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### Faith and Footpaths

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# FAITH AND FOOTPATHS

## Pilgrimage in medieval Iberia

*George D. Greenia*

Occasionally over the centuries an incident occurs that shifts a center of gravity and draws the attention and energy of formerly disinterested bystanders. In the opening decades of the ninth century, an abandoned Roman mausoleum in remote northwest Spain was proclaimed the resting place of the Apostle St. James the Greater, the only original companion of Jesus buried in Europe other than Peter and Paul in Rome. All three were martyred for the faith, but the celebrated presence of the two greatest princes of the Church in a single city that subsequently became the home of a continuous line of successors to Peter – and interpreters of Paul – had long given Rome the edge.

Yet James was the first to shed his blood, a Son of Thunder whose fame came to muffle some of the official voice booming from central Italy. Pilgrims started arriving in Compostela first from hardscrabble Galicia, then from ambitious Asturias, and soon from all the embattled northern Iberian realms. Eventually they came from the whole of Christendom. Compostela's hillside cemetery prompted its earliest neighboring prelate to relocate his diocesan see in order to hover over his most precious shrine. The freshly repositioned bishopric grew into a metropolitan see that rivaled Toledo and almost deprived that legendary Visigothic capital of its primacy over all Iberia. It was well served by a series of resourceful and well-connected bishops, and succeeded in becoming the most appealing draw of any holy place among the Christian kingdoms of the Peninsula, providing a target for Moorish raiders as well as motivation to counterattack them. It also served as a pretext to levy an homage tribute on all the grateful lands whose byways led to Compostela. Never famous as a destination for cures, apparitions or miracles, the sanctuary of Santiago did trigger wondrous economic growth, a new jostling of disparate cultures among its visitors, and fresh engines of art and architecture that still awe pilgrims today (Ashley and Deegan 2009). The story of Santiago is that of a shrine whose ponderous stature ignited the wrath of Muslims, the envy of neighbors, and the emulation of scattered holy places which could point onward to Compostela. In one way or another, everyone redefined themselves as travelers on the road to St. James.

### **Finding the tomb**

James the Elder, one of Jesus's closest disciples, was beheaded by Herod Agrippa in 44 CE, the first of the Twelve to be martyred according to the Acts of the Apostles. Nothing is reported in

Christian scriptures or even by the earliest Church Fathers as to his remains, but by the ninth century a powerful myth had arisen that would persuade not a few Christians and Muslims that his supposed tomb site was in the far western anchor of the Latin Imperium. As the year 1000 approached, James was invested with apocalyptic significance. The hymns and commentaries of the Asturian monk Beatus de Liebana embraced the Book of Revelation, the last entry in the Christian scriptures and a favorite of believers in times of desperation like those in Muslim-occupied Spain. “Their” James bracketed salvation history for Iberia because after the Resurrection he had come to the ends of the world to preach a good news destined to triumph after savage trials. Northwestern Spain, the forested domain of Celts and Sueves, eventually became a counterweight to distant Jerusalem across the fulcrum that was Rome, and pilgrims surged toward each axis of this fateful spiritual beam (Webb 1999).

The earliest wisps of the Jacobean legend styled him an early missionary to these distant provinces of Imperial Rome in the interval between the crucifixion of Jesus and James’s own martyrdom. Accounts which eventually coalesced into the authoritative *Vita* in the twelfth-century *Codex Calixtinus* (otherwise known as the *Liber Sancti Jacobi*) declared that his erstwhile evangelization was fruitless, and so disheartening that even the apostle needed a consoling apparition by the Virgin Mary to bolster his spirits. A tradition grew that she appeared to him in Zaragoza on a pillar, launching a sizeable cult of its own focused on a jasper pedestal that survives to this day and is still revered by pilgrims to that shrine. James returned to Jerusalem to meet his death, but further legend had it that his disciples gathered the head and body and rather miraculously sailed back to the faraway Iberian Atlantic coast where he was interred and then forgotten.

