

The Spiritual Evolution of Cabeza de Vaca in *Shipwrecks*

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This article examines the refashioning of the self that took place during the eight-year journey of Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca and his companions through North America. These four survivors of a Spanish expedition adopted shamanic practices that endeared them to indigenous communities residing in the southwestern region of North America. Through the alchemy of suffering, Cabeza de Vaca underwent a spiritual transformation that heralded a new American identity. His plea for justice for the indigenous peoples of the Americas makes him a historical figure worthy of remembrance and commemoration. [Article copies available for a fee from The Transformative Studies Institute. E-mail address: journal@transformativestudies.org Website: <http://www.transformativestudies.org> ©2014 by The Transformative Studies Institute. All rights reserved.]

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Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca (1507-59) served as the king's representative and treasurer for an expedition that explored Florida under a mandate from the Spanish Crown. In his report to the Spanish king Carlos V, first published in 1542 as *La relación* (*The Narrative*) and again in 1555 as *Naufragios* (*Shipwrecks*), by which title it subsequently became known, Cabeza de Vaca describes the arduous eight-year odyssey (1528-36) from Florida through northern Mexico which culminated in his spiritual transformation.

Before joining the Florida expedition led by Pánfilo de Narváez, Cabeza de Vaca had been a Spanish soldier who had fought several

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