As responsible for the first contact of Europe with Africa and Asia via maritime routes, Portugal and Spain have left traces of their ships all around the 5 continents and the 7 seas, in a period of c. 300 years. For the last 50 year, this thin slice of Humankind’s maritime history - corresponding to a time when Iberian ships transported gold, silver, Chinese porcelain and precious gems - has been under attack by commercial activities directed specifically at this underwater cultural heritage (UCH). This threat - as well as hard-learned lessons acquired from the examination of treasure hunting activities impacts - has led both Iberian countries to be some of first States to ratify the UNESCO Convention regarding the protection of the UCH.

Here we present examples of the current situation of the UCH of Iberian origin, not only in the territorial water of Portugal and Spain but also in their former colonies: Central and South America, Angola, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Guinea, Timor, Indian Ocean and Macao.

More than a hundred records of Iberian wrecks are known today, but their preservation status is very variable. The graph shows the status and number of wrecks found in waters of Portugal and Spain and former Iberian colonies around the World. Selected examples from each of the different routes are indicated in the map.