His posthumous success as an evangelizer began in the 820s or 830s CE when one Pelayo, a pious hermit or monk, saw a play of lights floating above a wooded hillside not far from the port of Padrón and reported his discovery to the local bishop, Theodomir (ca. 819–847 CE). Moved by selfless piety – or sensing an opportunity to reposition his diocese within the only continuous power structure known in Christian Europe – Theodomir validated the discovery as the very tomb containing the remains of St. James and induced king Alfonso II of Asturias to become a patron. The long-abandoned Roman cemetery overgrown by a pine grove was rechristened in the saint’s name, as Sanctus Jacobus (Saint Jacob, or James) morphed into Sancti Yagus, Santi Yagüe, and simply Santiago. The Compostela part came shortly afterward, probably from *composita tellus* (groomed plot of land) although the appeal of the folk etymology of *campus stellarum* (field of stars) proved irresistible.

Although there were earlier tomb cults in Iberia such as those of Eulalia of Mérida and Emilianus (Spanish San Millán) of Castile, and collective sites such as the Cámara Santa in Oviedo, Santiago towered above them and served as something of a template and terminus for most of the medieval Iberian sacred circuits whose shrine sites became a rosary of venerated and hospitable stopping points. The rise of pan-European Marian devotions in the thirteenth century prompted the appearance of a torrent of new sightings of the Virgin in Spain as well, often leaving behind iconic images of herself at Nájera, Villalcázar de Sirga, and Ponferrada along the French route, and at Monserrat and other places scattered in territories reconquered from the resident Muslim population. (Not a few historians assume that these apparitions were well-timed wonders that encouraged resettlement of underpopulated frontier towns.) The newer shrines tended to honor Mary’s apparitions or merely places of local devotion that sponsored annual feast day treks called *romerías*. Almost none were curative shrines. Santiago de Compostela became something of an antique model of the venerated tomb long after the age of martyrs had passed, and a major goal of long-distance pilgrimage.

## The faces of St. James

The image of St. James became ubiquitous. He never lost his canonical representation as a preaching apostle toting a book representing the Gospel proclamation. But he rapidly acquired new attributes as himself a pilgrim with the recognizable attire and equipment of any traveler to Compostela. The earliest (1125–1150 CE) representation of “Santiago peregrino,” affixed to the church of Santa Marta de Tera in Zamora, displays the crucial accessories: a walking staff, a traveler’s satchel, and the soon-to-be-inescapable scallop shell. The formalities of high Romanesque sculpture are visible in the plaited beard and sheer, almost gauzy drapery, but this James has snapped his head to the left and raises an oddly inflated left hand in apostolic admonition and warning; his eyes are protruding with energy and he even bares his teeth as he speaks. John K. Moore provides the best description of the statue and its message:

He has the matted hair of a desert prophet, the full but fashionable beard of a court sage, and the paunch of an established authority who knows his throw weight. This is the anti-warrior, armed with his voice, speaking with his arms, head pivoted to take in his audience. The extremities of head and hands are inflated with the mighty bel-  
lowing from within. This man is on a mission, something the travel gear underscores, positioning James not on a stage but in motion across a landmass he intends to make echo.

(2014, 35)

The James of Santa Marta is on the cusp of transformation from preacher to pilgrim, urging his devotees onward as both.

Although the Santa Marta statue was produced on-site, it anticipates the French style which esteemed Santiago as the icon for his pilgrimage. All the images of St. James produced in France after the twelfth century, as well as the most influential models in the distinctive French style imported into Spain, are in agreement on the image of the saint those pilgrims sought to visit: a resolute walking sojourner, just like the pilgrims themselves. (See, for example, the image of Santiago Beltza in Puente la Reina, or any one of the dozens now gathered in the Museo das Peregrinacións in Santiago.) These *caminante* (walker) images mostly carved in Spain demonstrate that the cultic representation of St. James, the display figure that invited the observer to prayer, was that of the traveler. Pilgrims prayed to their pilgrim patron, and not to the apostle warrior who came later.

