

## Between the tragic and Salvation: How shipwrecks in the “História trágico-marítima” teach pilgrimage on the Southeast Coast of Africa

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**Abstract:** This article reveals how sixteenth century shipwreck reports, originally published in the form of pamphlets and transcribed by Bernardo Gomes de Brito, in the following century, in the *História trágico-marítima* (1735), were fundamental in enabling successive survivors of shipwrecks along the coast of Southeast Africa to find the means of subsistence, the route to be followed on land, and the native peoples to be contacted in order to be saved, which I call the Route of Salvation. Amidst the tragedy and the loss of human life and materials, reports of shipwrecks played a positive role in disseminating the knowledge necessary for the journeys or pilgrimages of survivors.

**Keywords:** Ivory; *História trágico-marítima*; Africa.

*Entre o trágico e a Salvação: como os naufrágios na “História trágico-marítima” ensinam a peregrinar na Costa Sul-Oriental da África*

**Resumo:** O artigo revela como os relatos de naufrágios, ocorridos no século XVI, publicados na forma de panfletos e, no século seguinte, transcritos por Bernardo Gomes de Brito, na *História trágico-marítima* (1735), foram fundamentais para que os sobreviventes dos sucessivos naufrágios ocorridos na costa da África Sul-Oriental encontrassem os meios de subsistência, o caminho em terra a ser percorrido e os povos nativos a serem contatados de modo a serem salvos, a que denomino de Rota da Salvação. Em meio à tragédia e às perdas de vidas humanas e de materiais, os relatos de naufrágio desempenharam um papel positivo ao divulgar o conhecimento necessário à peregrinação dos sobreviventes.

**Palavras-chave:** Marfim; *História trágico-marítima*; África.

## Fortune and misfortune on the *Carreira da Índia*

**O** *s lusíadas* (1572), by Luís Vaz de Camões, is known to exalt Portuguese success in the great oceanic explorations, but among its stanzas the poem also opens cracks which reveal the darker side of these discoveries: the loss of numerous vessels which ventured onto the *Carreira da Índia* – the Indian Run. In addition to the poetry, during the sixteenth century some of the stories of these misfortunates were narrated in prose, the so-called shipwreck reports, whose exemplary nature provided various lessons, varying from religious warnings with a moral-edifying nature to teachings about the art of navigation and the maritime routes to be followed or avoided. Sailors constructed knowledge about the Atlantic and Indian oceans, the so-called ‘*conhecenças marítimas*’ (maritime knowledge) which “functioned as a ‘vital sign’ in the sense of guiding and helping less experienced travelers to locate themselves in the immense and varied [maritime] space” (Roque, 2013, p. 150). The same was true of shipwreck survivors. João Baptista Lavanha, who described the loss of the *nau Santo Alberto*, stated that “shipwrecks teach how sailors should act in the event that another should happen” (Lavanha, 1971, p. 59), while *Frei Manoel de Sá*, when writing about the censorship of the publication of some eighteenth century shipwreck reports, states that these “opened an illustrious school of caution, in which horrible experiences were learned, those who boldly and fearlessly surrendered their lives and wealth to the wind and waves” (Tabucchi, 1979, p. 29).

Starting from the tragic face of Portuguese maritime expansion, the aim of this article is to analyze part of the sixteenth century *Carreira da Índia* shipwreck reports along the Southeast coast of Africa, “to recover [the] experience of failure in imperial expansion”, observing, in the inverse sense, how this became “useful to future expeditions” (Voigt, 2008, p. 212). Following the *Carreira da Índia* signify constructing knowledge about the coastal territories close to maritime routes. Vasco da Gama’s voyage opened the Indian Ocean to the Portuguese and knowledge of the Southeast coast was vital not only for navigation and trade, but also for the survival of various shipwrecked people who ended up there and had to travel overland to save themselves.

In relation to pain and loss, shipwreck reports constructed and transmitted knowledge, while the priest *Frei José Troiano* referred to the survivors as those who “saw with their own eyes and the sorrow of their hearts the fatality of the ruin” and “after escaping from the bowels of the sea, vomited from the waves, and thrown onto unknown lands”, reached “the port of safety to tell us of their dangers”. Their testimonies, written on “bitter leaves”, would be useful “to those who sail in parts of India, and continually follow that *Carreira da Índia*, so that in the danger of others they can learn to avoid their own” (Tabucchi, 1979, p. 33-34). This article has the aim of revealing how, in addition to their tragic aspect, the reports of nautical misfortunes along the Southeast coast of Africa were fundamental for the

construction of knowledge about this territory, located below what is now Maputo Bay. It shows that this coincided with the region of the ivory trade and, thus, highlights how the shipwreck reports are an unprecedented source for its study. For this reason, it investigates what the reports describe, since the knowledge collected about this space was not selected by its authors randomly, nor did it encompass the full set of what the travelers saw, knew, and experienced during their land journey. Rather it was carefully chosen in order to teach future shipwreck sailors how to identify the signs necessary for their survival and that these coincided with the ivory trade. In this sense, the records about this trade did not follow the logic of economic interests, or of simple curiosity, but the imperative of salvation, for which reason I call the path followed by these shipwreck survivors the Route of Salvation.

The historiography that analyzes shipwreck reports, since the study by Quirino da Fonseca, in 1938, has focused on both the literary aspect and the scientific bias that characterize these texts. Its didactic aspect has also been pointed out, highlighting the lessons of moral, religious and navigation on land and at sea that they present. The originality and novelty of this article lie in revealing the importance of accurate information on the treatment of ivory as a success factor for survival on land, providing the knowledge to face the tragic situation of shipwrecks, highlighting how the narratives of these nautical failures played a key role in the constitution of trade with the Portuguese in the region (Fonseca, 1938; Boxer, 1959 e 1979; Colombo, 1996; Lanciani, 1997; Blackmore, 2002; Madeira, 2005; Voigt, 2008 e 2009; Pereira, 2022).

