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Apostolic Activity of St. James the Apostle: Leading to the Formation of the Camino de Santiago

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For pilgrims, 2021 is a Year of Saint James. This happens every few years (the last was in 2010 and the next will be in 2027), i.e. when July 25, the Day of St. James, is on Sunday. Pilgrims have been travelling to the tomb of St. James for centuries. The Way of St. James (Camino de Santiago) to Santiago de Compostela in Spain became a special spiritual asset of European cultural heritage following the Declaration of the Camino de Santiago by the Council of Europe on 23 October 1987, and official branches of the way have been drawn across Europe.

In order to actualise the pilgrimage along the Way of St. James, the features of the life of St. James the Greater and his activities which led to the rise and formation of the Camino de Santiago are discussed in this article. While the origins and development of the pilgrimage walk of St. James are presented, the article discusses the distinctiveness of St. James's activities among the apostles. The paper reviews his apostolic activities after the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ, it presents the history of his tomb and the beginning of his holy cult in Spain.

Key Words: St. James the Apostle, the Way of St. James, the Camino de Santiago, pilgrim

Introduction

Over the centuries thousands of Christians have travelled the paths of this world, and at least for a short time, abandoning their usual comforts, guided by the spirit of faith and repentance. Pilgrims have always wanted to resemble the Lord Jesus Christ, who had nowhere to lay his head while living on this earth (Luke 9:58; Petraitytė, 2008). In the XXI century, the phenomenon of pilgrimage continues to expand alongside economic, social and technological development. Pilgrimage is perceived as a time of self-discovery, an intermediate state between the present and the future life. Travelling pilgrims have sought the meaning of life and answers to the main existential questions (Liutikas, 2009, 2016).

The Way of St. James (Camino de Santiago) to Santiago de Compostela in Spain has become a special spiritual asset of European cultural heritage. No other Way in European history has played such an important role in the formation and consolidation of a Christian European identity. On no other road will we find so many monuments of Christian culture. Not for nothing was it included in the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 1993.

In 1987, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Marcelino Oreja Aguirre, prepared and submitted a proposal to declare the Way of St. James the first cultural route in Europe. A meeting of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe was held in Santiago de Compostela to proclaim solemnly the declaration of Camino de Santiago and to unveil a granite plaque in the Obradoiro square of the city with the inscription: 'The Way of St. James – Cultural Route of Europe, 23rd October, 1987' (Oreja Aguirre, 2013) marking the new revival of the first European cultural route. Indeed, since the declaration was published in Europe, the real revival of this way has begun, as the Council of Europe restored the status of particular importance of the Way of St. James by declaring it the most important cultural way in Europe. Following the adoption of the declaration, the Council of Europe invited European states to revive the pilgrim route as part of Europe's common heritage. The European pilgrimage route programme was launched, expressing the hope that faith, which had for centuries mobilised pilgrims for a common purpose and given them strength despite differences and national interests, would bring together a society that upholds the values of tolerance, mutual respect and unity (Millan Mon, 2013; Millan Mon, 2014; Tūras, 2014).

When talking about the Camino de Santiago, questions arise about how the Camino de Santiago appeared, why the Way of St. James leads to Santiago de Compostela, what the historical origin and development of the Camino de Santiago is. In order to actualise the pilgrimage along the Way of St. James this article discusses the hagiographic features of St. James The Greater which were the basis for the beginning and formation of the Camino de Santiago. The purpose of the study is to present the historical and legendary features of St. James's life and activities which influenced the formation of the pilgrimage. To achieve the objective:

- 1) the distinctiveness of the activities of St. James from other apostles is discussed;
- 2) St. James's activities after the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ are reviewed;
- 3) the history of the apostle's tomb and the origins of the holy cult in Spain are described.

