As a result, navigator Juan Sebastian Elcano took command of the expedition and drove the remaining ships to Palawan, Brunei, and later the Moluccas, where they collected a valuable cargo of spices. With only one ship remaining, Elcano led the journey back to Spain across the Indian Ocean and around the Cape of Good Hope, reaching Cadiz in September 1522 aboard the galleon “Victoria”. This expedition became the first world circumnavigation.

Although Magellan took possession of the Philippine archipelago for the King of Spain in 1521, colonization did not start until the arrival of Miguel López de Legazpi from New Spain (present-day Mexico) in 1565. With instructions from Philip II, Viceroy Luis de Velasco sent Legazpi to explore the Philippine islands in search for spices, and find a maritime route back to Mexico, which previous expeditions by Loaisa (1525), Saavedra (1527), and Villalobos (1543) had failed to accomplish. Villalobos, who named Samar and Leyte “the Philippines” after King Philip II, sailed in August 1543 in eastward direction, but turned back a few weeks later, unable to hit upon favorable winds. The *tornaviaje* or “return trip” was finally discovered in 1565 by Andres de Urdaneta, an Augustinian friar and navigator in Legazpi’s expedition. Urdaneta was able to return to Acapulco by sailing north to latitude 39°, where his ship, the “San Pedro” picked the eastward *kuroshio* winds from Japan and crossed the Pacific to the coast of California. From there he sailed south along the coast until finally reaching Acapulco. The entire eastward transpacific journey lasted over 4 months.

Meanwhile, back in the Philippines, Legazpi explored Samar, Leyte, and Bohol, where the famous “blood compact” was signed with chieftain Sikatuna in March 1565. Later, the first Spanish settlement of the Philippines was founded in Cebu. In 1571, Legazpi made Manila the capital of the archipelago due to its strategic location and excellent harbor. The city became the center of the *Capitanía General de Filipinas*, or Captaincy General of the Philippines, which would come to include Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, the Caroline islands, and for a time parts of Taiwan and some of the Moluccas.

Legazpi’s arrival started a period of Spanish colonization that lasted over three centuries, creating a permanent relationship between the Philippines and Spain until 1898, and between the Philippines and the Americas until the 1815, the year the last Manila galleon sailed. The political and commercial links between such distant lands was possible thanks to a network of regular sea lines that connected them efficiently.

A *Flota de Indias* or West Indies Fleet already sailed the Atlantic between Spain and America since Columbus’ first voyage in 1492. In the 1560’s a monopoly system was

organized with escorted galleons sailing fixed routes on regular schedules between Spain and the New World. The Fleet carried passengers and goods for trade in both directions. Manufactured goods were sent from Spain to its American territories, and precious metals and agricultural products were shipped back from the Americas to Spain. Although various fleets sailed since 1492, the official Atlantic route started in 1566, and lasted until 1790, when the *Casa de Contratación* or House of Trade was abolished, after Spain opened its Western ports to free trade.

With the colonization and settlement of the Philippines, the Spanish Crown also needed a regular line of communication across the Pacific that linked Mexico City and Manila. The Philippines was an autonomous captaincy general attached to the Mexico-based Viceroyalty of New Spain, and trade became one of the major incentives for immigration to the islands. The Manila-Acapulco Galleon, inaugurated in 1565 by Urdaneta's first trip, was the response to this logistical need¹.

The *Galeón de Manila*, also known as *Nao de Manila* or *Nao de la China* (ship of China) was set to sail once a year in each direction. The journey from Acapulco to Manila lasted about three months, including a stopover in Guam. On the opposite direction it required four to five months, sometimes even six, due to the long detour it made to pick the eastward *kuroshio* winds near Japan. Initially a royal decree mandated that two galleons sailed together from Manila to Acapulco. However, after 1650 the convoy was reduced to one, as this represented a smaller investment for the Manila merchants, who could fit the entire cargo in a single, larger galleon. In 1702 a new decree ratified this practice.

The Manila Galleon made possible a permanent commercial and political link between the Philippines and New Spain for over two hundred and fifty years². The ships carried civil servants, soldiers and priests from Mexico to Manila, including newly appointed governors, archbishops and sometimes *visitadores* or royal inspectors. It also carried the *situado* or funds in silver to pay for the civil and military expenses of the colonial government in the Philippines, as well as official correspondence between both cities.

More importantly, the galleon played a crucial role in the growth of trade and the economic sustainability of the archipelago. Although Chinese and Arab merchants had already been trading with the Philippines before the arrival of the Spaniards in the 16th century, the establishment of the Manila-Acapulco route led to a boom in commercial activity in the region over the next two centuries. Large quantities of silver were shipped from Acapulco to Manila in exchange for valuable goods from many corners of Asia. Mexican and Peruvian silver became the basis of a lucrative trade between the Philippines and neighboring territories like China, the Moluccas, Japan, Formosa, Siam and even India. Merchants in the Philippines bought valuable goods from Chinese traders who arrived in Manila, and from local farmers and manufacturers, and loaded

¹ Some authors claim 1571 was the year the galleon trade was established (the year the Spanish founded Manila). Others argue it was 1573, when galleons first carried Chinese goods to Acapulco.

