

John Cabot Biography Explorer (c. 1450–c. 1500)

Explorer John Cabot made a British claim to land in Canada, mistaking it for Asia, during his 1497 voyage on the ship *Matthew*.

Who Was John Cabot?

John Cabot (c. 1450, disappeared May 1498), born Giovanni Caboto, was a Venetian explorer and navigator known for his 1497 voyage to North America, where he claimed land in Canada for England. After setting sail in May 1498 for a return voyage to North America, Cabot's final days remain a mystery.

What Did John Cabot Discover?

In 1497 Cabot traveled by sea from Bristol to Canada, which he mistook for Asia. Cabot made a claim to the North American land for [King Henry VII of England](#), setting the course for England's rise to power in the 16th and 17th centuries.

Cabot's Route

Like [Christopher Columbus](#), Cabot believed that sailing west from Europe was the shorter route to Asia. Hearing of opportunities in England, Cabot traveled there and met with King Henry VII, who gave him a grant to "seeke out, discover, and finde" new lands for England. In early May of 1497, Cabot left Bristol, England, on the *Matthew*, a fast and able ship weighing 50 tons, with a crew of 18 men. Cabot and his crew sailed west and north, under Cabot's belief that the route to Asia would be shorter from northern Europe than Columbus's voyage along the trade winds. On June 24, 1497, 50 days into the voyage, Cabot landed

on the east coast of North America.

The precise location of Cabot's landing is subject to controversy. Some historians believe that Cabot landed at Cape Breton Island or mainland Nova Scotia. Others believe he may have landed at Newfoundland, Labrador or even Maine. Though the *Matthew's* logs are incomplete, it is believed that John Cabot went ashore with a small party and claimed the land for the King of England.

In July 1497, the ship sailed for England and arrived in Bristol on August 6, 1497. Cabot was soon rewarded with a pension of £20 and the gratitude of King Henry VII.

When and Where Was John Cabot Born?

John Cabot was born Giovanni Caboto around 1450 in Genoa, Italy.

Wife and Kids

In 1474, John Cabot married a young woman named Mattea. The couple had three sons: Ludovico, Sancto and Sebastiano. Sebastiano would later follow in his father's footsteps, becoming an explorer in his own right.

Family and Early Life

John Cabot was the son of a [spice](#) merchant, Giulio Caboto. At age 11, the family moved from Genoa to Venice, where John learned sailing and navigation from Italian seamen and merchants. Cabot officially became a Venetian citizen in 1476 and began conducting trade in the eastern

Mediterranean. Records indicate that he got into financial trouble and left Venice as a debtor in November 1488. During this time, Cabot became inspired by the discoveries of Bartolomeu Dias and Christopher Columbus.

How and When Did John Cabot Die?

It is believed Cabot died sometime in 1499 or 1500, but his fate remains a mystery. In February 1498, John Cabot was given permission to make a new voyage to North America; in May of that year, he departed from Bristol, England, with five ships and a crew of 300 men. The ships carried ample provisions and small samplings of cloth, lace points and other "trifles," suggesting an expectation of fostering trade with indigenous people. En route, one ship became disabled and sailed to Ireland, while the other four ships continued on. From this point, there is only speculation as to the fate of the voyage and John Cabot. For many years, it was believed that the ships were lost at sea. More recently, however, documents have emerged that place Cabot in England in 1500, laying speculation that he and his crew actually survived the voyage. Historians have also found evidence to suggest that Cabot's expedition explored the eastern Canadian coast, and that a priest accompanying the expedition might have established a Christian settlement in Newfoundland.

Ferdinand Magellan Biography

Explorer (c. 1480–1521)

While in the service of Spain, the Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan led the first European voyage of discovery to circumnavigate the globe.

Synopsis

Ferdinand Magellan was born in Portugal, circa 1480. As a boy, he studied mapmaking and navigation. By his mid-20s, he was sailing in large fleets and was engaged in combat. In 1519, with the support of Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, Magellan set out to find a better route to the [Spice](#) Islands. He assembled a fleet of ships which, despite huge setbacks and Magellan's death, circumnavigated the world in a single voyage.

