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The Family Pilgrimage to Santiago

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The presence of women on the roads to Santiago since the beginning of the pilgrimage is becoming better known. The texts show that family pilgrimages, of children with their parents, of sons with their fathers or of daughters with their mothers, are not just a contemporary phenomenon.

Key Words: pilgrimage, Saint James of Compostela, family, children, Middle Ages, modern times

Research into the history of the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela has revealed its importance for several centuries. The figure of 15,000 pilgrims transported in the 15th century by ships from English, island or continental ports must probably be multiplied by two or three, as not all captains or ship owners paid the required tax, and the groups of pilgrims who, by the dozens or hundreds, obtained passes to cross the kingdom of Aragon from the second half of the 14th century onwards bear witness to this (Storrs, 1994; Vielliard, 1936; Salicrú & Lluch, 2007). The very dimensions of the Compostellan basilica, as conceived as early as the 12th century, prove that an attendance of more than a thousand worshippers was not only expected but must have been commonplace. As late as January 1745, the young Neapolitan pilgrim Nicola Albani attests:

I will also speak of the number of people seen in front of the said church by day and by night, in such a way that there is not even a place left, so to speak, to stand, because of the great attendance from all over Spain, Portugal, France, Germany and so many other nations. And the church does not close day or night, for there is always singing and services. As for the confessors in front of the said church, they are about six hundred in number, and the capacity is about a thousand; consider the number of devout people, since the church can hold eight or ten thousand people (Rucquoi et al., 2018:1027).

Even taking into account the fact that it was a Jubilee Year and, perhaps, the exaggeration of the author of the story, the Compostellan sanctuary never ceased to

receive ‘countless’ visitors. According to *sermo XVII* of the *Codex Calixtinus* - compiled between 1140 and 1160 - the pilgrims who flocked to Compostela came from many regions, even far away, and spoke all languages (Herbers & Santos Noia, 1998:85-104). The pilgrims’ accounts that have come down to us give an insight into their motivations, the routes they followed and the emotions they felt when they finally arrived at the tomb of the Apostle James, son of Zebedee (Rucquoi et al., 2018).

Men and women travelled to Galicia to venerate the apostle who had chosen to evangelise to the ends of the earth. Most of the written accounts are by men, and even the famous Margery Kempe’s story in 1417 was actually dictated to her son, and revised later by a cleric (Staley, 1996). But chronicles, lives of saints, notarial documentation and wills show that there were many women on the way, from the ‘little old ladies’ mentioned by the Dominican Gerard de Mailly in the thirteenth century to Queen St Isabella of Portugal and St Brigid of Sweden a century later (Bériou, 2003: 355). We also know that many women accompanied their husbands, whose names alone are usually mentioned. One of the miracles attributed to Saint James was in favour of a Burgundian man called Guibert who had been paralysed since the age of fourteen. He went to Compostela with his wife and servants and, according to the text, was there healed by the apostle (Herbers & Santos Noia, 1998:176).

But did the children accompany their parents or one of them? Was the ‘holy journey’ sometimes, or often, a family affair? Were there children on the way?

There is little evidence in the documentary record of the presence of children among the pilgrims to Santiago, but those that have come down to us do not seem to be exceptional. In the 11th century, we do not know whether the future Saint William of Vercelli was accompanied by his parents when he made the pilgrimage at the age of fifteen, but we do know that Saint Pauline, after visiting Rome with her parents, went to Santiago only in the company of her husband (Vázquez de Parga *et al.*, 1992:50-51).

A few centuries later, in England, when young girl called Alice was five years old, her father took her with him from Lonsdale in Yorkshire to Compostela. But, before they could embark, she suffered a serious injury to her foot, which later became infected. Father and daughter had to abandon their plan and lived in London on public charity until they heard of the miracles performed by St Thomas in Hereford; healed by the saint, Alice returned to London and testified in 1307 to the power of the bishop who had died twenty-five years earlier (Finucane, 1992; Barron, 2004).

Other examples of family pilgrimages can be found in medieval documentation. In June 1387, the Duke of Lancaster, John of Ghent, son of the King of England, went to Santiago with his second wife, Constance of Castile, and his two daughters, Philippa, who was twenty-seven years old, and Catherine, who was fifteen (Buchon, 1825:149).