² Within its full existence from 1565 to 1815, about 40 galleons did not sail for various reasons. On average, that is only one out of seven years that the trip was not made.

them onto the galleon according to a system of *boletas* or cargo permits granted to Spanish residents of the Philippines.

Nutmeg, clove, ginger and other spices from the Moluccas, Chinese silk, ivory, porcelain and jade, Japanese lacquer ware, and Philippine cinnamon and cotton textiles were among the goods embarked in Manila. The merchandise was then shipped to Acapulco, where import taxes were paid to the Royal Treasury, and sold to Mexican merchants who paid in silver. One year later, the galleon returned to Manila stacked with silver 8-Real coins or bars from the sale of these products. The silver was distributed to the Manila tradesmen, who then used it to purchase new cargoes of goods to be sent to Acapulco the next time round. Such an extraordinary commercial exchange made Manila the largest center of trade in the Orient for over two centuries. Trade became the major source of income for the Philippines during the entire colonial period.

During some time, Manila galleons also travelled to the port of Panama and to Callao in Peru as the demand for Oriental products there was also high. However, these other Pacific routes were prohibited early on (1582) to protect the Atlantic trade between Seville and Portobello (Panama) and thus the interests of the Seville merchants. A Manila galleon would not set sail again for Peru until 1779, when the line was reauthorized after the disruption of trade in the north Pacific due to the American War of Independence. Internal trade between Acapulco (New Spain) and Callao (Peru) also existed until the late 16th century, but was also forbidden (including Panama) to protect South American markets from the competition of Chinese products sent from Manila. Despite this prohibition, some trade continued illegally throughout the 17th century between both viceroyalties. Strong demand for silk and other Asian products in Peru made this trade very profitable. Commercial activity between Acapulco and Callao was reauthorized from 1774 to 1815.

The Manila-Acapulco line lasted until 1815, when revolution broke out in Mexico, leading to the country's independence in 1821. In 1785 the Spain had set up the *Compañía de Filipinas* (Company of the Philippines) which operated an alternative route to Spain across the Indian Ocean and round the Cape of Good Hope, like the old Portuguese route. The new line proved useful after Mexico achieved independence and the Pacific line was interrupted. However, for about 30 years two routes operated simultaneously, one across the Pacific, and one across the Indian Ocean. By this time, new Philippine products were being exported to Europe: iron, indigo and tobacco.

With the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, the new line was modified to pass through the Red Sea, Egypt and the Mediterranean. This shortened the trip from Manila to Cadiz considerably, as did the invention of the steam engine and building of steam boats in the early 19th century. After 1821, merchant ships continued to sail the old galleon route from the Philippines to Mexico, but on a private basis and without monopolistic restrictions.

III. The Manila Galleons as part of a World Trade Route

For two and a half centuries, a remarkable trade route operated across the Pacific bringing huge quantities of silver to the Philippines, and fine goods from all corners of Asia to the Americas. On the Atlantic, a more complex route operated between Spain and her American territories through a network of Caribbean ports.

The Atlantic or West Indies Fleet was composed of two lines: *La Flota*, which sailed to Veracruz (Mexico), and *Los Galeones*, which travelled to Nombre de Dios (later Portobello) on the Isthmus of Panama. They sailed together from Seville across the Atlantic, and then split both ways upon entering the Caribbean. *La Flota* would call at San Juan (Puerto Rico), Santo Domingo, and Havana before heading for Veracruz, while *Los Galeones* called at Cartagena de Indias, an important fortified port in present-day Colombia, where the riches from Peru were loaded on the galleons, before reaching Portobello. On the return trip, both convoys would call at Havana before sailing together to Spain, where they would take the Guadalquivir River, upto Seville. In the early 18th century, the departure and destination point of these fleets was changed from Seville to Cadiz, on the Atlantic coast. These fleets linked Spain with the Americas regularly from 1566 when the monopoly system was established, to 1790, after Spanish ports were opened to free trade.

Thus, two lengthy maritime routes operated across the Atlantic and Pacific oceans simultaneously for over two centuries. Both of these lines were in turn connected by an overland route between Acapulco and Veracruz via Mexico City, known as the *Camino de China* or Road of China, because it led to Acapulco, where the Asia-bound Manila galleon or *Nao de la China* sailed from. The road also incorporated a smaller route from the silver-producing town of Zacatecas, which supplied the precious metal to the galleon. Through this overland route, the Atlantic and Pacific lines were connected, forming a single combined route that stretched from Manila to Seville, linking Asia, America and Europe. Asian goods were sent from Manila all the way to Spain, and European products were transported to Manila from Seville, via the Mexican ports of Veracruz (Atlantic) and Acapulco (Pacific). Indeed, a truly global route operated, crossing two oceans and linking three continents. We have termed this global line the Spanish Crown Trade Route (SCTR).