Pilgrimage is one of the few phenomena that attracts the attention of scientists of different academic fields. Information from historical and theological sources provides an insight into the features of the development of the phenomenon of Camino de Santiago and explains it in the context of European culture. Studies on the Camino de Santiago reveal the importance of the first and the oldest European cultural route in Europe.

The Calling of James the Son of Zebedee

St. James, son of Zebedee and Salome and brother of John the evangelist, came from Galilee and was one of the twelve apostles of Jesus. According to Saint Jerome, the family was noble and originated from Jaffa. Jaffa, the old part of modern Tel Aviv, is the oldest city in Palestine and the port of King Solomon. It is also one of the oldest cities in the world. The city was first mentioned in the written chronicles of the Egyptian Pharaoh Thutmose III. Jaffa belonged to the Egyptians, Jews, Persians, Phoenicians, Romans, Greeks and all of them left their traces in the history of the city. Jaffa was at the crossroads of cultures, a hospitable city by the sea, where Apostle Peter stayed (Starkie, 1957). James and John were closely related to Jesus's family. According to some authors, Jesus was the cousin of James the son of Zebedee. It is believed that Salome, the mother of James and John, was a cousin of Mary, the mother of Jesus (Starkie, 1957).

The son of Zebedee is also called James The Greater to distinguish him from the Apostle James the Less, the son of Alphaeus. It is in the apostolic lists provided by the evangelists that two people called James are mentioned (Mk 15:40). James is called the Greater even though he was younger than the apostle James the Less. That is because he was the first of the two to follow Jesus (Mt 4:21). In religious communities of that time and later there was a custom that he who first joined the community was called the elder and he who joined later was referred to as the younger, although the latter could be older in age or superior in merit. Such a distinction thus reveals different roles of the two apostles in the first community of the disciples of Jesus Christ and, accordingly, their different role in the texts of the New Testament (Oželis, 2017, 2019).

James and his brother John were fishermen of Lake Gennesaret (Sea of Galilee) as were their fellow fishermen Simon Peter and his brother Andrew.

As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 'Come, follow me,' Jesus said, 'and I will send you out to fish for people.' At once they left their nets and followed him (Mk 1:16-18).

James was called by Jesus, when he and his brother were repairing their nets by the Lake of Gennesareth.

When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him (Mk 1:19-20).

So, after hearing Jesus's call, they do not hesitate to go with him and become his most faithful followers, fishers of men (Mk 1:17).

James was called John's brother as they were alike not only because of the blood relationship, but also in their character, for both were equally zealous and eager, and both shared the same aspirations. When he had chosen the twelve, Jesus gave James and John the title 'Boanerges' in Aramaic for their austerity which means 'sons of thunder' (Mk 3:17). The impulsiveness of James and his brother John is evidenced by an event in a village in Samaria narrated by Luke the evangelist. When Jesus and his disciples were travelling to Jerusalem, the inhabitants of one of the villages of Samaria refused to

accommodate them for the night. The outraged brothers James and John exclaimed: 'Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?' (Luke 9: 54). Jesus, of course, reprimanded his disciples. This impulsive reaction of James and his brother signifies both their love for Jesus and the old strife between the Samaritans and the Israelites. When Jesus intervened everything calmed down. It is also stated that James was called the 'child of thunder' because of his thunderous preaching, which terrified the evil, moved the sluggish, and made everyone marvel at his greatness. Therefore, Beda Venerabilis (about 672-735) says of James that he thundered so loudly that if he had thundered a little more violently, the whole world would not have been able to withstand him (de Voragine, 2015).

Salome, the mother of James and John, asked Jesus to seat one of them on his right hand side and the other one on his left, i.e. to share his glory with them.

Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favour of him 'What is it you want?' he asked. She said, 'Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom' (Mt 20:20-21).

Here, human ambition is interblended with zeal for the Kingdom of God. Salome is with her sons not only in these requests, but she follows her elder son. She is an ambitious mother defending her children. As a result, there is discontent among the other disciples because 'When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers.' (Mt 20:24; Starkie, 1957).