The now definitive representation of James from around the 1180s was completed for the Pórtico de la Gloria as part of the exterior west façade in Santiago itself. The saint is perched on a shallow throne and given unique centrality on the central door column right beneath the matching posture of the Christ risen in glory a few feet above him:

He is hieratic, elevated, meeting no one’s gaze except God’s. He holds his attributes with a light touch because they are icons and not serviceable tools. The scroll is too small to contain anything substantive, the staff a dainty symbol of someone already in charge. Most of all he’s silent, calm, immobilized by the column against his back.

(Moore 2014, 36)

This is the image that has greeted pilgrims for more than 800 years and is by far the most commonly reproduced likeness of the saint. It became the authoritative model for most of the derivative imagery that radiated back out from Santiago between the thirteenth and fifteenth

centuries. The Pórtico de la Gloria is the “Sistine Chapel” of Romanesque statuary and the then polychromed James, head ablaze with a jeweled nimbus, pressed itself into the memory of his devotees.

### **Celebration and ambition**

Bishop Theodomir was the bold visionary who seized on the discovery of the tomb and even moved his diocesan see from Iria Flavia on the Galician coast to that sparsely populated hillside in the interior and launched the first building projects there, first a free-standing chaplaincy, then a small neighboring monastery, then a full architectural structure that served as a sacred envelope for the tomb. The Roman mausoleum above ground was demolished in favor of a superimposed sanctuary with an altar, and century by century laborious construction alternated with even more laborious engineering, earthworks, and the enormous task of taming the heaving shoulders of granite just beneath the Spanish soil (Suárez Otero 2014). And even poor pilgrims played their part. Those without coins to offer or wax candles to light during their night vigils and song fests picked up limestone from Triacastela and carried that burden for a whole week before contributing their gift to help make mortar for the endless edifices commissioned by delirious clerics.

Even at its height in the Middle Ages, there were no more than a few thousand permanent residents in Santiago. Willing pilgrims who donated their muscle and goodwill therefore made up a sizeable portion of the work force that built the vast monuments erected during that period along the endless westward path. Many of those building projects were pilgrim hostels intended for them, and oddly the cathedral in Santiago was too. Those permitted to pray through the night within the church itself could apparently number in the hundreds or even thousands. Italians and Germans and Frenchmen settled in companionable throngs, each in their encampments on the tribune level of the great Romanesque edifice and mustered competing choruses of hymns to St. James in their native tongue. At times those crowds produced unhappy consequences: in the early thirteenth century, for example, some aggressively jostling pilgrims turned violent and committed murder; the cathedral was shuttered by the homicide until it could be rededicated. In the following century, perhaps prompted by successive waves of plague – or at any rate overripe and under-washed travelers – the relentless stream of daily arrivals helped inaugurate the age of the *botafumeiro*, a giant censer attached to the ceiling of the transept in order to symbolize the cloud of prayers arising from the pilgrims, and incidentally mask their odor.

As a site of visitation its success would soon exceed Theodomir’s wildest dreams. But it was the more ambitious and internationally savvy diplomat bishop Diego Gelmírez (1069–1149) who drove the cult of St. James, and its potential pilgrim allure, to heights unprecedented in the Latin West. Only Martin of Tours and Thomas Becket in the Middle Ages, and Lourdes and Fatima in the modern era, can compare with Santiago as national shrines with international appeal.

The traditional capital of Visigothic Spain had been Toledo, a centrally located urban complex on a major river and well connected by roadways to the surrounding peninsula. It was retaken from the Moors in 1085, a huge psychological boost for the Christian Reconquest, and once the native Mozarabic liturgy was replaced by the standard Roman rite in 1086, its prelate enjoyed restored status as the Primate of all Catholic Iberia, a decisive reincorporation of the peninsula into Western Christendom and its crusading fervors. But Toledo had no cult that could rival the draw of the tomb of James in the far northwest, no feeder routes lined with

attractive secondary shrines, and no relentless stream of foreign visitors with a high sense of agency. And for centuries Toledo sat on the edge of an active war zone.