The fact that the combined Manila-Acapulco and Veracruz-Seville lines composed this single worldwide route is explained by two main factors. Firstly, although both lines were managed separately for administrative purposes, they fell under the single jurisdiction of the Spanish *Casa de Contratación* or House of Trade, a government division that oversaw all navigational and trade matters in Spain and her territories, and collected taxes for it. The *Casa* itself was overseen by the *Consejo de Indias*, a Council of the Indies which exercised supreme authority over all matters in the West and East Indies, that is, America and the Philippines. This control was exercised through the Viceroyalties, and at a lower level the *Audiencias*, a type of court with legislative and administrative powers. The *Casa* exerted a monopoly over all trade in the colonies and authorized or prohibited sea routes. Thus, a central government institution controlled the full Manila-Seville line.

Secondly, the fact that numerous commodities (and passengers) were transported the entire journey from Seville to Manila, and from Manila to Seville, indicates that a single, global route operated. On one hand, European products arrived in Manila after the transatlantic and transpacific journey, for example: Spanish wines and olive oil contained in large earthenware jars. These products were mostly from the Aljarafe region in Seville, a rich agricultural area conveniently located near the port where the Atlantic fleets sailed from. Manufactured products such as home utensils, construction tools, weapons, and textiles were also exported to the Philippines. The introduction of many such items resulted in Spanish terms entering native Philippine languages and dialects. For example, Tagalog words for table cutlery are mostly Spanish in origin: “kutsara” (spoon) comes from *cuchara* in Spanish, “tinidor” (fork) from *tenedor*, “kutsylio” (knife) from *cuchillo*, and so forth. Many tools used for construction or agriculture also have Spanish-derived terms: “martylio” (hammer) from Spanish *martillo*, “tornylio” (screw) from *tornillo*, “lyabe” (wrench) from *llave*, and “araro” (plow) from *arado*.

This also applies to fruits, vegetables and animals that were brought from Spain aboard the West Indies fleet and Manila galleons. Examples include the “cabalyo” (horse) from Spanish *caballo*, the “baka” (cow) from *vaca*, the “mola” (mule) from *mula*, and agricultural products such as “algodon” (cotton) from *algodón*³, “asukal” (sugar) from *azúcar*, and “oliba” (olive) from *oliva*. Other products were brought to the Philippines directly from America, so a Spanish version of the native American word was incorporated to the Philippine language, for example: “patatas” (potato) from *patata*, “mais” (corn/ maize) from *maiz*, and “tsokolate” (chocolate) from *chocolate*. This adds to the notion that trade existed between Spain and the Philippines, and that a Seville-Manila route (SCTR) was in operation.

In the opposite direction a variety of Asian products reached Spain via Manila, Acapulco and Veracruz. Chinese silk, ivory, porcelain, jade, gold, nacre and gemstones, spices such as clove, pepper and nutmeg from the Moluccas, Japanese furniture and lacquer ware, Philippine cinnamon, tobacco, cotton and textiles were all exported from Manila. Much of this was distributed within New Spain and Peru, and therefore stayed in the Americas. However, part was also sent to Veracruz and loaded onto the Atlantic West Indies fleet for Spain. The influx of these products resulted in some Asian cultural influence in Spain which have remained to this day.

The classical example is the adoption of the *mantón de Manila* or Manila shawl in the traditional flamenco dress, considered inherent to Andalusian fashion. As silk garments arrived in Seville aboard the galleons, the shawl became popular among women in Seville, and with time was incorporated to the *traje de sevillana* or traditional Sevillian woman’s dress, which has also become an icon of flamenco fashion. The Philippine hand fan or pay-pay (spelt *paipay* in Spanish) also became popular in Spain as a result of this trade. A number of Philippine terms also entered the Spanish language in the course of this exchange. (Chapter V looks into this phenomenon more closely).

³ In Tagalog, the word “koton” (from the English term “cotton”) is also used.

IV. The First Global Trade Route.

Various important trade routes have existed in the course of human history linking distant lands and bringing products and cultures together, from antiquity to modern times. The ancient Roman-Indian routes, the Silk Road (up to the 13th century) or the Portuguese spice routes (15th - 17th centuries) all played a crucial role in the exchange of goods, technology and ideas. From the 16th to 18th centuries the combined West Indies and Manila Galleon lines was one of these major intercontinental routes.

It is difficult to determine which historical route or combination of routes actually sparked trade and human interaction at a “global” scale. The term “globalization” is defined as “the process by which businesses or other organizations develop international influence or start operating on an international scale”⁴. By the 16th century a number of long-range routes operated simultaneously on an international scale. Most were linked to each other (directly or indirectly). The question is: which individual trade route can be considered responsible for the beginning of globalization? One way to approach this is by measuring the length of these routes. Which single route was the longest? Another way is assessing the territories or continents they brought together. How many continents did each route cross or link?

In the section below we will measure the length of a selection of historical intercontinental trade routes in existence up to the 19th century to determine which one covered the greatest distance, and linked the most continents.

A. Measurement of historical trade routes

We have calculated the length of four major historical intercontinental trade routes up until the 19th century, plus the first world circumnavigation (started by Magellan and completed by Elcano in 1522) which will be used as a benchmark. The five routes are listed below:

1. Magellan-Elcano World Circumnavigation
2. Europe-India Routes (3 itineraries)
3. Silk Road (2 itineraries)
4. Portuguese Spice Route
5. Spanish Crown Trade Route

To aid in the comparison, we will put together a distance index referenced to the length of the first world circumnavigation made by Magellan & Elcano, to help visualize the differences in length between routes.