Between the second half of the sixteenth century and the first half of the seventeenth reports of shipwrecks circulated in printed pamphlets, like a type of “*cordel* literature”. Although the exact volumes of their print runs are not known they were very popular (Voigt, 2008, p. 204). Between 1735 and 1736, 12 of them were published together by Bernardo Gomes de Brito, in his famous *História trágico-marítima*, whose texts had “a notable homogeneity in terms of the organization of the narrated material”. Of interest here is the part which describes what occurs after the shipwreck and the survivors reached land, the so-called *Pilgrimage*, in other words “the itinerary of the survivors along the coast heading towards the nearest Portuguese possession” (Lanciani, 1997, p. 51, 80) in order to be rescued. The five texts analyzed here – about the galleon São João (1552) and the *naus* São Bento (1554), Santiago (1585), São Tomé (1589), and Santo Alberto (1593) – are the only ones in which the survivors had to travel by foot along the African coast. Contained in the reports of these disasters are various types of information about the routes followed, knowledge of which was cumulatively constructed during the sixteenth century through the experience of pilgrimage of these shipwreck survivors along the Route of Salvation. The pilgrims/shipwreck survivors hoped to return to European civilization on the ships of Portuguese merchants involved in the ivory trade who landed along this region of the coast. “Along the deserted and uncultivated coasts of Africa” (Tabucchi, 1979, p. 38), which their pilgrimage passed through, aid came from the lords of local kingdoms with whom the survivors negotiated, since these lords were interested in

maintaining good relations with the Portuguese. Knowing how to recognize these people, the proper way to contact them, the correct trail and how to follow it, were vital signs accumulated from tragic experience and universalizing this was essential for the daily survival of future survivors. Transforming the lamentable shipwreck into precious reports provided information about how to survive and made them important repositories about the ivory trade.

**Box 1 – List of shipwrecks that occurred on the South-Eastern Coast of Africa, whose survivors traveled the Salvation Route**

NAME OF THE SHIP	TYPE OF VESSEL	YEAR	LOCAL OF SHIPWRECK	SURVIVORS INITIAL NUMBER	SURVIVORS FINAL NUMBER	SURVIVORS AT THE END OF THE WALKING JOURNEY (%)
São João	galleon <sup>1</sup>	1552	Terra do Natal	500 (180 Portuguese + 320 slaves)	25 <sup>2</sup> (8 Portuguese + 17 slaves)	5,0
São Bento	<i>Nau</i>	1554	Terra do Natal – Rio do Infante	322 (98 Portuguese + 224 slaves)	25 (21 Portuguese + 4 slaves)	7,7
Santiago	<i>Nau</i>	1585	North of Moçambique, in river Quizungo	85 (57 in the barge, 19 in the skiff and 9 in the raft <sup>3</sup> )	30 (19 in the barge, 9 in the skiff and 2 in the raft)	35,3
São Tomé	<i>Nau</i>	1589	Terra dos Fumos	98 (45 walked until Sofala)	40 (±13 + 27 among those who walked until Sofala) <sup>4</sup>	40,8
Santo Alberto	<i>Nau</i>	1593	Terra do Natal – Penedo das Fontes	225 (125 Portuguese + 160 slaves)	182 <sup>5</sup> (117 Portuguese + 65 slaves)	80,9

Source: Brito (1971, v.1-2).

<sup>1</sup> Galleons were warships, equipped with cannons, being smaller and faster than the *naus* that were huge merchant ships.

<sup>2</sup> António Canas calculated at 22 the survivors at the end of the journey (Canas, 2003, p. 108).

<sup>3</sup> Barge was a small vessel for approaching land and had a sail; skiff was “a small boat, which is carried in the ship to launch in case of need”, being smaller than a barge; and the raft was built of tied wood and, in the case of shipwrecks, hurriedly removed from the sinking ship (Bluteau, 1713, v. 1, p. 6; v. 2, p. 295).

<sup>4</sup> Only about 24.5% survived among those who waited for a Portuguese boat in Lourenço Marques Bay, while among those who walked to Sofala, the rate reached 60%.

<sup>5</sup> Of those who reached Lourenço Marques Bay, 28 decided to walk back to Sofala and only two survived. (Brito, 1971, v. 2, p. 635-636).

In noting in Box I the decline of the death rate among those washed up on the Southeast African coast during the sixteenth century, it can be concluded that learning about the Route of Salvation from shipwreck reports was effective. Forty-one years (1552-1593) chronologically separate the shipwreck of the galleon São João and that of the *nau* Santo Alberto and while only 5% of the galleon's survivors managed to be rescued at the end of the pilgrimage, in the case of the latter ship, this figure reached 80.9%. In addition to these numbers, repeated references in the reports to the experiences of previous shipwrecks reveal that knowledge about what happened could serve as a guide for future pilgrimages. Thanks to these adventures (or is better to say misadventures?) Portuguese knowledge about local geography was deepened; about how, where, and which African people traded ivory tusks with the Portuguese and their cabotage routes. Shipwreck reports were read by those traveling on the *Carreira da Índia* and their shared reading allowed these accounts to fulfill their intended pedagogical role and, despite all the catastrophes they narrated, taught people to survive and to guide themselves along the Route of Salvation. What were its distinctive signs?

## The geography of the Salvation Trail

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The shipwrecks<sup>6</sup> which resulted in a terrestrial pilgrimage along the Southeast African coast occurred between the Cape of Good Hope and the northern side of the mouth of the Zambezi River (for the Portuguese) or the Cuama (for Africans). This territory extended from 33° South, near where the so-called Terra do Natal began, to 20° South, when the land of the Macuas began, north of the Zambezi. Four vessels – the galleon São João and the *naus* São Bento, São Tomé, and Santo Alberto – sank between Terra do Natal and Terra dos Fumos, south of the mouth of the Zambezi and Inhambane Bay. The loss of the Santiago was the only one which occurred north of the river, on the Mozambique Channel which separates the Island of Madagascar from the continent, close to *Baixios* or *Bassas da Judia* or *India*. Using timber removed from the ship, its survivors constructed five different vessels, but only three – a barge, a skiff, and a raft – reached land, separately reaching different points of the coast, located between the north of the delta and the Quizungo River, in the country of the Macuas more to the north (Maps 1 and 2).