Diego Gelmírez capitalized on the growing sway of Santiago in church affairs. Already a papal legate and soon the first archbishop of Santiago, Gelmírez saw the pilgrimage route as a potential artery to Rome. He campaigned for his see to become the head of the Spanish church, authoring the major history of his own deeds, the *Historia compostelana* (covering the years 1100–1139, in a fine modern edition by Flaqué Rey 1994). Gelmírez also inaugurated the building of the new Romanesque cathedral dedicated posthumously in 1213 which is the unforgettable edifice visitors enter today. Another episcopal diplomat and historian, Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada of Toledo (1170–1247), finally deflected papal validation of Santiago's claim to lead the Spanish Church, but neither he nor mighty Toledo ever managed to eclipse the pull of the bodily remains of an apostle for a relic-crazed medieval Europe (Márquez Villanueva 2004, 255–268; see also the historical surveys of Moralejo and López Alsina 1993, and of Singul 2009).

### Tombs and heroes

Tomb cults thrived in the Middle Ages whether the visitor sought saints or epic heroes. French scholars including Gaston Paris (1839–1903) and Joseph Bédier (1864–1938) appreciated the mutual influence of medieval hagiography and epic poetry. Bédier even suggested that epics such as the *Chanson de Roland* were composed as complements to routes that passed by legendary sites of chivalric importance, such as Roland's final battle at Roncesvalles or his supposed burial place at Blaye near Bordeaux. Those landmarks are along well-established pilgrimage routes to Santiago and even if the epics were not composed to promote hero tourism per se, they did reinforce the historic resonance of the trails for both secular as well as sacred history.

The clearest echo of French epic adventure *cum* pilgrimage in Spain is recorded in the twelfth-century Latin *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle* which recounts a fictional expedition of Charlemagne into Moorish domains to forge a safe path toward Santiago. The earliest surviving version of this fantasy chronicle makes up the central narrative of Book Four of the celebrated *Codex Calixtinus* discussed subsequently. The French emperor is invited by the apostle in a dream to take Spain back from Muslim control as a Crusader *avant la lettre*. His success is accompanied by miracles worked by St. James, but tragedy strikes on Charlemagne's withdrawal over the Pyrenees when the rearguard is ambushed and Roland is slain, a fatal skirmish that actually did take place in 778 CE. The various epic accounts of the adventures of Charlemagne and final misadventure of his kinsman Roland spread throughout Europe in written and oral form, and the fanciful *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle* was recopied at least 150 times in Latin and another 50 times in various vernacular tongues, so the pious and their pastors were not the only ones indulging in sightseeing. For long centuries the trails of faith promised brushes with adventure both sacred and secular and all Europe looked to Spain as a memorial landscape for belief and heroism.

### Dogged travelers

The physical trails themselves deserve their place in the history of European cultural traffic. Santiago de Compostela as a traveler's destination helped define named land routes both inside of and well beyond Iberia, something neither Jerusalem nor Rome could claim. All roads led to Rome and pilgrims simply took to the highways used by merchants and mercenaries, abbots

and armies. Visitors to the tombs of Peter and Paul faced a daunting patchwork of diffident principalities and scant infrastructure dedicated to their care.

Overland routes to Jerusalem for their part were often trackless paths through indifferent or hostile wilderness, and the nearly inevitable sea routes were also commercial ones, with pilgrims simply cargo for the merchant marine. Santiago beckoned with well-known highways or *caminos* departing from Paris, Tours, Vézelay, Arles, Le Puy-en-Velay and elsewhere in France; from the Germanic heartland; and from the ports of Ireland, England and the Baltic. Inside the Spanish realms the main route was the “Camino francés” stretching from Roncesvalles westward to Santiago, but there were various others, including the early “Camino primitivo” from Oviedo, the English-Irish-Nordic Route (“Camino inglés”) from Ferrol or La Coruña, the Northern or Cantabrian Coastal trail, the “Vía de la Plata” up from Seville, and scores of minor feeder routes that joined the main pathways.