⁴ Oxford University Press Dictionary

The methodology used to calculate the distance of each route consists of selecting some strategic intermediate points⁵ for each route, then measuring the distance between them and eventually adding up them up. Except when stated, we have used the internet tool gc.kls2.com to calculate these schematic routes⁶. For calculation purposes, the distance taken for each phase of the route is the shortest one. Although this direct line was not actually followed by the early ships and galleons, the application of the same method to every route will produce comparable results on a relative basis. In other words, the percentage deviation will remain unchanged, leaving unaltered the terms of comparison.

1. Magellan-Elcano World Circumnavigation

Figure 1.1. Magellan and Elcano’s Circumnavigation of the World

Source: <http://mappery.com/map-name/Magellans-Circumnavigation-of-World-1519-1522>



The above is the longest route calculated for the sake of comparison. This was not actually a trade route, but a Spanish voyage of exploration to the Far East in the early 16th century. It was initiated by Ferdinand Magellan in 1519, and completed by Juan Sebastian Elcano in 1522. The distance of this voyage will be used to compare the major trade routes in history, and to put together a distance index where 100 = Magellan & Elcano expedition.

⁵ These cities do not necessarily correspond to the ones the trade route passed or called at, as many do not exist today. Thus, only current cities will be used, not historical ones.

⁶ The tool calculates distances between present-day airports based on the shortest modern airplane route between them.

Figure 1.2. Schematic Map of Magellan & Elcano’s World Circumnavigation
 Picture and calculation tool: www.gc.kls2.com



Table 1.1 - Cities in the Magellan-Elcano World Circumnavigation

Sector (sub routes)	Miles
Sevilla-Las Palmas	855
Las Palmas-Dakar	918
Dakar-Conakry	441
Conakry-Recife	1,907
Recife-Rio de Janeiro	1,156
Rio de Janeiro-Mar del Plata	1,340
Mar del Plata-Punta Arenas	1,220
Punta Arenas-Isla de Pascua	2,658
Isla de Pascua-Cebú	8,790
Cebú-Kota Kinabalu	620
Kota Kinabalu-Ambon	1,063
Ambon-Dili	376
Dili-Cape Town	6,845
Cape Town-Sal	4,433
Sal-Horta	1,540
Horta-Sevilla	1,245
TOTAL:	35,407

According to this calculation, the length of Magellan-Elcano’s world circumnavigation was 35,407 miles. This will be used for comparative purposes at the end of this section.

2. Roman–Indian Routes

Figure 2.1. Three Schematic Roman-Indian Routes

Picture and calculation tool: www.gc.kls2.com



Various itineraries of this route existed during the times of the Roman Empire between Rome and India. We have taken three different paths and measured their respective lengths, in each case starting in Rome and ending in Goa: one through Asia Minor (mostly overland), one across the Mediterranean and the Arabian Peninsula (land and maritime route), and one through the Red Sea (only maritime).

Table 2.1.a - Roman-Indian Route (Itinerary 1)

Rome – Bari – Tirana – Istanbul – Tabriz – Zahedan – Quetta – Goa

Sector (sub routes)	Miles
Rome-Bari	228
Bari-Tirana	155
Tirana-Istanbul	475
Istanbul-Tabriz	949
Tabriz-Zahedan	1,032
Zahedan-Quetta	366
Quetta-Goa	1,113
TOTAL:	4,318

Table 2.1.b - Roman-Indian Route (Itinerary 2)

Rome – Catania – Heraklion – Tel Aviv – Kuwait – Dubai – Goa

Sector (sub routes)	Miles
Rome-Catania	335
Catania-Heraklion	582
Heraklion-Tel Aviv	604
Tel Aviv-Dubai	802
Kuwait-Dubai	531
Dubai-Goa	1,375
TOTAL:	4,229

Table 2.1.c - Roman-Indian Route (Itinerary 3)

Rome – Catania – Alexandria – Aden - Goa

Sector (sub routes)	Miles
Rome-Catania	335
Catania-Alexandria	953
Alexandria-Aden	1,587
Aden-Goa	1,939
TOTAL:	4,814

3. Ancient Silk Routes

Figure 3.1. Ancient Silk Route

Source: http://bizchinatown.com/img/travel/ancient_silk_road_map.gif



Figure 3.2. - Schematic Ancient Silk Route
 Picture and calculation tool: www.gc.kls2.com



The Silk Route was a network of overland and maritime routes between Europe and the Far East which lasted from about 300 BC to the late 14th century. The route brought together distant Asian and European goods, culture, and ideas. One of the most important commodities was Chinese silk, which gave the route its name. The ancient road was entirely overland, making the journey long and dangerous. Later a maritime route also developed. For our study, we have taken two different itineraries of the (overland) Ancient Silk Road, a northern and a southern itinerary. Both start in Venice (Italy) and end in Xi'an (China).

