

# Overseas Shipwrecks: Depictions in Spanish and Portuguese Sources from the 16<sup>th</sup> Century

PhDr. Jaroslava Marešová

## Abstract

This dissertation analyses Spanish and Portuguese shipwreck accounts of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. These accounts were written mainly by survivors of catastrophic shipwrecks on overseas voyages to America and India and therefore belong to the huge corpus of works written in the 16<sup>th</sup> century about exploring and conquering new territories. But unlike the most of the written sources of the period, these accounts do not celebrate the overseas enterprise, they bring a new, tragic, perspective and describe the dangers and misery of overseas voyages. Portuguese shipwreck accounts were very popular among the readers of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and therefore they created a kind of tradition. They are often seen as a specific genre and represent an important topic of the Portuguese literature of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and are studied by many Portuguese literary scholars. In this dissertation six Portuguese accounts are analysed, five of them written by survivors. There are not as many shipwreck accounts written in Spanish. The best known of them is the account by Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca. The second shipwreck account written in Spanish and analysed in this dissertation is the letter by Maestre Juan in which he narrates his wreck on the Serrana keys in the Caribbean Sea. This letter still remains almost unknown. Although the Spanish and the Portuguese shipwreck accounts are very similar, they are very rarely compared and studied together. The aim of this dissertation is therefore to compare them and describe which characteristics they have in common.

It has already been shown by literary studies focused on this topic that shipwreck accounts are a specific genre between historiography and literature in which facts and fiction are always mixed. This dissertation is dedicated also to analyse the connection of these accounts to travel writing and autobiography on one side and to literature on the other.

Lastly, in the final part of this dissertation we analyse the relation of shipwreck accounts to the *Travels (Peregrinação, 1614)* by Fernão Mendes Pinto and to the *Misfortunes of Alonso Ramírez (Infortunios de Alonso Ramírez, 1690)* by Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora. These two narratives are based on the tradition of shipwreck accounts and have many topics and motives in common with them, but they also widely differ from them. The differences and similarities are also described in this dissertation.

The first chapters of the dissertation are introduction and a detailed description of the studied accounts. After them the chapter dedicated to analyse the relation of the accounts to travel writing and autobiography follows. The conclusion is that the shipwreck accounts are a specific kind of travel writing in which the autobiographical elements are often very important. The analysis and interpretation of the studied accounts

forms the main part of the dissertation. Special attention is dedicated to the intertextual relations between the different accounts and to the possibility of influence of the older accounts on the later ones. In some cases, the accounts written by survivors are compared to accounts about the same wrecks written by chroniclers. A typology of the shipwreck accounts is proposed in the final part of the fourth chapter. The last chapter of the dissertation is dedicated to analyse Pinto's and Sigüenza's narratives with special attention to the similarities and differences from the shipwreck accounts. Sigüenza's and Pinto's work have in common many motives and topics with the shipwreck accounts, but they also surpass them. These narratives cannot be seen as travel writings because it is the protagonist, not the voyage, which is central in them. We can conclude that in the shipwreck accounts the unlucky voyage makes a specific hero, in Sigüenza's and Pinto's narrative it is the hero who sets on the voyage because he has some motives for it. From this point of view Sigüenza's and Pinto's work can not be classified as travel writings and therefore become closer to novel.

### **Key words**

shipwreck accounts, travel narrative, autobiography, Spanish American literature, Spanish literature, Portuguese literature, 16<sup>th</sup> century, overseas voyages