These medieval thoroughfares made good use of surviving Roman roads and when necessary, cattle paths, building an infrastructure that opened up a persistently underpopulated interior and allowed the penetration of international traffic and ideas. A quip long attributed to Goethe pronounced that pilgrimage gave birth to Europe and Christendom was its mother tongue. The core notion at least has clear merit. In an age before citizenship that could be documented by anything other than one’s native dialect, being a pilgrim granted a sort of pan-European identity that was itself both membership in a shared community of faith and a universal safe conduct through foreign lands. It also made the pilgrim worthy of charity and shelter, and imposed a stern expectation that locals would provide both to these strangers. Even when pilgrims and their hosts routinely failed to live up to the terms of their idealized relationship, those ideals were universally acknowledged and made borders and frontiers far more porous at every level of society.

Medieval pilgrimage was not always a peaceful affair, and could not be. No cross-country traveler set out across unknown territories naively unarmed against wolves, dogs or thieves. Leaving home was dangerous enough, and the most common feature of the highways of faith after churches, chapels and monasteries were cemeteries. It can only be an educated guess, but perhaps 10% to 15% of all long-distance travelers never made it home again. While some chose to resettle elsewhere, not a few fell victim to misadventures, disease and accident. It was easy enough to die of thirst, hunger or exposure. And the quip is shopworn but true enough that the rich had doctors and the poor had pilgrimage, which meant that setting out for a major shrine entailed surrounding oneself with a concentrated display of human suffering. Pilgrim hostels and hospitals – often nearly interchangeable – were intended as places of charity but ended up more as vectors for disease than as centers of sanitation. The approach to most major towns in medieval Spain and elsewhere was often signaled by a St. Lazarus chapel for lepers (Martínez García 1993).

The majority of pilgrims in Spain were defensively armed, even though officially Spain was considered occupied Christian territory and warriors intent on any combination of faith, valor and plunder qualified as crusaders and therefore armed themselves offensively. But unlike the Holy Land, Spain saw no regular influx of combative foreigners seeking to wrest sacred sites from enemy hands, nor foreign visitors hoping to gain access to holy landmarks sequestered within hostile hands.

Despite this, one of the most persistent, and currently embarrassing depictions of Santiago is as Matamoros, the Moor Slayer (Raulston 2008). Propagandists for military triumphalism, mostly French revisionist historians of the period, turned Santiago into a mounted warrior with attributes of a white horse, a brandished sword, and defeated Muslim foes sprawled before him with their decapitated, turbaned heads scattered on the ground. So embedded did this image

become that when conquistadors exported their violent ways to the New World, St. James promptly became a *Mataindios* (Slayer of Indians) and – returning the compliment in the fullness of time – during the wars of Latin American independence he became a *Mataespañoles* (Slayer of Spaniards). The standard reading of these images in more recent centuries affirmed that St. James was reassigned to also be the patron of the Reconquista of Moorish Spain. Francisco Márquez Villanueva rejects this interpretation, showing that the Matamoros that originated in the north along the pilgrim trail only arose well after those avenues were safely contained deep in Christian lands. Santiago was deployed as an icon of a struggle already won for pilgrims and as a patriotic hero, but not an inspiration for the Reconquista itself.

The paths of pilgrimage in medieval Spain – before there was a Spain, of course, when the Iberian lands comprised separate ethnic and dynastic kingdoms – are saturated with pilgrim lore and emblazoned with pilgrim art. The preferred iconography has proven the most durable mark of the travelers who created and canonized these routes, starting with the ubiquitous scallop shell. The humble *vieira* is supposed to represent the trek that takes the traveler all the way to the sea. It may have begun as a pagan fertility symbol suggestive of the *mons veneris*, and scallop shells with perforated flanges clearly intended as wearable emblems of some sort have been found in Iberian pre-Christian burials far from any medieval pilgrimage route. The lucrative sale of scallop shells within Santiago itself was a closed market which admitted no competition with cathedral-sponsored vendors. It was the preferred accessory of all classes of devotees of St. James and deluxe versions appeared in precious metals and carved jet, a type of soft coal which can be polished to a durable luster. Once the association with the journey to Compostela was cemented, however, the scallop shell became the badge worn from the outset of the trip. Utility items such as the dried gourd (used as a canteen) surrendered their identity to the pilgrim user and appear almost nowhere in medieval art except as part of a sacred walker's gear. The shoulder cape, the walking staff, the broad-brimmed felt hat good for rain or sun, and the modest satchel slung from a shoulder strap constituted the most stable costume known in the medieval world except for the monastic habits of those who often never traveled at all (for essays on life in the medieval city of Santiago see Antón Vilasánchez and Tato Castiñeira 2000).

