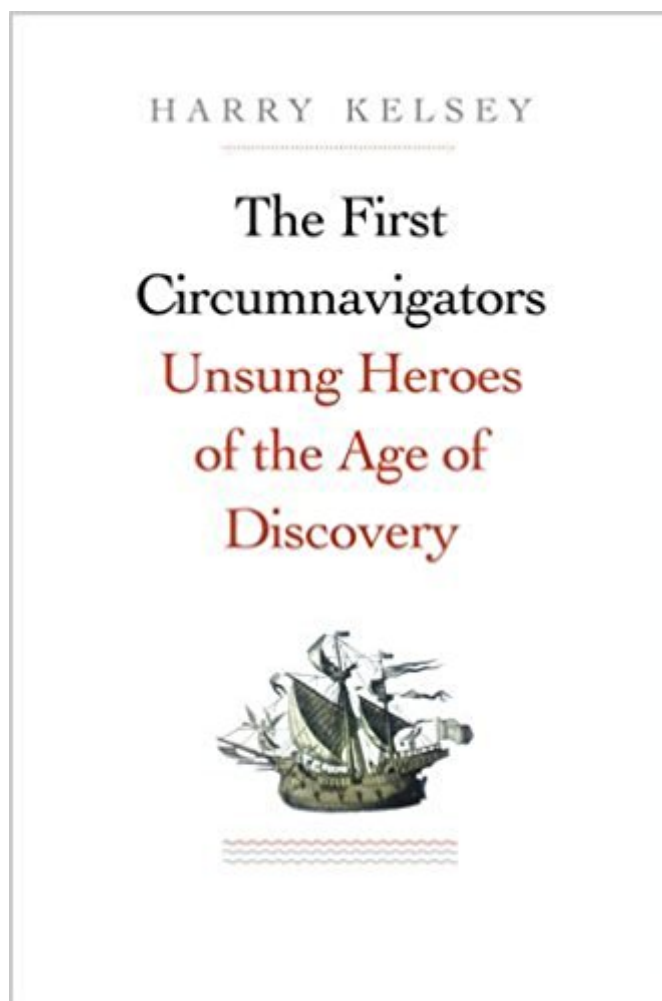


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The First Circumnavigators: Unsung Heroes Of The Age Of Discovery



Synopsis

Prior histories of the first Spanish mariners to circumnavigate the globe in the sixteenth century have focused on Ferdinand Magellan and the other illustrious leaders of these daring expeditions. Harry Kelsey's masterfully researched study is the first to concentrate on the hitherto anonymous sailors, slaves, adventurers, and soldiers who manned the ships. The author contends that these initial transglobal voyages occurred by chance, beginning with the launch of Magellan's armada in 1519, when the crews dispatched by the king of Spain to claim the Spice Islands in the western Pacific were forced to seek a longer way home, resulting in bitter confrontations with rival Portuguese. Kelsey's enthralling history, based on more than thirty years of research in European and American archives, offers fascinating stories of treachery, greed, murder, desertion, sickness, and starvation but also of courage, dogged persistence, leadership, and loyalty.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"This book is a thorough and well-written narrative based upon the original journals of early seamen who circumnavigated the globe. Harry Kelsey has put life into the men who sailed on these voyages, detailing the hardships they suffered, the food they ate, the dangers they faced, the natives they met, and the fights they had. In sum, much that goes beyond popular accounts to explain the remarkable and daring accomplishments of sixteenth-century explorers who searched the world for riches—both real and imagined—are contained in these pages."—Iris Engstrand, University of San Diego (Iris Engstrand)"There are

few historians who have mastered the source material pertaining to this period to the extent that Kelsey has. A wonderful read for anyone interested in the history of world exploration.

- John Johnson, Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History (John Johnson)

"The First Circumnavigators is an old-fashioned, spume-flecked work of history. Kelsey's main concern is with the mariners themselves, and the timber hulks in which they rode the waves. He provides revealing evidence not only of the physical hardships of life at sea, but also of the psychological attrition."

- David Gelber, Literary Review (David Gelber Literary Review 2016-08-01)
- [A] meticulously researched account of the early Pacific voyages
- Adam Nicolson, Spectator (Adam Nicholson Spectator 2016-10-01)
- "Kelsey writes with enormous authority."
- Jonathan Dore, TLS (Jonathan Dore TLS 2016-09-30)

Harry Kelsey is a research scholar at the Huntington Library and the author of several acclaimed biographies of sixteenth-century explorers, including Sir Francis Drake: The Queen's Pirate. He lives in Altadena, CA.

Nobody, I mean nobody, covers the the field of the first circumnavigators like Harry Kelsey. He lists not only the captains who were the first to circle the globe, but each individual crew member too. I was especially interested in the progress of these ships. They were unaware, as yet, of the patterns of the trade winds in the Pacific. One ship left "Manila" bound for Mexico, and returned a month later, having given up in the face of constant headwinds. The privations that these men suffered surprised me too. Many expeditions returned home with less than 10% of the original crew. Dr. Kelsey's book brought me along on these voyages. It was a most interesting read.

Fascinating story. Well researched and incredibly readable. Must read for any history buff.

The book starts in 1519 with the difficulties of Magellan's voyage and completion of the circumnavigation by Elcano. A major takeaway is esteem of Magellan's contribution under extremely difficult circumstances, political as well as navigation and seamanship. The book disabused me of the notion that Francis Drake was the second captain to circumnavigate the globe. It features mapping the Pacific in the 16th century after Magellan by all Spanish navigators until Drake, although Sebastian Cabot gets a mention. The book adds knowledge about lesser known navigators, while the more important explorers like Cabrillo never went completely round. Vizcaino

is never mentioned. There is interesting politics mixed with navigation, including how severe privation necessitated the Spaniards to violate the boundary specified by the treaty of Zaragoza. The litany of subordinate captains pilots and, in some cases, crew bespeaks extensive research but makes for somewhat tiresome reading. The piecemeal maps of the Pacific could do with augmentation by a larger view. Renditions of the voyages makes interesting reading albeit, except for Magellan, with minimal historical significance. The book accounts for how, as trade with the Islands became based in New Spain, circumnavigation became more of an accident than an accomplishment. It ends with the voyages of Drake and Cavendish as the Spanish and Portuguese ceded primacy of navigation and commerce to the English and Dutch, who became the major beneficiaries of Iberian sponsored exploration.

Interesting parts but not the most exciting book on the topic. Fairly short, I felt it just gave an overview or outline of early circumnavigation. Rarely gets deep into any one character or expedition's story. Over the edge of the world about Magellan's voyage was a much more interesting, although longer, book. Other books on exploration such as the story of the Endurance, 1491, etc. were more interesting to me.

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