Table 3.2.a – Ancient Silk Route (Itinerary 1)
 Venice – Istanbul – Trabzon – Tbilisi – Baku – Almaty – Urumqi – Xi'an

Sector (sub routes)	Miles
Venice-Istanbul	886
Istanbul-Trabzon	574
Trabzon-Tbilisi	273
Tbilisi-Baku	279
Baku-Almaty	1,400
Almaty-Urumqi	524
Urumqi-Xi'an	1,310
TOTAL:	5,246

Table 3.2.b - Ancient Silk Route (Itinerary 2)

Venice–Catania–Heraklion–Beirut–Zahedan–Quetta–Islamabad–Xi’an

Sector (sub routes)	Miles
Venice-Heraklion	972
Heraklion-Beirut	597
Beirut-Tahran	908
Tahran-Zahedan	704
Zahedan-Quetta	366
Xi'an-Quetta	430
Islamabad-Xi'an	2,036
TOTAL:	6,013

4. Portuguese Spice Route

Figure 4.1. Portuguese Spice Route (black line)

Source: http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/21/Caminho_maritimo_para_a_India.png

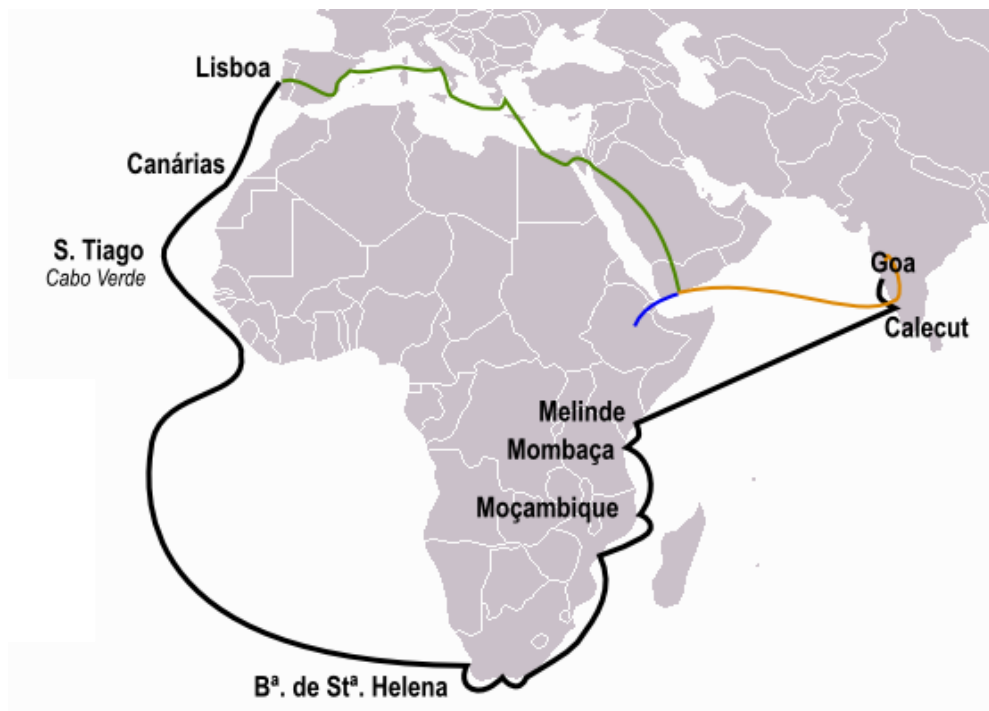


Figure 4.2. Schematic Portuguese Spice Route

Picture and calculation tool: www.gc.kls2.com



The Portuguese route was established in the early 16th century after Vasco da Gama rounded the Cape of Good Hope and discovered the maritime route to India in 1498. Although the route is often considered to end in Goa (India) where the Portuguese had a major commercial hub, we have extended the route to Malacca (Malaysia) as some Portuguese galleons continued their journey to that port until 1641, when it was ceded to the Dutch.

Table 4.2 - Portuguese Spice Route

Lisbon-Dakar-Cape Town-Maputo-Mombasa-Goa-Cochin-Malacca

Sector (sub routes)	Miles
Lisbon-Dakar	1,732
Dakar-Cape Town	4,107
Cape Town-Maputo	1,003
Maputo-Mombasa	1,575
Mombasa-Goa	2,698
Goa-Cochin	325
Cochin-Malacca	1,905
TOTAL:	13,345

5. West Indies-Manila Galleons or Spanish Crown Trade Route (SCTR)

Figure 5.1 - Schematic Spanish Crown Trade Route (SCTR)

Picture and calculation tool: www.gc.ks2.com



The SCTR lasted for over two centuries and linked Manila (Philippines), Acapulco, Veracruz (Mexico), and Seville (Spain). The distance from Manila to Acapulco is about nine thousand miles. There are three hundred miles overland from Acapulco to Veracruz, and a final five thousand five hundred miles between Veracruz and Seville. Thus, the total distance adds up to a fourteen thousand six hundred sixty one miles.