Once on land, the shipwrecked sailors who reached Terra do Natal and Terra dos Fumos decided not to go south, since they would have to pass through large and little-known hostile spaces before reaching the vicinity of the Cape of Good Hope, where they needed

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<sup>6</sup> Four occurred on the return trip (Godinho, 2005), the exception is the *nau* Santiago.

to count on luck to be rescued by vessels from the *Carreira da Índia*. They also decided not to wait for rescue from the sea, aware that the deep draught navigation routes, called the “outward leg”,<sup>7</sup> were far from the coast, and for this reason it would be difficult to be helped by these ships. The bay which the natives called Inhaca and the Portuguese Lourenço Marques, into which the river with the same name flowed, also known by the latter as the Espírito Santo River, where the ivory was loaded, was the destination chosen by the survivors who followed the Route of Salvation in the South-North direction. They believed that in this location they would find a coastal vessel which would bring them to the Island of Mozambique, where the Portuguese involved in the ivory trade came from.

Map 1 – The Route of Salvation on the Southeast coast of Africa which the shipwrecked sailors followed and *Baixo da Judia*, in the Mozambique Channel



Source: *Carte portugaise de la mer des Indes entre le Cap de Bonne Espérance et le Cap Comorin*, Joao Teixeira Albernaz I, Lisbon, 1649. BNF. DCP. Ge DD-2987 (9668 B and 9669 B).

<sup>7</sup> Those who used the “inward” leg, as in the case of Santiago, wintered in Mozambique (Brito, 1971, v. 2, p. 44).

The survivors of the São Bento calmly pondered the three possible options for their rescue. This debate reveals that they were well informed about the particularities of each option and that the previous sinking of the galleon São João – the first described in *História trágico-marítima* due to its exemplary nature – influenced the decision they took, revealing the pedagogical nature which these texts played in guiding survivors along the Route of Salvation. According to survivors, it was possible to: 1) go south in the direction of the Cape of Good Hope, towards Aguada do Saldanha, and wait there for a *nau* on the *Carreira da Índia*; 2) remain where they were, construct a fort, and try to build a small vessel to send to Sofala asking the Portuguese there to rescue the rest; 3) go to the Lourenço Marques River, as those from the São João galleon had done, and decide whether from there it was possible to reach Sofala.

Map 2 – The delta shaped mouth of the Zambezi River and the lands of the Bano chief to the north



Source: Jean Baptiste B. D'Anville, Detail of *Carte de l'Ethiopie orientale...*, August 1727. BNF. DCP. GE DD-2987 (8302).

In relation to the first option, they concluded that it would be difficult “to overcome the difficulty of the large rivers and mountain ranges which lay between [them] and the Cape” and that “Aguada de Saldanha had been little frequented for many years in these parts”, abandoning it as an alternative. They gave up on the second option because they had not saved enough tools to construct the vessel. Nor did they possess sufficient iron, removed from the remnants of the ship and used to barter with the natives in exchange for food and protection, to endure the year they believed they would have to spend there, an important lesson which would be learned by successive shipwreck survivors. Despite the difficulties faced by the São João, the survivors of the São Bento concluded that they could cover the same distance in less time and that the iron they had was sufficient for the journey (Perestrello, 1971, p. 70), thus choosing the third option. They were more successful than the São João, with the highest mortality occurred amongst the slaves. Twenty-one of the 98 Portuguese who reached land survived (21.4% of them), but only four of the 224 slaves (1.8% of the captives), revealing that the latter suffered harsher conditions during their trajectory. Moreover, a few were intentionally left behind to learn the language and local customs, serving in the future as intermediaries between the natives and the Portuguese, another mechanism to help future pilgrimages, as was later done in Brazil (Metcalf, 2005).

The survivors of the *nau* Santiago were the only ones who followed the Route of Salvation in the inverse sense, in other words, North-South. Since the three small vessels in which the survivors traveled were dispersed, the trajectory of each group was different. Those from the skiff landed more to the north, near the Quizungo River, and went first to the lands of the Bano chief, near the Lurango river, a kingdom which traded ivory, and about which they had received reports that there were Portuguese residing there. The raft group reached a more southern point, north of the Linde River, the higher arm of the Zambezi River, while the boat landed to the south of them, between the tip of Linde and Quelimane/Quilimane, the lower arm of the delta. All headed to Luabo, located in the south of the mouth of the Zambezi, where they knew the Portuguese Francisco Brochado was based, who they believed would help them reach the Portuguese fort Sena (as he would), located upstream, from where they would get a vessel to Mozambique.

While the survivors of the first four ships entered in contact with various Bantu groups, those from the Santiago contacted Swahili populations, mixed with Arabs, who were Muslim and whom the Portuguese generically called “*Mouros*” or Moors. This was “a stereotypical term which designated the natives of Portuguese India who professed the Islamic religion” (Rita-Ferreira, 1982, p. 131; Roque, 2011) and was recurrently used in shipwreck literature. In this region these groups built kingdoms, with networks of towns and cities, and began to trade, including in ivory, with the natives of the interior and with various



ports along the coast up to Sofala in the south and with the Orient. After the arrival of the Portuguese, they would serve as local intermediaries.