One of the requests for passes from the Aragonese Chancellery mentions the case of the Pisan Knight, Giovanni Bençon who, as a result of a vow, made the pilgrimage with his wife, son and daughter in 1445; two years later, Salvanyolus de Trolonqua, from Corsica, and his son Paul were going to Rome after visiting St. James (Salicrú i Lluch, 2007:170-177). Irish documentation refers to the memory of a father and son who died shortly after returning from Santiago in 1472 (Stalley, 1998).

In 1487, alms were given by the chaplain of the Catholic Queen,

coming to Castile on the way, to two pilgrims, husband and wife, who carried a child in a basket on their back (Benito Ruano, 1996).

Hagiography, literary works and art provide complementary testimonies by depicting children, usually accompanied by one or two parents, on the pilgrimage routes. The *Codex Calixtinus*, assembled in Santiago in the middle of the 12th century, relates, in its Book II, twenty-two miracles attributed to Santiago. The third miracle, dated 1108, tells the story of a man who went to Compostela to ask the Apostle for the grace to have a child. When he returned to his homeland, his request was granted. When the son was about fifteen years old, he accompanied his parents and other family members on a pilgrimage to Santiago. But, the boy fell ill in the Oca mountains and died. The parents cried out in grief and the mother, addressing the Apostle, threatened to commit suicide if he did not return her child. Saint James resurrected the young man and they all continued their pilgrimage to Compostela (Herbers & Santos Noia, 1998:162-163).

The story was reproduced a few centuries later, in Strasbourg, in Kunz Kistener's *Jakobsbrüder*, written at the end of the 14th century. The author tells the story of infertile parents who finally have a son thanks to prayers to the Apostle, the death of this son on the way to Compostela while they are fulfilling their vow, and the transport of the young man's body by one of his friends to Galicia where Saint James resurrects him. The story is completed by the resurrection of a sacrificed child, and eventually by the friend, the Count, his wife and the child praising the apostle and raising a monastery in his honour (Euling, 1899; Honemann, 1999).

The fifth miracle depicts a father and son who, in the company of other pilgrims, stop at an inn in Toulouse in 1090. Eager to appropriate the travellers' belongings, the host slips a silver plate into the young man's satchel; caught on the way by men-at-arms, the son is hanged, although his father has offered to take his place. On his return from his pilgrimage, on his way past the gallows, the father finds his son alive and has him removed (Herbers & Santos Noia, 1998: 164-165). The miracle was soon reported again in Santo Domingo de La Calzada, where, on his way to Compostela with his father and mother (Figure 1), the young man was unjustly accused by a maid, hanged and kept alive thanks to the Apostle's intercession, due to his parents' pleas to the judge set him free (Pfeiffer, 1845:167-169).

The next miracle, dated 1100, was granted to a Knight who, in order to escape the plague that was devastating Poitou, left for Santiago with his wife and their two children. His wife having died in Pamplona, the knight found himself without money and without the mare 'which carried his children'. Taking them by the hand, he continued on foot when a man lent him his donkey to go to Galicia. When they arrived at the Basilica of Compostela, Saint James made himself known to the pilgrim and left him the donkey so that he could return home with his children (Herbers & Santos Noia, 1998:165-166).

The presence of children of different ages on the Pilgrim's Way, usually accompanied by their parents, does not only appear in the miracles attributed to Saint James. According to the *Miracles of Saint Isidore*, written at the beginning of the thirteenth century by Lucas de Tuy, the Augustinian Canons of San Isidoro de León relied on a young pilgrim to prove the resurrection of a man by Saint Isidore. In a group of German pilgrims, they found a young boy who, 'because he was a foreigner, did not know Spanish and could not have been warned by anyone', and asked him to throw a stone. The stone precisely indicated the place where the man's empty tomb was located and was seen to be a sign of the miracle that occurred (Pérez Llamazares, 1992:70).

Miracles, which often served as an example for preachers, had to be plausible. This is also true of literary works, even when they feature fictional characters. In the story of Floire and Blanchefflor, from the end of the twelfth century, which was a huge success, the Saracens plunder Galicia and then attack a group of pilgrims, including a French Knight

*preus et cortois,
Qui au baron saint Jaques aloit,*

With his daughter; the knight is killed with many pilgrims and the young kidnapped woman will give birth to Blanchefflor (Du Ménil, 1856:5-6).