Table 5.1 - Spanish Crown Trade Route (SCTR)

Manila – Acapulco – Veracruz - Seville

Sector (sub routes)	Miles
Manila-Acapulco	8,926
Acapulco-Veracruz	287
Veracruz-Sevilla	5,448
TOTAL:	14,661

B – Comparison of historical trade routes

The following table compares the distance in miles of each of the four historical routes analyzed, plus the first world circumnavigation. It also includes an index for each route created to help visualize these distances: the Trade Route Length Index (TRLI). It applies the value 100 to the world circumnavigation route, and then calculates proportional values for every other route.

Table 6.1 – Length of Historical Trade Routes

Historical Routes	miles	TRLI (Index)
World circumnavigation	35.407	100,00
Europe-India routes		
2.1.a	4.318	12,20
2.1.b	4.229	11,94
2.1.c	4.814	13,60
Silk routes		
3.2.a	5.246	14,82
3.2.b	6.013	16,98
Portuguese Spice route	13.345	37,69
Spanish Crown Trade Route (SCTR)	14.661	41,41

The above table shows that the SCTR was the longest route of all analyzed. A Portuguese route operated between Europe, Africa and Asia since the early 16th century through a large network of ports in the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans. However, this was shorter in length than the Spanish Crown Trade Route, as the table indicates. SCTR spanned 14,661 miles (41.4 index points) in its full length from Manila to Seville, about 1,300 miles (almost 4 index points) or 10% more than the Portuguese Spice Route, which measured 13,345 miles.

Thus, going back to the question of what trade connections or routes initiated globalization, SCTR can be considered a firm candidate from the point of view of length, as it was the *longest route* in history up to that moment. Let us now look at the second criterion: the number of continents that a particular trade route brought together. The list below shows the continents that each of the four routes connected:

<u>Route</u>	<u>Continents linked (total)</u>
Roman-India Routes	Europe, Asia (2)
Silk Routes	Europe, Asia (2)
Portuguese Spice Route	Europe, Africa, Asia (3)
Spanish Crown Trade Route	Europe, Americas, Asia (3)

Both the Roman-Indian and the Silk routes linked the continents of Europe and Asia (albeit through different paths and to different extents). The Roman-Indian routes also called at some port cities along the Red Sea and the North African coast, which could be interpreted as also linking the African continent. However, trade from those coastal cities was comparatively small, and hardly reached inland (except through separate trade channels along the Nile for example). The Roman-Indian route was mostly carrying goods from India, Arabia and Europe (mainly Italy) and therefore can be considered to have linked Europe and (Southern) Asia only⁷.

The Silk Route was a much longer commercial network that spanned from Western Europe to Eastern Asia. In fact, the longest Silk Route itinerary analyzed (table 6.1) was 1,200 miles longer than the longest Roman-India itinerary. However, this route also linked two continental blocks only: Europe and Asia.

The Portuguese Spice Route was born during the European Age of Exploration as an alternative to the centuries-old Silk Road, as a safer and faster way to reach the valuable products of the Orient. It was a fully maritime route, which meant it avoided crossing dangerous territories and was also faster than an overland route, despite the long detour it made around Africa. Unlike the Roman-Indian Route, this Portuguese line called at many ports in West, South, and East Africa. Total trade in those African ports was considerable, so it is safe to say that the Portuguese Spice Route linked the African continent. It also linked Asia and Europe, so this trade route connected a total of three continental blocks.

⁷ In the standard categorization of continents, the criterion of a common landmass (or separation by water) is applied primarily. However, it also incorporates historical and cultural ties as a secondary criterion. This is the case in the consideration that Europe and Asia are different continents, a common interpretation in the West. Continental Europe and Asia may form a single landmass, though cultural and historical differences are applied to separate them into two blocks. In countries like Russia however, a territory that stretches from Europe to the Far East, only the landmass criterion applies, and Europe and Asia are considered to be the same continent. Similarly, some cultures (Spanish-speaking countries) consider the Americas to be a single continent, whereas others (US and Canada) prefer to divide it into two: North and South America.

If however, we were to consider the cultural and historical links as the primary criterion, the extent and number of continents would be quite different. This alternative categorization would be useful when analyzing international politics, immigration, capital flows or trade, as is the case here. For example, under this criterion, the **Mediterranean** could be grouped into a single continent (Southern and Central Europe, the Middle East, North Africa, and its extensions to Central Africa) because a number of ancient civilizations all flourished around that region (Mesopotamia, Rome, Greece, Egypt, Muslim caliphates) and because they (and their descendant nations) have been permanently connected through trade, exploration, wars and conquests, and therefore have major cultural and historic links.

The question of which trade route sparked globalization (from the point of view of continental coverage) would therefore be analyzed in a different light, if continents were categorized from this cultural-historical perspective. In fact, the importance of a trade route would be based on the number of nations and cultures it linked, rather than on the number of continents from a simply geographical point of view. For example, the Roman-Indian Route would be less “global” than the Silk Route (despite both linking Europe and Asia according to the standard continental categorization) because the former would be considered to link the “Mediterranean” and perhaps a “South Asian” or Indian block, whereas the latter would include a “Far Eastern” block as well. The same criteria could be applied when analyzing the Portuguese route and the SCTR. This alternative method of assessing globalism or the extent of “global” connections can be used in future studies on the subject. Here, we have looked at distance and geographical (continental) coverage only.

