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David Cressy's *Shipwrecks and the Bounty of the Sea* analyzes the development of ship salvage on the coasts of England and Wales from the mid-sixteenth to the mid-eighteenth centuries from a social-historical and economic perspective. Cressy examines the interactions between the groups involved to demonstrate that the widely held image of coastal inhabitants as "barbarous country people" is untenable (p. 10). The negative image of the coastal dwellers as insidious robbers should be reevaluated. Cressy uses extensive, previously under-researched documents to analyze customs and practices in shipwreck salvage, the distribution of shipwreck shares, and rewards. In so doing, he convincingly demonstrates that, on English coasts, shipwrecks were generally dealt with in the context of the social order.

Cressy first reviews the estimated size of the English and European merchant fleets and the frequency and cost of shipwrecks. According to his calculations, up to 5 percent of voyages failed. In single events, such as a major storm in 1703, many ships with hundreds of crew members could be lost at once. Current research estimates that as many as 4,000 ships were shipwrecked on the coasts of England during the early modern age (p. 27). In the appendix of the book, Cressy lists the names of 850 ships that were shipwrecked in the period from 1559 to 1750. Their history is preserved because of their size and importance. The list gives a good overview of the origin of the ships and the periods in which there were particularly many shipwrecks.

Shipwrecks have always been a theme in literature, whether in ancient, biblical, or early modern sources. They are stylized in religious writings as a metaphor for God's just punishment of wrongdoings and used as a means of warning. Cressy uses local archives, state papers, and High Court of Admiralty records, including correspondence from officials and testimony from witnesses to the salvage of shipwrecks and flotsam. He
brings the various points of view together to form an overall picture of how a shipwreck occurred and what other activities followed. Cressy presents this as a social process in which recurring social structures of community activities can be identified, such as the surrender of loot after the appearance of a representative of the Crown.

The discovery of ships in distress, the treatment of survivors, the collection of wreckage, hiding, and the distribution of goods were often the subject of local dramas. Cressy demonstrates this in over ten examples, including the shipwreck of the ship George in Northumberland, which embroiled the governments of three countries in 1565. Cressy also gives a particularly detailed account of the story of the Dutch merchant ship Golden Grape, wrecked at Chesil Beach in Dorset in 1641. This event illuminates the tensions of law and custom, cooperation, and rivalry that existed at the time. Unlike many accounts, there is no overt use of violence here but rather cooperation and, in some cases, courtesy toward the survivors. Cressy devotes a separate chapter to the fate of shipwrecked people. The sources are the reports of the investigators and commissioners of the Crown. Some reported looting and fraud, but many received assistance, such as shelter, clothing, and medical care. Often, they were allowed to return home, and this applied not only to civilian seamen but also to the crews of enemy ships in wartime.

The items recovered from the wrecks and the profits associated with them are mostly recorded in extensive records. In England, it was customary that the goods and materials of shipwrecks belonged to the Crown. However, clarifying whether or not it was a shipwreck in the sense of the applicable laws, and who had what rights to it, was anything but simple in practice. Cressy demonstrates that the greatest beneficiaries of the shipwreck and jetsam business were usually the commissioners of the Crown. He illustrates this vividly in the case of the Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports. His subordinates supervised the southern beaches and insisted on his lordship's share. His rival, the Lord High Admiral of England, considered wrecking rights as one of the most important of his perquisites. This rivalry was only resolved when the same man held both offices. In some cases, landlords on the coast claimed "wrecking rights" to their lands and vigorously defended these rights against rival owners, Admiralty officials, and their own tenants. This claim was defended to the point of duels.

Salvage work was carried out not only on ships stranded on the coast but also on sunken ships if they were within the reach of divers. These operations were particularly technically challenging. Cressy's study highlights several salvage operations off the coasts of England and New England from an archaeological perspective and discusses various diving technologies. Free diving and the diving bell were the most commonly used methods at the time. Many of the dives were for the recovery of valuable cannons. Diving bells were only used in deeper water and offshore. Underwater salvage, and everything connected with it, experienced a boom in 1687 when the British captain William Phips recovered a large silver treasure (many millions in present-day values) from a sunken Spanish galleon off Hispaniola and brought it back to England. It was a famous event at the time and undoubtedly influenced the initiative for diving for treasure.

Cressy also discusses the use of the diving barrel, calling it a "more advanced equipment" (p. 231). This is a misjudgment, because compared to diving bells, diving barrels were a technological dead end, even though some amazing successes were achieved with them.[1] The description of a report by the army officer and mathematician Robert Heath from 1750 as possibly the "most comprehensive account of eighteenth-century diving technology" is also exaggerated, because the writing of Marten Triewald, the European authority on diving in the eighteenth century (Kon-
sten at lefwa under watn (1734)), should rather have been cited (p. 232).

In the final chapter, Cressy discusses developments up to the middle of the eighteenth century. Important changes were brought about by new laws in 1714 and 1753. The first amendment mainly increased the fines for those who entered a vessel without permission or took objects. In the second law, the punishable acts were expanded and the fines were increased once again.

There are already a number of scientific writings from various disciplines that deal with shipwrecking. Few, however, address the social and legal implications of such events, further activities they prompted, and the interactions among the groups involved. Specifically, coastal communities in early modern England have been little studied in this regard. A shipwreck, however, does not imply an end point in a line of maritime historical inquiry but only, as Cressy shows more clearly than previous studies, a transition to a different phase, with new actors and conditions on the coast than those at sea.

It would be desirable to address the question why England, in comparison to the Baltic region where shipwreck salvage also had a centuries-old tradition, did not develop its own technicized salvage industry with systematic recycling of shipwrecks, or only after a very long delay.[2] This development began in the Baltic region as early as around 1730 with the activities of Triewald and only found an equivalent in England many decades later. This gap in research does not, however, diminish the importance of Cressy's social-historical study with regard to the coasts of England and Wales.

Notes


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