## The ivory trade on the Southeast coast of Africa

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When the Portuguese reached the east of Africa during Vasco da Gama's expedition, the region was already in the midst of intense activity with the Far East, especially India, carried out by coastal people. This traffic dated back to the end of the seventeenth century, before the arrival of Muslims and Indians, with ivory being important in these African transactions. Portuguese traders established on the Island of Mozambique progressively replaced the Asians in this trade, trading ivory directly with the Bantu and Swahili people along the coast. Using coastal shipping, tusks were brought to Mozambique, and from there dispatched to India and loaded on *Carreira da Índia* vessels to be sent to Portugal. The survivors of the *São João*, which sank in the Natal region in 1552, knew the geography and once on land, concluded "that since there was no other measure, decided that they should walk in the best order they could through these lands towards the river Lourenço Marques discovered" (Relação..., 1971, p. 25), because they believed that they could be rescued there by some boat involved in the ivory trade, since it was the main embarkation point. The survivors of the *São Tomé*, which sank in 1589 returning from India loaded with a large quantity of pepper, "all agreed to go along the coast to Lourenço Marques River" and, on the way to the river, met various chiefs, "friends of the Portuguese, from the trade and communication they had with the Mozambique". Distinguishing friendly peoples from the enemies of the Portuguese due to trade was a vital sign registered in the shipwreck reports, although they warned that "those *cafres*<sup>8</sup> did not do anything out of virtue", but because it was from the ivory trade that they derived wealth (Couto, 1971, p. 521, 544, 553).

As soon as the survivors of *São Tomé* reached land, "they sent out some sailors to see if there were any settlements" nearby. They quickly found some huts, but the natives fled quickly. However, once the latter "discovered that they were Portuguese, from the communication they had with them due to the ivory trade, which every year they went there for, they soon became very domestic" (Couto, 1971, p. 521). Initially, the scared natives rejected contact, but later on recognizing them they became friendly. The narrator did not hesitate in crediting the change in attitude to previous contacts in the ivory trade and the mention of the incident warns the reader, a future pilgrim, that in order to follow the Route of

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<sup>8</sup> Term used by the Portuguese, being a corruption of the Arabic word *kaffir* (infidel) and was used in Portuguese documentation to identify all Africans indistinctly.

Salvation it was necessary to look for “friendly tribes”, as they referred to local people, which involved following the ivory trade. As well as the African peoples to be contacted, the shipwreck reports describe the route followed and the geographic features encountered until the final destination, and the fortunes and misfortunes faced in the arduous struggle for survival, recording the information that would help the Portuguese to progressively dominate the geography of the ivory trade. According to Diogo do Couto, who described the shipwreck of São Tomé, Terra dos Fumos, where it occurred, was “named as such in our sea charts; such name was given to it by our people who first passed through it, due to amount of smoke they saw on the land at night; but the native *cafres* called it Land of the Macomates, after the so-called *cafres* who lived around this area.” He also says that the boat on which the few survivors were saved ran aground in front “of a river, which on our charts still lacks a name, which is at 27° and 1/2” latitude to the South. As this region was visited by those who “sail from Mozambique to the São Lourenço River for the ivory trade”, they called it “Simão Dote, after a Portuguese of this name, who went there” for this purpose. Couto described it a river that was “small, fit only for small vessels and fifty leagues away from Lourenço Marques Bay”. He also said that Terra dos Fumos “is held by the king called Viragune” and extended inland into the *sertão* for 30 leagues and there in the kingdoms of Mocalapapa, a neighbor to the south, and Vambe, closer to Terra do Natal, the Portuguese “would trade ivory” (Couto, 1971, p. 522-524).

Shipwreck survivors had to be capable of identifying the Route of Salvation which was juxtaposed with the ivory trade. Their salvation consisted of following this as quickly as possible and this learning was progressive. Sepúlveda calculated that from where the survivors of the São João reached the coast, Lourenço Marques was “180 leagues” in a straight line, but they ended up walking around 300 leagues, spending five and a half months, since they were often forced to take detours to cross rivers, inlets, and bays (Naufrágio..., 1942, p. 25). The difficulties they faced on the pilgrimage along the Route of Salvation revealed that it was imperative to accumulate geographic knowledge, and mathematical instruments – compasses, astrolabes, sextants, etc. –, as well as sea charts (maps), were indispensable in the construction of this knowledge. As a result, these needed to be taken from the ships. They navigated on land as they did at sea: following the direction of the compass, measuring latitude by the altitude of the sun and at night guiding themselves by stars. Sea charts portrayed the coast and registered the main geographic features, especially the rivers, which the pilgrims crossed along the way, vital markers of the route. New information was carefully registered in shipwreck reports which would later serve to update the maps, consulted by future pilgrims. Pilots and their assistants were fundamental in navigation tasks, for which reason they invariably had preference in boarding lifeboats, inverting the traditional hierarchies which ruled the Portuguese world (Pereira, 2018).

The survivors of the São Bento were the first to mention the mathematical instruments which they took from the ship to guide themselves on land. They brought with them an astrolabe, but around the twenty-third day of the march, when hunger spoke more loudly, they exchanged it for “a cow and some goats and cakes”. They also consulted a sea chart each time they came across important markers on the terrain. Using this chart, they recognized a large river which they crossed at the beginning of their journey and Lourenço Marques Bay, when they reached its southern shore. The Espírito Santo River was named Aguada Boa on their map, but the empirical experience of the pilgrimage allowed them realize that this was a mistake: there were two distinct rivers and the correct observation was registered in the shipwreck report to update Portuguese charts and to guide future shipwreck survivors. When the survivors of the Santo Alberto reached the Lourenço Marques River, they showed the king of the Inhaca the instruments which they brought with them and how they functioned. The African was enchanted with the technology which the Portuguese mastered. During one meeting, “the pilot said it looked like time to it, pointing to the clock saying eleven o’clock,” making Inhaca interested in how the Portuguese were capable of precisely knowing the time. After the pilot showed him how they carried out the operation, “he marveled much and wanted to be shown, by the directions of the needle, the path they had followed until there” (Lavanha, 1971, p. 557-636). The mathematic instruments and the capacity to know their position were also symbols of power and the superiority that the Portuguese believed have in relation to the natives, always used to their benefit.