'You don't know what you are asking,' Jesus said to them. 'Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?' (Mt 20:22).

In other words, to assume his suffering. "We can,' they answered.' (Mt 20, 22).

Jesus said to them, 'you will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father.' (Mt 20: 23).

Thus, Jesus foretold the martyrdom of the brothers: one of them (i.e. James) would be the first of the apostles to be executed, and the other (i.e. John) would die last.

St. James Among the Three Outstanding Apostles

In the apostolic lists and descriptions of callings, James the Greater is the third one to be mentioned (after Peter and Andrew) (Mt 10:2). He is one of the dearest and closest disciples to Jesus. Together with Peter and John, he participates in the most important events of Jesus's life.

With Peter and his brother John, we see him in the episode when Jesus raises the daughter of Jairus, the ruler of the Galilee synagogue. About their engagement it is said: 'He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James.' (Mk 5: 37).

When he arrived at the house of Jairus, he did not let anyone go in with him except Peter, John and James, and the child's father and mother (Luke 8: 51).

Peter, James and his brother John are present during the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor.

After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves (Mt 17: 1).

They witnessed the Transfiguration of Jesus on Mount Tabor. 'There he was transfigured before them' (Mk 9:2).

An apocalyptic prophecy is revealed to these disciples, foreshadowing the destruction of Jerusalem, future disasters and wars.

As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, 'Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?' Jesus said to them: 'Watch out that no one deceives you' (Mk 13: 3-5).

James, Peter, and James's brother John were with Jesus on the Mount of Olives before Jesus's arrest, suffering and death. But when Jesus prayed in agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, they could not keep watch with him and they all fell asleep.

He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, 'my soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.' Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the

ground and prayed ... Then he returned to his disciplines and found them sleeping. 'Couldn't you men keep watch with me for one hour?' (Mt 26:37-40).

Thus, James was given the privilege of participation in important moments in the life of Jesus. As mentioned above, together with Peter and John, James witnessed the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor. The three apostles were called to keep watch in the Garden of Gethsemane just before Jesus's arrest, suffering and death. On Mount Tabor, James, John, and Peter were destined to see the glory of Jesus the Lord; and in the Garden of Gethsemane - his suffering and humility. Having previously imagined that the Messiah would be the triumphant saviour of the Jewish people, after this second experience James realised that Jesus's destiny was to suffer and to give his life. This second experience also influenced James, although of an impulsive and wayward character, to give his own life for Jesus Christ without hesitation. This martyrdom happened in the fifth decade of the first century. The Acts of the Apostles state:

It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword (Acts 12: 1-2).

This message testifies that James fell victim to persecutions because he was one of the more important personalities of the Christian community in Jerusalem.

Activities of St. James the Apostle in Judea and Spain

Tertullian (160-222), one of the first fathers of the Church, wrote about the activity of the apostles after the resurrection of Jesus. First, the apostles preached faith in Jesus Christ in Judea and established churches. Then they spread all over the world, proclaiming to the nations the same teaching and the same faith. In every city they established Churches which gave the offshoots of faith and the seeds of teaching to other Churches, so that they in turn became Churches. Therefore, they are regarded as apostolic: for they are 'offshoots' of the Apostolic Churches. It is necessary that everything be characterised by its origin. Therefore, these churches, however numerous and large they may be, constitute the First Apostolic Church from which they are all descended. They are all primary, all apostolic, since they all are one (Tertullian, 2014).