### Writing about pilgrimage

Pilgrimage appears relatively rarely in the literary record. The Latin *Codex Calixtinus*, the most celebrated volume on the saint, is a product of clerical encyclopedists at both extremes of the French trails (Márquez Villanueva 2004, 165–179). The components of the *Codex* were assembled in the mid-twelfth century by French propagandists selecting from Spanish raw materials to build a sort of “Summa Jacobea.” The given name of the collection comes from the spurious claim that it was authorized by Pope Calixtus II, an assiduous ally of Diego Gelmírez. The editors included an account of the history of the saint's *translatio* and *inventio*, that is, the arrival of James's body in ancient Galicia and its discovery centuries later, followed by complex sermon materials encouraging devotion to the saint. To further excite the faithful, yet another section pulls together an ample collection of miracle stories (Coffey et al. 1996). It is this section that stretches the book's purview back along the trails where James worked his miracles for those approaching his tomb.

The fourth section is the most fanciful, a trumpet blast of Latin prose recounting Charlemagne's mighty exploits in Iberia, apparently designed to tickle the Cluniac monks from France and the laymen who revered them. Both groups were promoting the pilgrimage to St. James as they extended their influence along this soft frontier. The terrain and tribal disputes



among Basques, Navarrese, Aragonese, and others may have been irksome to walkers and opportunistic French nobles, but the ecclesiastical avenue was becoming well populated with friendly bishops and abbots who had relocated from north of the Pyrenees. Not to mention thousands of common folk who could count on a friendly welcome from French expatriates who stamped their name on a whole chain of *Villafrancos*, or French Towns, and even christened for themselves a major artery adjacent to the very cathedral in Santiago: the Rúa dos francos, where French influence is just as visible in the ‘rúa’ part as in the ‘francos.’

The fifth book of the *Codex Calixtinus* is an out-and-out first-hand report written by an opinionated French cleric, one Aymari Picaud, writing quite intentionally for his countrymen. The now canonized *Pilgrim’s Guide* has become famous as the first true travel guide, describing the various routes that converge on the eponymous French Route in Puente la Reina, Navarre, and then march on to Santiago. He catalogs the journey’s dangers, material comforts and opportunities for spiritual satisfactions such as visiting the not-to-be-missed tombs of French saints. There is a haughty disapproval of most natives of Iberia until one reaches Galicia when they start to resemble their Gallic neighbors. This fifth book was unmistakably drafted by a rather diffident Frenchman who carefully elaborated on his successful trek because the most complete description of all is of the cathedral in Santiago with its artistic glories and splendid services. Any Spanish participation in this ambitious travelogue is uncertain because the descriptions are all outsider views, the brochure-worthy hype written for potential visitors and not the report of anyone who made his own unique visit, much less the insider’s “peek behind the curtain” that Spanish contributors could have supplied. The numerous hymns spliced into various parts of the *princeps* copy of the *Codex Calixtinus* are meant for Jacobean celebrations either in Compostela itself or in anticipation of arrival there, and not a few of those melodies and lyrics were first composed in France.

Although a number of later copies derived from the earliest *Codex Calixtinus*, which is still zealously treasured in Santiago, are extant, none are as elaborately produced or penetrated much into popular lore. This was an anthology for the clerical elite who could draw on most of its contents for composing their own sermons or for devotional reading in French monastic foundations along the main pilgrimage route (Reilly 1993). As a stand-alone composition, the Pseudo-Turpin history about Charlemagne and Roland was a tremendous literary success, but mostly outside of Spain. The *Pilgrim’s Guide* in Book Five has become a classic only in the modern era, imposing itself on contemporary dreams of the Middle Ages and scripting journeys that cannot replicate the idealized composite attributed to Aymari Picaud.