It was due to the accumulation of geographic knowledge collected by the previous pilgrims that in 1593 the survivors of the Santo Alberto were able to cover almost the same distance to Lourenço Marques Bay much more quickly, with greater security, and far fewer human losses. The percentage of survivors was 80.9% (Table 1), with the highest mortality occurring among the slaves. According to Lavanha, they walked “more than three hundred leagues”, in “three months”, from Penedo das Fontes to the Island of Inhaca, located in the bay, a distance which in a straight line, in a South/North direction, is equivalent to “150 leagues” (Lavanha, 1971, p. 634).

## The dismantled ship

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Once on land, three important objectives were necessary to undertake the journey and follow the Route of Salvation successfully. First, preserve their lives when meeting natives; second, find the correct route to follow; and third, obtain food and water to survive. Success in all three cases depended on contact with friendly tribes, responsible for providing sustenance and security of the shipwreck survivors. João Baptista Lavanha warned his reader that “shipwrecks teach how sailors should act during another [shipwreck] that may occur,

which useful remedies they should use, and what are the apparent and harmful things they should flee from”. Among this knowledge was “how to deal and communicate with the *cafres*, by what means they will carry out the necessary trade, and their barbarous nature and customs” (Lavanha, 1971, p. 559), as they believed to be the characteristics of local peoples, always described negatively from an ethnocentric perspective. Among the teachings for survival, the reports taught that it was necessary for survivors to remove from the vessels and carry with them everything that could be exchanged with the natives and also that “contact with the blacks” would follow the same standards of exchange in the ivory trade, being “mediated by ‘presents’ – cloths and pieces of iron – to which they positively reacted” (Madeira, 2005, p. 272, 276).

The care with which the shipwrecked survivors, one after the other, sought to remove iron nails from the ships, which would be exchanged for food, protection, and guides in the pilgrimage on the Route of Salvation showed that they were aware of their value due to the fact that the Bantu groups in Southeastern Africa mastered iron processing techniques and that the raw material achieved a high value in the local market. Since the year 1000, “mineral extraction and the production of instruments and ornaments of iron, copper, tin, and gold intensified simultaneously” (Rita-Ferreira, 1982, p. 41) and while copper was more used for the production of decorative and ornamental objects, with which those in power covered themselves; iron was used in the production of tools and utensils. As soon as he was safe, Sepúlveda ordered the removal from the São João of “arms and supplies and powder and some Cambraia clothes, to see if there was any way to exchange them for food in that land” (Relação..., 1971, p. 16). Bartering took place depending on the use each attributed to the objects exchanged: supplies and protection for the Portuguese and metal, beads, and fabrics for the Africans. Although this affirmation reveals that the shipwrecked survivors knew the cultural codes of barter, they brought with them “many jewels and rich stones and money”, which amounted to “more than one hundred thousand *cruzados*”, which mattered little in relations of local exchanges. When the first group of natives approached them, bringing with them a cow, they understood, through their nods and gestures, “that they wanted iron” and Sepúlveda ordered them to hand over a “half dozen nails” from the remnants of the ship, which “they were glad to see”, and began to negotiate the “price of the cow”. However, the negotiation was frustrated because one group did not dominate the linguistic code of the other and did not have an interpreter, revealing that it was not enough to have metal for barter to be successful. The result was that they went very hungry and for the first month all they had to eat was some “fruits from the forest” and the rice they managed to recover from the ship’s stores. Later they were very successful and to cross a large river, they managed to exchange some nails for four boats (Relação..., 1971, p. 18-21). The report of this shipwreck warned about these errors – “do not get rid of weapons; do not let

the group divide into different companies; do not do everything the *cafres* want” (Madeira, 2005, p. 270). These were to be avoided, as they led to only 5% of those who survived the shipwreck reaching the end of the Route of Salvation.

The metal removed from ships was so essential for the maintenance of the survivors that, knowing what had happened with previous shipwrecks, they used their volume to measure the possible distance to be covered on the Route of Salvation and the time they would have to survive on this pilgrimage. When the survivors of the São Bento reached land, they assessed the options they had in order to be saved. Straight away they gave up on remaining where they had landed, since they estimated they would have at least a year’s wait, calculating that they did not have sufficient metal to exchange for food and protection with the local natives for long time. For this reason, they decided to head towards Inhaca Bay and, taking into account the information they had about the São João, they calculated that they would cover the necessary distance quickly, since they had sufficient iron for bartering in this interval. The first Africans that the survivors of the São Bento saw were on the beach, “burning some pieces of the ship thrown up by the sea, to get the nails from them”. Warned by what had happened to the survivors of the São João and observing the interest of the natives in iron, its captain, Fernão Álvares Cabral, tried to communicate with them with great difficulty, offering “caps, cloths, and pieces of iron”. According to the narrator, they “were as happy as if they had made them masters of the world”, but the communication difficulties, because they did not have an interpreter, prevented them from being able to obtain much information from them about the land. Despite this initial difficulty, the report reveals that the survivors were capable of better dominating the cultural codes of the natives and carried with them only what could be exchanged with the latter. Each shipwreck survivor “kept in his bag as many things to eat as he could find, and the most nails and iron they could bring for exchanging – which at that time were the most esteemed jewels”, cutting into small pieces the very heavy objects to be carried and leaving behind the ship which looked like a bone “since there was no stick left nailed to it”. The misfortunes of Sepúlveda and the other survivors of São João, who had preceded them, had left the important vital sign that on the Route of Salvation a simple rusty nail was worth more than all the jewels and the money in the world. For this reason, they lamented a few days later when facing a cliff that was difficult to climb, they had to “discard most of the iron they carried” since they knew “with great certainty than what they left there was not iron, but life” (Perestrello, 1971, p. 50-70).