After the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, there is a twelve to fourteen-year period when nothing is written in the New Testament about the Apostle James. The Golden Legend by Jamesus de Voragine states that the Apostle James, the son of Zebedee, preached in Judea and Samaria after the ascension of the Lord. Then he went to Spain to sow the word of the Lord there. But, when James realised that there would be nothing useful to do and after he had acquired nine disciples, he left two of them there to preach, and took the other seven with him back to Judea (de Voragine, 2015). On the way back to Judea, on January 2, 40 in Zaragoza, the apostle met the Virgin Mary. During this visionary encounter Mary encouraged him and requested for a church to be built in that place to commemorate her son Jesus. She also gave him the pillar where Jesus was tied for scourging. The column will remain here until the end of the world and there will always be worshippers of Jesus in this city. James fulfilled this request and built the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Pillar (La Iglesia De La Virgen del Pilar) (Starkie, 1957). According to an old Latin manuscript, it was the first church in the world consecrated by the apostle in honour of St. Mary the Virgin. Before moving from Zaragoza to Jerusalem, James ordained his disciple Athanasius as the first bishop and his disciple Theodore as a priest (Van Liere, 2006; Starkie, 1957).

St. James the Great – The First Martyr of the Apostles

When St. James returned to Judea, he preached the Gospel and was disapproved by the Jews. As narrated in the Golden Legend (de Voragine, 2015), James was the first of the apostles to sacrifice his life for preaching of the Gospel. It is mentioned in the Holy Scripture that Herod Agrippa II decapitated James in Jerusalem to establish himself with the Jews. Herod Agrippa ruled Judea from 41 to 44. Although the author of the Acts of the Apostles does not speak directly about the reason for James's decapitation, the historic background reveals Herod's substantial support for the Pharisees movement.

It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. [Then] he saw that this met with approval among the Jews (Acts 12: 1-3).

This occurred in 44 AD (Gitlitz & Davidson, 2000). Perhaps then it was quite common to deserve such a punishment since Jesus warned his apostles:

Be on your guard; you will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in the synagogues ... But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved (Mt 10: 17-22; see also Lanzi & Lanzi, 2004; Tūras, 2014).

The prophecy of Jesus to James that he would drink from the same cup of the Redeemer's suffering was fulfilled (Mt 20:23). Importantly, the description of the death of this apostle (Acts 12:1-2) is the only one in the New Testament as if to confirm the importance of this personality to the First Christian community in Jerusalem. The Apostle Paul writes:

James, Cephas [Peter] and John, those esteemed as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumscribed (Gal 2:9).

These exceptional aspects of the life and activities of the Apostle James made him the Greater. According to the Golden Legend, he is called 'James the Greater'. First of all, he was so named because of his vocation, because he was called by Christ earlier than the other James. Secondly, because Christ seems to have felt a greater closeness to him than to the other; this is evident from the fact that Christ introduced him to his secrets – the resurrection of the dead girl and the glorious Transfiguration. Thirdly, he earned this name because of his suffering, because he was the first of the apostles to suffer. And finally, he is called great because he was the first to be called to the grace of apostleship, and can he be called greater because he was the first to be called to the glory of the eternity (de Voragine, 2015).

The Tomb of St. James the Apostle in Spain

A later tradition explains how the body of the apostle killed in Jerusalem arrived in Spain. According to the legend, Apostle James's disciples Theodore and Athanasius did not wish to leave the body of their murdered teacher in Jerusalem during the persecutions. They took the body to Jaffa where they boarded a ship and committed themselves to the Will of Providence.

After passing through the Strait of Gibraltar and along the Portuguese coast, the ship reached the Port of Iria Flavia in Galicia located at the confluence of the Sar and Ulla rivers. They lifted the body out of the ship, and laid it on a stone, which then melted like wax into a shape of a coffin. After these magical adventures, the body of the apostle was eventually buried in the area of the present-day city of Santiago de Compostela. Later these events sank into oblivion, and up to the IX century only oral tradition testified about the presence of the apostle's tomb in that territory (Starkie, 1957; Lanzi & Lanzi, 2004; Tūras, 2014).