About sixty years after the Discovery of America, Spanish galleons were sailing between Europe and the Americas on a regular basis. The *Flota de Indias* or West Indies Fleet sailed regularly from Seville to Havana across the Atlantic. Later, with the discovery of the transpacific *tornaviaje* in 1565 and the establishment of the Manila-Acapulco galleons, permanent trade started between Asia and the Americas. The Pacific and Atlantic lines were in turn connected through Mexico, and internal trade within Spanish America also existed, especially between New Spain and Peru. Thus, a single worldwide route started to operate linking territories in Asia, America and Europe.

SCTR crossed and linked the American continent, something the Portuguese line did not. This is an important argument against considering the Portuguese route entirely “global”. Portuguese navigators discovered new routes to Asia, but their galleons traded within the known world: Europe and the Orient. Only after the discovery of the New World in 1492, and the establishment of permanent links with the Americas, from both Europe and Asia, can trade be considered to have been really *global*. Not only was SCTR the longest trade route in its time, it was also the only one to cross and link and the Americas with Europe *and* Asia.

Linking three continents was just one of the achievements of the global Spanish-Philippine route. It also contributed to the development of trade within Asia and Europe themselves, and even Africa, either by promoting existing routes or by establishing new ones. Large quantities of Spanish 8-Real silver coins entered the Asian markets via Manila, in exchange for all sorts of luxury goods. These coins eventually became legal tender in countries such as India and China. On the opposite end, Seville became one of the major trade centers in Europe, leading to growth of manufacturing activity and increased trade with other cities. In the Americas, the global route also resulted in the development of internal trade within New Spain and Peru

This contributes to thesis that the SCTR was the **first global trade route**. It was the longest trade route up to that moment in history, and the first one to link Europe, Asia *and* the recently discovered American continent.

V. Some repercussions of the West Indies-Manila Galleon trade

In chapters II & III we have already looked at some of the cultural effects of the Manila-Seville line or SCTR. Spanish influence on Mexican and Philippine culture was much stronger than vice versa, as Spain was the colonizing power. It brought its own culture and customs to the territories it settled, first the Americas, later the Philippines. Spaniards brought their architecture, arts, religion and language to the islands. Missionary work led to the widespread of Christianity by the late 17th century. As a result, the Philippines is one of only two predominantly Christian countries in Asia nowadays, the other being East Timor. Spanish construction methods and styles transformed the urban scenery in the islands, and led to a genuine Filipino style of architecture, which combines native, Chinese and Spanish elements. The "Bahay na Bato" or traditional Filipino house made of stone and wood, usually nipa palm or bamboo, is a good example of this fusion.

SCTR also brought the Spanish language to the Philippines. Originally it was not a priority for the government to teach the language to native population. However, from the beginning important educational institutions using Spanish as the medium of instruction were set up by religious orders. The earliest examples include the Colegio de San Ildefonso of Cebu (which later became the University of San Carlos) founded in 1595, and the Colegio de Manila founded in 1596, both by the Jesuits. The University of Santo Tomas (Manila) was founded in 1611, and the San Juan de Letrán School (Manila) established in 1620. By the 19th century an important class of educated Filipinos or *Ilustrados* emerged, and Filipino literature in Spanish flourished until the first half of the 20th century. In 1863, almost fifty years after the galleon trade ended, Queen Isabella of Spain decreed that a public education system be set up in the Philippines, leading to the construction of numerous schools across the archipelago. By the 1890's a large portion of middle class Filipinos was fluent in Spanish, this being either their first or second language. In fact, when independence was achieved from Spain and the First Philippine Republic established in 1899, the Malolos Constitution chose Spanish as the country's official language. Later, during the period of US administration which lasted until 1946, Spanish was marginalized, and gradually declined.

However, Spanish remains in thousands of words in Tagalog (and other Philippine languages) which are derived from Spanish, as a result of their introduction through the galleon trade or later, specially manufactured goods, agricultural products, textiles and many terms related to government, religion and education. The following list includes a number of such Filipino words derived from Spanish:

Construction & Agriculture tools

Tagalog	English (Spanish)
Martilyo	hammer (martillo)
Machyete	machete (machete)
Tribuson	corkscrew (tirabuzón)
Lyabe	wrench (llave inglesa)
Sipilyo	brush (cepillo)
turnylio	screw (tornillo)
kadena	chain (cadena)

kubo bucket (cubo)

Weapons

<u>Tagalog</u>	<u>English (Spanish)</u>
Sable	sword (sable)
Daga	dagger (daga)
Pulbura	gunpowder (polvora)

Home furniture & utensils

<u>Tagalog</u>	<u>English (Spanish)</u>
Kutsara	spoon (cuchara)
Tinidor	fork (tenedor)
Kutsylio	knife (cuchillo)
Silya	chair (silla)
Bangketa	stool (banqueta)
Bintana	window (ventana)
Mesa	table (mesa)
Libro	book (libro)
Baso	glass (vaso)
Tuwalya	towel (towel)
Gripo	tap (grifo)
lente	lens (lente)
lampara	lamp (lampara)
relo, rels	clock (reloj)