Santo Alberto was the last ship to be wrecked in the region. The success of the survivors’ pilgrimage resulted from the knowledge accumulated from previous wrecks over almost half a century. Among other types of knowledge, they mastered the art of bartering iron for food, which allowed the majority to reach the Lourenço Marques River. Nuno Velho, who

was well educated and foreseeing “the future necessities for arms and munitions, without which their doom on the land which were travelling was certain, [...] warned the captain to collect the arms, powder, lead, and *morrões*<sup>9</sup> which they could find” on the ship, as well as the muskets which they could find and, “tied, put them in some pipe, to save them”. He recalled the “loss of the S. Tomé, in Terra dos Fumos, [...] whose successes he read in Goa, written by Gaspar Ferreira, her second pilot”, and also the misadventures of the São João, which he knew well. Aware of these previous experiences, as soon as the shipwreck became inevitable, it “was this foresight and recall of Nuno Velho of such importance” which sealed the success of the survivors, since they had arms to defend themselves from the natives and sufficient iron to exchange for food and protection, since “in similar misfortunes and disastrous events, great care was taken with the collection and storage of arms, clothes, and copper, for exchange and defense” and “everything was put in the *chapidéu*”, the highest part of the ship, where the forecabin generally was, “so that it could be easily saved” (Lavanha, 1971, p. 570-573). Warned by Nuno Velho, the skill of the captain, the pilot, and the sailors of the Santo Alberto allowed a quantity of weapons, iron, and guidance tools to be removed from the ship, which remained indispensable on their pilgrimage. They thus first brought the vessel as close as possible to land, so that many lives could be saved – 125 Portuguese and 160 slaves – and the material removed more easily. After the first night, the survivors set fire to the remains of the ship that had been washed ashore, both to heat themselves, and for “our men to use the iron for exchange”. This task was carried out quickly so that the “blacks would not have [iron] except what was in their hands and it would have the necessary value”. For the same reason, the remnants of the ship were buried or submerged. The largest objects, harder to carry, such as a boiler and six copper cauldrons, were cut into small pieces to be transported (Lavanha, 1971, p. 572-574). His knowledge of the barter system meant that due to the death of the captain in the shipwreck, Nuno Velho was chosen by the other to replace him and guide them along the Salvation Trail.

During their pilgrimage, these survivors made innumerable barterings. Based on his experience, Lavanha taught future shipwreck survivors that “gold and silver do not have a price among them”, since they only “value the most necessary metals, such as iron and copper, and thus for very small pieces of any of these they exchange cattle, which is what they most value, and with them they carry out their trade and exchanges and their treasures” (Lavanha, 1971, p. 580-630). Everything indicates that gold was not appreciated or identified as a symbol of social distinction in Sub-Saharan Africa before contact with Muslim commercial networks. On the contrary, the red of copper was more valued than the yellow of gold (Herbert, 1984). The Santiago, “the richest and most prosperous [ship] which had left the

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<sup>9</sup> The wick used to fire a musket (Silva, 1789, p. 66).

kingdom”, had as part of its ballast “a large quantity of eight *reale* coins”. When the ship began to capsize, those on board began to fill their bags, “a few of the common people were so greedy that they filled their bags with *reales*, which they intended to bring with them and save on the rafts they had made”. However, they had greater difficulty in removing anything from the ship, since it ran aground on high seas, on one of the sandbanks on the Mozambique Channel and they had to leave almost everything behind. Due to the distance, the speed with which the ship sank, and the lack of space in the boats in which they saved themselves, they ended up bringing with them only some supplies, consumed on the crossing. When they reached land they had little more than the clothes on their back, which actually had a higher exchange value, much more than the *reales* which served for little if anything. While the bulk of the ivory trade was carried out by the Portuguese in exchange for beads and cloths they brought from India, sometimes a luxury adornment, such as European clothing or fabrics, would end in the hands of the chiefs. This was the case of the survivors of the São Tomé who found in the king of Manhiça, a “friend of the Portuguese”, who “came naked, and wrapped in a cloth that covered his lower parts, and wearing a *ferragoulo*<sup>10</sup> of green cloth, which the *Alferes-mor* D. Jorge de Meneses, had sent from Mozambique, through Captain D. Paulo Lima” (Couto, 1971, p. 532). The survivors rapidly identified the clothing as a visible sign of previous contact made with these natives in the ivory trade, since they knew that the Portuguese provided ornaments to honor the chiefs.

To the contrary of the others, the Santiago sunk north of the Zambezi River, “in the district of Quizungo”, according to the chronicler of the shipwreck, “a river known to the Portuguese,” because they traded for ivory in the region. Some of the survivors were sheltered by a local chief, but went hungry because food was scarce. For this reason, they wanted to head south, where they expected that they would be rescued by a Portuguese ship near the Zambezi River. However, for this it was necessary to find a local guide and to have secure information to follow. Then “one day a black man appeared there with a taffeta hat on his head”. This vision of the European artifact made the survivors very happy because it was indicative of a previous relationship with Portuguese traders. He was called Bano and “was the nephew of Sheikh Bano of Luranga”, who arrived with letters from Portuguese who lived in this kingdom, which stated that Luranga was located a little more to the south, “eight leagues” distant and that “its main trade and interaction with the Portuguese is ivory”. Bano gave all the Portuguese three packs of clothes, as he was used to bartering for ivory and the supplies (rice and corn) he planted, which he exchanged with them for “the clothes they were wearing, tin, and beads” (Cardoso, 1971, p. 471, 476).

Some exchanges could be given a high symbolic meaning, as observed in relation to

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<sup>10</sup> *Ferragoulo*: a cloak or short-sleeved coat which is put on over the head (Bluteau, 1713, v. 2, p. 85).

objects meant for various chiefs, whose luxury is evident. However, one present stood out among these, since its meaning is completely different. Near Inhaca Bay, Ancosse Gamabela, who had liberally offered protection, guides, and supplies to the Portuguese, refused to accept the usually presents (some mother of pearl beads, a piece of silver, seven pieces of copper, and a blood stone<sup>11</sup>) offered by Nuno Velho. He stated that one piece was sufficient “which would remain in his name, so that he would always remember him and the Portuguese who accompanied him”. Touched by the gesture of detachment, Nuno Velho said that he would give him “the most precious and esteemed jewel there was in the world” and that this was the Catholic faith symbolized in the “cross of beads he had around his neck”, an object of little material value, but which had significance for him and his men. He gave the present to the king with great reverence and “raising his eyes to heaven, kissed it with great devotion”, which was then imitated by the Portuguese, the African, and then by all of his people. Nuno Velho, even more moved, considering this a collective gesture of reverence for the Catholic faith, had a cross eight palms wide carved from a tree and after explaining to the king the power of this symbol, he stated that he considered this present to be “the real trophy”, since he had planted “in this way the tree of the Holy Cross” (Lavanha, 1971, p. 600-603). Shipwreck after shipwreck, “took the pieces of the ship”, each in a more efficient manner, which allowed the survivors to follow the Route of Salvation. Already beneath the waves on the sinking ships there submerged “the riches that they had acquired with such eagerness over a long time” and which “in a single day were lost”.