At the beginning of the fourteenth century, Jehan de Saint-Quentin, in *Le Dit des Annelés*, shows how, on returning from a pilgrimage to Santiago, a 'very noble lady' named Ysabel allowed herself to be seduced by the young knight who had accompanied her and her husband to Compostela; on seeing that she had been discovered,

she denied her husband. With the help of God and the 'Baron Saint Jaque', the deceived husband defeated his adversary, who was hanged, and condemned his wife to wander the sea with iron rings tightly bound to her fingers. Found on an island on St James's Day by

*a Count Palatine
Who had many towns on the great road
In Spain, where the pilgrims pass
Who go straight to St James',*

She settled along the same road to welcome pilgrims. The *Dit* adds that her husband, who was on his way to Compostela again, with their two children, forgave her but that she chose to continue her task of hospitality (Jubinal, 1839:1-32; Toury, 1991; Iñarrea Las Heras, 2005).

Iconographic representations of pilgrim families also testify to the fact that they were part of the landscape. The story of the young man hanged in Santo Domingo de La Calzada while travelling with his parents was widely represented during the whole Middle Ages (Caucci von Saucken & Arlotta, 2021). A Bible from the beginning of the 13th century, preserved in Amiens, shows Elimelek, his wife and two children with all the attributes of the pilgrim to Compostela¹. Several of the *Cantigas de Santa María* by King Alfonso X the Wise, illuminated a few decades later, are decorated, for example, with illustrations of a blind woman and her daughter (Figure 2) going to a sanctuary (*Cantiga* 278) and a mother and daughter on pilgrimage (*Cantiga* 378). The famous miniature that opens the Cartulary of the Tournai Confraternity of 1488 depicts pilgrims in front of the altar of St James in Compostela (Figure 3); among them is a woman, carrying a small child in her arms, with a young boy clinging to her skirt (Voisin, 1863).

The right-hand panel of one of the doors of the church of the former King's Hospital in Burgos, dating from the 16th century, shows a man with a stick, a sack and a hat decorated with a shell, followed by a child and a woman carrying a younger child in her arms.

In the Baroque period, the theme of the 'Holy Pilgrim Family' was developed in forms of art, of which the Pilgrimage Museum in Compostela has two examples.

¹ Amiens (France), Bibliothèque Municipale, Ms. 21, f° 97.

The first, made of chased and embossed silver and originating from Mexico, shows the Virgin, the Child and Saint Joseph, wearing the attributes of a pilgrim: a stick, a hat, a pilgrim's coat and scallops (Figure 4). The second, from an Indo-Portuguese workshop in Southeast Asia, offers a similar group in ivory. It is true that, since the 17th century, representations of the 'Pilgrim Child Jesus' and, in the 18th century, of the 'Pilgrim Virgin' could be admired in the churches and convents along the Way of Saint James (Peña Martín, 2011). A church dedicated to the 'Pilgrim Virgin' is located in Pontevedra, south of Santiago.

Indeed, it must have been common to see whole families on the pilgrimage routes. The Venetian Bartolomeo Fontana, who made the journey to Compostela in 1539 and reached it in seven months, recalled having seen a statue of the Virgin at Loreto

near which I saw groups of men from various countries, with women and children, with the necessary equipment for the journey on donkeys, walking day and night, resting where they were if they could not reach the day's destination (Fucelli, 1987; Rucquoi et al., 2018:443-444).

The family pilgrimage, although less frequent than that of couples (Figure 6) or individuals, has been ongoing throughout the history of devotion to the apostle buried in Galicia. In 2014, for example, the Franco-Peruvian photographer Céline Anaya Gautier made the pilgrimage to Compostela with her seven-year-old son Santiago, about which she wrote a book (Anaya, 2015). Numerous testimonies on social networks or in the specialised press attest to the presence of these families with children of very different ages, even though the statistics drawn up by the Compostela Pilgrim's Office divide the applicants for *Compostelas* into three groups: those under 30 years of age, those between 30 and 60 years of age, and those over 60. A recent example is the pilgrimage of dozens of girls accompanied by their mothers, who reached the Apostolic Shrine on October 12, 2022 (*El Correo Gallego*, 2022). How many of the quarter of pilgrims under the age of thirty are children or young people who have made a family pilgrimage?

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