During that period the Iberian Peninsula became Christian. Roman rule was replaced by Visigoths (westgots). However, at the beginning of the VIII century Islamic forces conquered North Africa, the eastern Mediterranean coast and most of Spain. The Islamic army established its base in Italy, significantly reduced the size and power of the Eastern Roman Empire and occupied its capital Constantinople. The Byzantine Empire, which had preserved many of the treasures of the classical Greek civilization and defended the Eastern Mediterranean coast from attacks on all sides, was no longer able to withstand. Pilgrimages to Jerusalem, that were popular at the time, became difficult and dangerous. Subsequent events also contributed to the rise of Santiago de Compostela. For example, after Caliph Umar occupied Jerusalem at the beginning of the XI century, the Fatimid caliph al-Hakim began to persecute Christians and desecrated the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The situation was further exacerbated when in 1071 Jerusalem, which had previously belonged to the relatively tolerant Egyptians, fell to the Seljuk Turks, who in the same year crushed the Byzantine Emperor Roman IV at Manzikert. In the first century of the second millennium, events reached their climax. As early as 1010, the Muslim caliph al-Hakim ordered the destruction of all Christian shrines and churches in the Holy Land. After defeating the Egyptian Muslims and conquering Jerusalem, at the end of the XI century the Seljuks Turks inflicted huge damage on the Christian pilgrimage. In 1065, they began a campaign of persecution against Christian pilgrims in the Holy Land. During this campaign, just two miles from Jerusalem, the Muslims killed the bishop of Bamberg and twelve thousand pilgrims. In 1071, the Seljuk Turks defeated the forces of Christian Byzantium and cut off the pilgrim routes (Verschuuren, 2015). Europe needed new, safer pilgrimage routes. The way to Santiago de Compostela became such a route.

After occupying most of the Spanish territories, the Muslims paid little attention to Christians living in the mountainous areas of the north of the peninsula. However, Christian groups living there initiated an armed resistance and began to push the Muslims southwards. While small Christian kingdoms were fighting Muslims in the IX century, on Mount Pedroso near the city of Padron in Galicia in the north-west of Spain a few believers saw a strange light. Angels told Pelagius, a hermit who lived on the mountain at that time, that the light was coming from the nearby tomb of St. James the Apostle. The message was transmitted to bishop Theodomir of Galicia, who ordered a search for the remains of the holy apostle. In 830, the tomb of the apostle was discovered under some blackberry bushes. The spread of this miraculous story strengthened Christian beliefs and combatitiveness.

As bishop Theodomir spread news of the discovery of the tomb of St. James the Apostle, in 834 the first pilgrim arrived – King Alfonso II of Asturias, who built a small shrine of stone and clay over the tombstone of the holy apostle. Soon a monastery was established on Mount Padron near the cell of the hermit Pelagius and twelve monks took turns guarding the site of the tomb as pilgrims from all over the Iberian Peninsula began to flock. Soon the city of Santiago de Compostela rose around the temple. In Latin, *campus stellae* means ‘star field’, because it was a star that pointed this place to the hermit Pelagius. Thus, the composite name of the city of Santiago de Compostela, located in north-western Spain, consists of the name of St. James (Span. Santiago) and the name of the place, which was called the star field (Lat. *campus stellae*) after the discovery of the tomb of this saint (Gitlitz & Davidson, 2000; Lanzi & Lanzi, 2004).

The vision that took place was interpreted as a sign from God to begin the liberation of Spain. James did not remain in the grave. Around 834, at the legendary Battle of Clavijo, where the army led by Ramiro, King of Leon, met the army of Abdurrachman near the present-day city of Logron, James appeared in a vision on a white horse and, having raised a flag with the sign of the cross, he led the Christians into battle against the Muslims. He is therefore referred to as Santiago Matamoros, or Moor slayer, and is perceived as a symbol of the fight against Muslims or Christians fight in general (Starkie, 1957; Lanzi & Lanzi, 2004). After this legendary victory, St. James often appeared in visions in various parts of the country supporting the Christian spirit until Spain’s final liberation in 1492. By the way, that is the year

that Christopher Columbus landed in America and the Spanish conquistadors began to take over ‘the New World’ with acclamations in the name of St. James coming from their mouths (Tūras, 2014).