## Cambaia beads

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The reports of the shipwrecks after the São João revealed that the survivors of the São Tomé, São Bento, and Santo Alberto were aware of the terrible misfortunes suffered by the first group of survivors. Along their trek, the latter were pillaged and almost all killed by African peoples not used to contact with the Portuguese. The other survivors knew how to learn lessons about previous mistakes from the printed reports and for this reason they rapidly sought to contact the neighboring kingdoms involved in the ivory trade, since they would have greater chances of being well received, obtaining information about the direction to follow, representing some guarantee of reaching the Lourenço Marques River alive and safe. For this reason, they looked for material evidence resulting from barter among the natives they met along the way. The ivory trade was also carried out using glass beads and

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<sup>11</sup> *Ancosse* was a title given to some local chiefs and the blood stone or sardius, described in the “Book of Apocalypse”, was one of the five stones which made up the heavens of the chosen.



some seashells from India. Colored Indian cloths were shredded and their threads mixed with white ones, or of a local origin, which were then woven together, since the Africans did not use dyeing techniques. The beads were “cylindrical beads, bluish, and greenish”, with which “people who wanted to distinguish themselves from commoners ornamented themselves” (Rita-Ferreira, 1982, p. 35, 49). “These are clay beads, of all colors, the size of coriander, and they are made in India, Negapão, from where they are brought to Mozambique, and from there through the hands of the Portuguese these blacks are contacted and they are exchanged with them for ivory” (Couto, 1971, p. 583-584). The presence of Indian beads among natives was carefully observed by the survivors and registered in shipwreck reports, with the “means of exchange” becoming vital signs for pilgrimage on the Route of Salvation.

For example, the survivors of the São Bento found a group of one hundred natives. Despite initially appearing dangerous, they entered into a difficult dialogue with them. One of these natives was naked like the others, but the narrator highlighted that he “wore a few beads in his ornamentation, which are of red clay, as large as coriander grains and thus round”. The Portuguese soon identified these beads and Perestrello, the narrator, confesses that “we were glad to see them” because they were aware that “those beads were made in the kingdom of Cambaia, which only by the hands of our men are brought to those places along the coast”. They were exchanged with the natives for tusks, meaning that this only could indicate that they were “close to some river where a rescue ship would appear” looking for ivory (Perestrello, 1971, p. 68-69).

The few survivors of the São João were saved by a ship that had come to Lourenço Marques Bay to “get ivory”, which was exchanged for beads “which among the blacks is the thing they most estimate”, and they were “exchanged for beads, and each person cost two *vinténs* of beads” (Relação..., 1971, p. 30-31). The São Bento survivors reported that the king of Inhaca “sold much ivory in exchange for beads, in which they all went well dressed”, since the beads conferred *status*, especially on the chiefs, “which they regard as such a precious treasure, like stones or their like are to us” (Perestrello, 1971, p. 115, 130). For this reason, “clothes, beads, and other things” were sent from Sofala, to rescue the last survivors of the shipwreck of São Tomé who still remained in the bay (Couto, 1971, p. 553). Signs that the natives were involved in the ivory trade and in contact with the Portuguese, the sight of these objects served as a relief, material evidence that they were approaching the end of the Route of Salvation.

## Translators

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Another important sign was the sharing by a native of a common language, capable of distinguishing the friendly peoples from those who could represent some danger, forming one of the valuable “vital signs” to be looked for. During the sixteenth century, Portuguese was becoming a type of *lingua franca* in the region, due to the action of Portuguese commercial agents, both working for themselves and occasional, who strengthened ties with native peoples. Shipwreck reports reveal that there were three different types of possible translators to be used by survivors. First, crews and slaves of various origins embarked on the *Carreira da Índia*. Second the increasing number of Portuguese, especially in the second half of the sixteenth century, who came to live among the *cafres*, whether they were involved in ivory trade or because they were survivors of previous shipwrecks and had been left along the way (Roque, 2017, p. 30). Third, Afro-Portuguese *mestiços*, who over time became intermediaries in the coastal trade.

The solution which the survivors of the Santo Alberto used to communicate revealed the difficulties they encountered. In this complicated system, but which nonetheless functioned, two slaves served as interpreters. “One belonged to Manuel Fernandes Girão, who understood the language of these *cafres*, and spoke that of Mozambique, and another belonging to António Godinho, who knew this one and spoke ours, and thus the two interpreters communicated” with the natives. The method was shown to be efficient because, according to the narrator, “the language is almost the same throughout all of Cafraria, and the difference between them is similar to what there is in the languages of Italy, or the common ones in Spain”. Only when they reached the lands under the dominion of Inhaca did they find a “*cafre* raised among the Portuguese, remaining in that land where the galleon S. João was lost”, who had been sent by the king to meet them and guide them to his palace. In turn, they left four slaves in Inhaca, of whom “three were blacks and one a Malabar,” and another ten who remained more to the Northeast (Lavanha, 1971, p. 570-629). From the situations experienced, it can be seen that the diversity of languages of those involved in the ivory trade, the role of Muslims and Swahili as intermediaries with the local Bantu people, the multiethnic origin of the slaves on board the ships, and the important role they played once on African soil, inverted the traditional European hierarchies since, as translators they were essential to the survival of the group and the practice carried out by the survivors, something commonly used by Portuguese, of leaving some individuals to serve as intermediaries with the natives in the future.