Márquez Villanueva (2004, 165–179) regards the *Codex Calixtinus* as a Trojan horse full of French monks. While Bishop Gelmírez himself may have commissioned components of the collection, it seems to have been given its final editorial stamp sometime before 1173 CE and well north of the Pyrenees. The clerics of Cluny enjoyed a widening sphere of influence among the ruling noble warrior class in central France, and the monks only encountered serious resistance when bartering with Rome. The *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle* mentioned previously spins an enthusiastic tale of Charlemagne’s expedition to establish a safe path through Spain so that foreign travelers could reach the tomb of the apostle. But this account presents a Spain devoid of Spaniards. The Muslim enemy is the only Iberian resident worth talking about, and fighting him is the responsibility of the apparently sole challenger Islam met south of the Pyrenees, namely the French. The Carolingian expeditionary adventure is a wholesale historical fiction – the real Charlemagne barely engaged in skirmishes beyond his southern frontier. The *Pseudo-Turpin* also happily ignores any report of native Christian Spaniards creating and defending their own kingdoms (Barriero Rivas 1997). They do not even merit a footnote as incidental partners to the French. This Trojan horse spills out its agents and its ink over Iberia in the cause of further Frankish incursions, ostensibly as spiritual tourism secured by French feats of arms.

Major works in the Iberian vernaculars, by contrast, reference the Camino de Santiago as part of their native backdrop usually without dwelling on it. When charging Moorish and Christian forces clash in the *Cantar de mio Cid* (probably composed in 1207), “Some shout Mahomat, and others Saint James,” but the reference hardly seems religious. The *Poema de Fernán González* (mid-thirteenth century) plays out much of its epic adventure along the vertex of the French Route on either side of Burgos but with no reference to anyone else on the trail other than the boisterous combatants of the plotline. Even Cervantes in his *Don Quixote* (1605 and 1615), a work that loves to recall a lost past, finds little use in summoning pilgrims as extras for his social landscapes. The folk tradition is where pilgrimage really begins to gain traction. Folk sayings allude to the incessant passers-by logging on towards Santiago, and innumerable legends and ballads recount their chance adventures.

In the plastic arts, devotional objects made for pilgrims are among the most common grave goods found throughout Europe, the treasured possessions of sacred travelers, men and women who wanted to arrive before the heavenly throne dressed in the costume and wearing the physical tokens of their earnest efforts to reach out to God while they were still on earth.

### Piety and opportunism

Clerical and folk compositions may also be supplemented with legal texts. Not all pilgrims were saints, and many of those selling them goods and services fleeced the credulous. The early church fathers mistrusted pilgrimage in general because of its multiple external and internal abuses. Not a few greedy bystanders saw how they could profiteer from excesses of piety and misdirected belief, extracting donations and selling false relics. Monumental churches and monasteries were constructed and elaborate decorations ordered. Among the wardens of hospitals and charitable refuges, hospitality fatigue could set in all too quickly. Travelers too, far from the restraints of village life and regular access to their legitimate sex partner, took advantage of the anonymity of foreign settings to sample foreign pleasures. Thousands of pilgrims poured into Spain to fulfill a sentence imposed for violent crimes that outraged a whole community. Condemning an offender to a hazardous journey dampened retaliatory violence between families and clans and transferred punishment from vengeful peers to an inscrutable God. But it also meant that pilgrims as a class could provoke a certain measure of mistrust. And in addition to the truly criminal were unspiritual wanderers, shameless freeloaders, vagabonds, opportunists, and downright flimflam artists (Arribas Briones 1993).