Clothes & footwear

<u>Tagalog</u>	<u>English (Spanish)</u>
Kamiseta	undershirt (camiseta)
Pantalon	trousers (pantalon)
Kalsonsilyo	underpants (calzoncillo)
Sapatos	shoes (zapatos)
Tsinelas	slippers (Chinelas)
Kalsetin	socks (calcetin)
Medyas	stockings (medias)
Abrigo	coat (abrigo)
Lana	wool (lana)

Agricultural products (fruits and vegetables)

<u>Tagalog</u>	<u>English (Spanish)</u>
Patatas	potato (patata)
Sibuyas	onion (cebolla)
Peras	pear (pera)
Paminta	pepper (pimiento)
Gisantes	peas (guisante)
Repolyo	cabbage (repollo)
Pipino	cucumber (pepino)

Mais	corn (maiz)
anyil (or “indigo”)	indigo (añil)
asukal	sugar (azucar)
algodón (or “koton”)	cotton (algodón)
oliba	olive (oliva)
bino	wine (vino)

Animals

<u>Tagalog</u>	<u>English (Spanish)</u>
Baka	Cow (vaca)
Kabayo	Horse (caballo)
Mola	Mule (mula)
Pato	Duck (pato)

Though to a much lesser extent, Asian and Philippine culture also influenced Mexico and Spain, especially in art forms, including fashion. A classical example is the silk *mantón de Manila*, a shawl with East Asian decorative motifs which was incorporated to the Spanish women’s flamenco outfit or *traje de sevillana*. The original *mantons* were produced in China and brought to Manila, where they were shipped aboard the Manila galleons to Acapulco and then to Spain on the Atlantic fleets. Later, these shawls were produced in Manila, and eventually Seville itself. With time, this garment became part of other typical Spanish dresses, such as the Madrid women’s *traje de chulapa*. Another example is the *pay pay*, a Philippine hand fan which became popular in Spain in the 19th and 20th centuries.

A number of Philippine terms also found their way into the Spanish language. Some examples include the mentioned *paipay* (Spanish spelling), *carabao* (a buffalo used for agriculture, native to the Philippines), *pantalán* (a wooden pier), *abacá* (Manila hemp) *sampaguíta* (a flower native to the Philippines) and *barangay* (a small district or neighborhood). The term *papel manila*, a cardboard paper made from Manila hemp (used for envelopes and folders) was also incorporated to the Spanish vocabulary (as was “manila paper” to the English language). So was the term *sampán* (from Chinese Cantonese “saam-paán”) meaning a small flat-bottom sailboat or skiff typically used by Chinese merchants.

In the arts, Oriental styles also influenced Mexico and Spain through the Manila galleon trade. Religious and decorative art, particularly sculptures and textiles were influenced by objects produced in Manila by Chinese craftsmen and shipped aboard the Manila galleons. In Mexico there are interesting examples of religious statues made of carved ivory (Jesus on the Cross, the Virgin Mary, or the Holy Family) which reflect Asian features or styles. The import of such objects in America and Spain had an influence on local manufacturers, who often incorporated such Oriental styles to their products.

VI. Conclusions

In this essay we have explored the Manila Galleon as part of a Spanish global trade route that crossed two oceans and spanned three continents. The regular shipment of goods for two and a half centuries between Seville and Manila, and the fact that it fell under the jurisdiction of a central government unit, the *Casa de Contratación*, demonstrates that a single route operated.

The combined West Indies and Manila galleon trade, or Spanish Crown Trade Route (SCTR), was the first global trade route in history, and the longest in its time. The entire Manila-Acapulco-Veracruz-Seville line covered almost 15,000 miles, surpassing in length other historical routes such as the ancient Roman-Indian routes, the Silk Road, or the competing Portuguese Spice Route. More importantly, the SCTR was the first and only one to permanently link the Americas to both Asia and Europe.

Beyond the impressive achievement of linking the three continental blocks, the SCTR also contributed to the development of trade within Asia, either by promoting existing routes, or by establishing new ones, especially between Manila and many other Asian ports. Traders arrived in Manila from many different regions including: China, Japan, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), India, Sumatra, Ormuz, and Cambodia. These merchants sold their products to Manila traders who sent them to New Spain (Mexico) aboard the Manila Galleon. In the opposite direction, significant quantities of Spanish 8-Real silver coins from Mexico entered the Asian markets via Manila. In some countries like China, the 8-Real coins even became legal tender. In the Americas, the SCTR resulted in the development of internal trade between (and within) New Spain and Peru, at least during a significant period of time. On the other end of the route, Seville (and later Cadiz) also became major trade centers in Europe, leading to new infrastructures and growth of manufacturing activity.

From the 16th to the early 19th centuries, the West Indies and Manila Galleons or SCTR made possible the worldwide exchange of goods, peoples, and culture. By linking the three major continents for the first time in history, the route established trade and cultural exchange on a global scale. It thus represents the earliest form of globalization.

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