The case of the São Bento is exemplary. First, they encountered “a young man from Benguela, left over from another shipwreck, who, being known to us, was soon taken and with many embraces brought to the captain”. He came with a group of natives and his presence was fundamental for them to approach peacefully. They arrived “singing and clapping their hands with great joy, bringing some cakes, roots, or other of their supplies, to

sell to us”, with this being the first time they managed to mitigate their hunger slightly, engaging in barter which benefited the two parts. Mastery of the two cultural universes by the black man from Benguela allowed the latter to anticipate the needs of the shipwreck survivors, organizing the supply of food in advance, acting in mutual benefit of survivors and natives. Despite the communication difficulties, the young man described the land where they were, which also facilitated movement through the region. Later, they found “a young man called Gaspar, remaining from the destruction of Manoel de Sousa [Sepúlveda]”, in other words, he was a survivor of the São João, who “knowing we were coming, came there to wait” for them. Unlike the man from Benguela, who ultimately did not want to be a guide for them, nor leave the place in which he lived, Gaspar “wanted to return to the land of the Christians”. The survivors received them with a mixture of happiness and relief, since the narrator confessed that “the thing we needed most was a translator” and they all gave “much thanks to God for helping us at this time, inspiring in a young man and of the Moor nation”, despite registering that he, “among those forests and almost savage people, had already absorbed their nature” (Perestrello, 1971, p. 72-73).

Finally, the survivors saw a Portuguese man, Rodrigo Tristão, who came with another group of natives, “changed in color and appearance, and no different from the native ones”. He was naked, had “a bundle of spears on his back”, and they were only capable of recognizing him “through his speech and hair”. He had lived for three years among the natives and helped the survivors to get food and to cross the bay, and also continuing with them. On the other bank, they found “a Malabar boy,” as the Indians coming from the River Ganges peninsula were called, who brought them to a village, telling them he would bring food the following day. Later, they came across “a Gujarati well known in India by some of the company”, who warned them of the bad intentions of the local natives and helped them cross another bay, showing them the path Sepúlveda and the other survivors of the São João had used (Perestrello, 1971, p. 73-74, 91). The presence of the Moor, the Malabar, and this Gujarati, “coming from this province of the same name in India, part of the Mughal kingdom” (Bluteau, 1713, v. 2, p. 162), and the fact that the latter was already known in India by some of the trading company revealed the role of Muslims and Indians as commercial agents on the coast of Southeast Africa, how the Portuguese appropriated pre-existing networks, and how they used their agents as translators. At the moment of the shipwreck, the social hierarchies in force in Portugal and those on board the ships were frequently inverted by the imperative of survival and it was almost never those who were nobles by birth, normally those who had the greatest privileges on land, who had priority for the boarding of the boats and lifeboats (Pereira, 2018, p. 165-178).

Between Inhaca and Sofala, now “reaching the land of salvation”, the survivors of the São Tomé reached the island “Bazaruta, where there was a son of Sofala called António

Rodrigues”, an Afro-Portuguese *mestiço* who controlled the trade and distribution of goods among the islands close to the “rivers of Monemone” and the continent. Although he had been expelled from Sofala as an outlaw, he had become an authority recognized by the Portuguese, issuing safe-conducts for travelers and goods which circulated in the region of the mouth of the Zambezi River. Rodrigues and the Moors who resided in the island welcomed the survivors, helping them in the next stage of their journey. Similar to what Rodrigues had done, they had already been helped at the Inhambane river, by another “*mestiço* called Simão Lopes, the son of Sofala, who had fled there due to reasons related to the Faith” (Couto, 1971, p. 544-547). Both are illustrative of *mestiço* agents, a first generation of Luso-Africans, taken advantage of by the Portuguese to intermediate trade with the locals, with whom survivors found shelter and aid on their pilgrimage. The reports registered their presence and where they could be found.

The survivors of the Santiago, which sunk north of the Zambezi, travelled through a region where the presence of Swahili populations was accentuated. By this time, the latter were already used to dealing with the Portuguese and, for this reason, the survivors were able to find someone capable of speaking Portuguese, the case of the Bano chief’s emissary. Those who saved themselves in the skiff contacted “someone who spoke some Portuguese, who they asked about Calimané”. He pointed out that the river was to the northeast and told them that Luabo was to the southeast. “With this news they were consoled, since they already knew where to go”. Later they came upon a large river, where they saw a boat. The *arraís* of the boat, seeing they were Portuguese, went to them and “spoke to them in Portuguese”. They were slaves of a “Muinha Sedaca, a Moor who was a close friend of the Portuguese”, with whom they negotiated and who helped them cross the river, revealing the commercial networks woven between the Swahili populations and the Portuguese, with an emphasis on the ivory trade.

Frei Francisco Xavier de Santa Teresa recognized that those travelling along the *Carreira da Índia* were “exposed to evident dangers in the harsh storms they experienced and the infamous shipwrecks which were often witnessed” and referred to shipwreck reports as disastrous and melancholy texts. However, it was thanks to these reports that, when travelling along the Southeast African coast, where many shipwreck survivors ended up landing, the new survivors knew from past experiences how to find salvation, revealing the positive aspects of these texts that served for the learning of future survivors. These showed the path to follow by land, the navigation instruments and means necessary to guide themselves. Furthermore, they indicated that shipwreck survivors had to pay attention to the natives’ clothing and that Indian beads and fabrics and European adornments were material evidence of the ivory trade with the Portuguese, indicating potentially friendly people. They taught that bartering with what was left from the sunken ships, especially iron objects

and fabrics, and the presence of translators were forms of gaining shelter, food, and guide. Together, the vital signs formed the “knowledge of the land” indispensable to follow the Route of Salvation, which coincided with the ivory trade, with the shipwreck reports serving as an unprecedented contemporary source for the study of this trade. Finally, transformed into knowledge, the tragic aspect of the shipwrecks in the *Carreira da Índia* began to be disguised as positivity.

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