Early Life

Ferdinand Magellan was born in Portugal, either in the city of Porto or in Sabrosa, circa 1480. His parents were members of the Portuguese nobility and after their deaths, Magellan became a page for the queen, at age 10. He studied at Queen Leonora's School of Pages in Lisbon and spent his days poring over texts on cartography, astronomy, and celestial navigation—subjects that would serve him well in his later pursuits.

Navigator and Explorer

In 1505, when Ferdinand Magellan was in his mid-20s, he joined a Portuguese fleet that was sailing to East Africa. By 1509, he found himself at the Battle of Diu, in which the Portuguese destroyed Egyptian ships in the Arabian Sea. Two years later, he explored Malacca, located in present-day Malaysia, and participated in the conquest of Malacca's port. It was there that he acquired a native servant he named Enrique. It is possible that Magellan sailed as far as the Moluccas, islands in Indonesia, then called the [Spice](#) Islands. The Moluccas were the original source of some of the world's most valuable spices, including cloves and nutmeg. The conquest of spice-rich countries was, as a result, a source of much European competition.

ADVERTISEMENT

While serving in Morocco, in 1513, Magellan was wounded, and walked the remainder of his life with a limp. After his injury, he was falsely

accused of trading illegally with the Moors, and despite all of his service to Portugal, and his many pleas to the king, any further offers of employment were withheld from him. In 1517, Magellan moved to Seville, Spain, to offer his skills to the Spanish court. His departure from Portugal came at an opportune time. The Treaty of Tordesillas (1494) declared all newly discovered and yet to be discovered territories east of the demarcation line (46°30' W) were given to Portugal and all territories west of the line were given to Spain. In the three years following his departure from Portugal, Magellan had religiously studied all of the most recent navigation charts. Like all navigators of the time, he understood from Greek texts that the world was round. He believed that he could find a shorter route to the [Spice](#) Islands by sailing west, across the Atlantic Ocean, around South America and across the Pacific. This was not a new idea, Christopher Columbus and Vasco Núñez de Balboa had paved the way, but such a voyage would give the Spanish open access to the [Spice](#) Islands without having to travel across areas controlled by the Portuguese. .

Final Years

Ferdinand Magellan presented his plan to King Charles I of Spain (soon to become Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire), who gave his blessing. On September 20, 1519, he set out with a fleet of five fully supplied ships, but hardly adequate to sail the distances he proposed. The fleet sailed first to Brazil and then down the coast of South America to Patagonia. There an attempted mutiny took place and one of the ships was wrecked. Despite the setback, the crew continued on with the four remaining vessels.

By October 1520, Magellan and his men had entered what is now called the Strait of Magellan. It took them over a month to pass through the strait, during which time the master of one of the ships deserted and sailed back home. The remaining ships sailed across the Pacific Ocean. In March 1521, the fleet anchored in Guam.

Later in March, 1521, Magellan's fleet reached Homonhon Island on the edge of the Philippines with less than 150 of the 270 men who started the expedition. Magellan traded with Rajah Humabon, the island king, and a bond was quickly formed. The Spanish crew soon became involved in a war between Humabon and another rival leader and Magellan was killed in battle on April 27, 1521.

The remaining crew escaped the Philippines and continued on towards the [Spice](#) Islands, arriving in November, 1521. The Spanish commander of the last ship, the Victoria, set sail December and reached Spain on September 8, 1522.

The Controversy over Who was First

There has been considerable debate around who were the first persons to circumnavigate the globe. The easy answer is Juan Sebastian Elcano and the remaining crew of Magellan's fleet starting from Spain on September 20, 1519, and returning in September 1522. But there is another candidate who might have gone around the world before them—Magellan's servant Enrique. In 1511, Magellan was on a voyage for Portugal to the Spice Islands and participated in the conquest of Malacca where he acquired his servant Enrique. Fast forward ten years later, Enrique is with Magellan in the Philippines. After Magellan's death, it is reported that Enrique was grief stricken and when he found out he was not going to be freed, contrary to Magellan's will, he ran away. At this point the record gets murky. Some accounts state Enrique fled into the forest. Official Spanish records list Enrique as one of the men massacred in the attack, but some historians question the records' credibility or accuracy, citing a bias against native people.

So, it is possible that if Enrique had survived after his escape, he might have made his way back to Malacca where he was originally enslaved by Magellan back in 1511. If true, it would mean Enrique—not Elcano and the surviving members of the crew—was the first person to circumnavigate the globe, albeit not in a single voyage.