The gamut of motives for pilgrimage is transparent in the totalizing catalogue of pilgrims in the *Liber Sancti Jacobi*. The opening sermon on the Apostle St. James lays out the panorama for us:

The poor go there, and so do the rich, criminals, knights, princes, rulers, the blind and lame, the mighty, the lords, the scions of great families, bishops and abbots, some barefoot, others penniless, others loaded with irons as a sign of their penance.

(*Liber Sancti Jacobi*, Book I, Chapter 17)

Yet at times something troubling underlies the motives of certain pilgrims, a presumption of commensurability: that the pilgrimage undertaken will necessarily cancel the offense committed or earn the favor requested. Measuring spiritual matters was one of the most persistent projects of the Church in medieval times, and included not only penances but also benefits such as indulgences earned through the performance of pious acts. Cyrille Vogel’s French phrase *pénitance tarifée* (“tariffed penance”) aptly conveys the calculations applied to reforming

one's life and conduct (Vázquez de Parga 1948). The human decision that selected pilgrimage as a seemly expression of piety has clearly made one attempt at devising appropriate measures of devotion, with the unknown hazards of the road left in the hands of God. This implies the penitential nature of all pilgrimage travel: the inevitable sacrifices, discomforts, vulnerability, inconvenience and indignities that are part of the experience sought and not just incidental to the trip. This sort of computation of grace and expiation also shows a fair measure of calculation on the part of Church authorities who could choose from any number of shrine sites both near and far as the offense warranted. But calibrated schemes for earning grace, or for expiation of earthly sins by present suffering, or for gaining indulgences through voluntary pious works would lead to a commodification of grace that proved disastrous for the Church and eventually crippling for the pilgrimage experience. Bartering the temporal for benefits eternal will never find a yardstick to persuade everyone.

By the end of the Middle Ages in Spain and elsewhere, the personalized, psychological dimensions of pilgrimage were undermined by the steady commodification of diverse forms of civil compensation and remission of sins. Just as murder could be redeemed by payment of *wergeld*, so other crimes normally punished with a judicial pilgrimage could be expiated by a fixed sum of money or by underwriting the costs of a substitute pilgrim who made the trip on commission. The spiritual benefits of a pilgrimage themselves came to be a commodity of transferable value, so a sinner might be required to perform two pilgrimages, one in punishment for a murder, say, and a second trip whose graces were formally reassigned as compensation to the aggrieved family. Thousands of these surrogate arrangements were apparently made and local records throughout Europe, including faraway northern ranges such as Germany and Scandinavian countries, give witness to the practice and Santiago was a frequently named destination. This practice quickly spread in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries to testamentary bequests which obliged heirs to perform a pilgrimage for the sake of the soul of the deceased, as a condition of receiving their inheritance. These replacement pilgrims became so common in Iberia itself that a Spanish proverb held that “en vida o muerte, todos han de ir a Santiago” (“In life or in death, everyone ends up going to Santiago”).

### Movement becomes myth

Pilgrimages of all sorts and to diverse destinations have become firmly embedded in the national Spanish myth. Annual *romerías* help define the cycle of village and even urban life, their colorful traditions a bond for locals and a draw for tourists, whether it be the often raucous parade to the Virgen del Rocío in the province of Huelva or the elaborate hypercharged piety of the thousands of costumed young people who take part in the Holy Week procession in Seville, and the hundreds of thousands of observers who pour into town to take in the spectacle.

But the most successful and massive of all remnants of medieval pilgrimage in Spain is clearly the Camino de Santiago, reanimated in the late twentieth century and every year attracting more than 300,000 mostly earnest walkers, and millions more respectful visitors to Compostela. International attention and frank admiration has successfully expanded the Camino's pilgrim catchment across the globe, and it has become not only an economic boon to a struggling economy, but also a vehicle for promoting sympathy for Spanish traditions and honoring Spain's capacity for disinterested hospitality. All tourism promises contact with the authentic Other through costumes, food, social practices and demonstrations of belief. The additional attraction of pilgrimage lies in the opportunity which it offers for discovering a more authentic

self, and the modern Camino de Santiago seems to fulfill for many the experience sought by centuries of travelers to Compostela.

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