In 899 a marble basilica was built on the tomb of the Apostle James to replace a modest earlier temple and the following year the bishop of Galicia established his residence here. When bishop Cresconius encircled the city with a more solid wall and added two towers to the Basilica, the pilgrimage had already become so intensive that he proudly assumed the title ‘Bishop of the Apostolic See of Compostela’. For this reason, the Pope in Rome, afraid of being pushed into the spiritual shadow, ordered the excommunication of the bishop in 1049. The growing flow of pilgrims was hindered neither by the disfavour of the highest church hierarchs nor by the attacks of robbers on the travelling knights. New towns, hospitals, monasteries, churches and chapels consecrated to St. James appeared on the way to Santiago de Compostela (Tūras, 2014; Frey, 1998).

In the XII century Pope Alexander III declared Santiago de Compostela a holy city, i.e. the third after Jerusalem and Rome (the way to Jerusalem led to the tomb of Christ and the way to Rome led to the tomb of St. Peter). Numerous ways led to the city, which would take pilgrims on horseback or on foot from one monastery to another through Germany, Belgium and France until they reached Santiago de Compostela, where they could show respect to the relics of the saint stored in the Cathedral of St. James (Van Liere, 2006; Kanapka, 2013).

Thus, the remains of St. James were only discovered in the IX-century in Spain. Three earliest church records of Santiago de Compostela (829, 844 and 854) confirm this fact without giving details, and a more detailed description of this event only appeared in 1077. While pilgrimage to the site was popular from the IX century, as a result of pirate rampages on the coast in the XVI century, the sacred remains were again hidden so that no one could discover them for another three centuries (Tūras, 2014). Thus, the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela was to be reborn again in the XX century.

Conclusions

James the Greater, the son of Zebedee, is one of Jesus's closest and most important disciples. He was one of the first to be called by Jesus. The Apostle James together with the Apostle Peter and the Apostle John is involved in the major events in the life of Jesus: raising of the daughter of Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue; the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor; revealing the apocalyptic prophecy about the destruction of Jerusalem and future disasters and wars, and the night vigil on the Mount of Olives before his arrest, suffering, and death.

The Apostle James preached in Judea and Samaria after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. Later (in about 39 AD) he travelled to Spain to proclaim the teaching of Jesus Christ. But soon (in about 40 AD) he returned to Judea to preach the Gospel. He was the first of the apostles to be beheaded in Jerusalem in 44 AD. The description of the death of the Apostle James is the only one in the New Testament and therefore seems to confirm the importance of this personality to the first Christian community in Jerusalem.

According to tradition, Theodore and Athanasius, disciples of the Apostle James, took the body of the executed apostle during the persecutions and committed to the Will of Providence, boarded a ship that reached the port of Iria Flavia in Galicia. Thus, after an unusual voyage, the body of the Apostle James reached the area of the present-day City of Santiago de Compostela, where it was buried.

However, at the beginning of the VIII century, Islamic forces conquered North Africa, the eastern Mediterranean coast and most of Spain. Christian groups living in the mountainous northern territories of Spain, began armed resistance against Muslims. During a persistent fight on Mount Pedroso in Galicia in the north-west of Spain, there was a vision of an emanating light, which led to the Tomb of the Holy Apostle James. The vision was interpreted as a sign from God to free Spain. During the Battle of Clavus in 834 St. James appeared in a vision on a white horse, hoisting a flag with the sign of the cross and leading the Christians into battle against the Muslims. Spain was freed from their influence, and Santiago de Compostela became a place of pilgrimage.

Thus, since the early Middle Ages, the Way of St. James has become a focal point of faith-building and pilgrimage. Today the whole of Europe is marked by branches of this way leading to Santiago de Compostela.

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