

# COMPOSTELLANUM

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### SUMARIO

	<u>Págs.:</u>
A. FILGUEIRA IGLESIAS, <i>Xosé Filgueira Valverde, deveceu por Galicia</i> .....	315
X. FILGUEIRA VALVERDE, <i>Glosa a la «Guía del Peregrino» del «Liber Sancti Iacobi», Códice Calixtino</i> .....	355
M. REGUEIRO TENREIRO Y F. REGUEIRO PÉREZ, <i>Filgueira e as razóns do galeguismo autonomista. 18-xuño-1936: Conferencia-mitin de Filgueira Valverde en Radio Lugo sobre a posición da Dereita Galeguista diante do Referendum do Estatuto de Galicia</i> .....	399
M. REGUEIRO TENREIRO Y F. REGUEIRO PÉREZ, <i>La literatura mística. Discurso pronunciado en el Instituto de Lugo en 1939</i> .....	475
M. REGUEIRO TENREIRO Y F. REGUEIRO PÉREZ, <i>Paul Claudel. «Via crucis»</i> .....	515
L. BLANCO CASÁS, <i>A «Bibliografía Compostelana» de Filgueira Valverde: unha recuperación</i> .....	525
L. ALONSO GIRARDO, L. MARIÑO TAIBO Y N. ROUCO ANEIROS, <i>Filgueira Valverde en la prensa: inventario posible</i> .....	543
F. J. BUIDE DEL REAL, <i>Armenia Jacobea</i> .....	593
P. ROSZAK, <i>The 'Prelude' to the Camino. The Way of St. James and The Cultural Identity of Kuyavia and Pomerania</i> .....	645
V. CAMINO GIADÁNS, <i>Breve reseña histórica y planimetría inédita del Colegio de Ejercitantes de Santiago de Compostela</i> .....	655
A. GONZÁLEZ FERNÁNDEZ, <i>La figura y el pensamiento de Raimundo Lulio, desde la actualidad</i> .....	671
 RECENSIONES Y NOTAS BIBLIOGRÁFICAS	
C. GEGÚNDEZ LÓPEZ, <i>«El camino de Santiago», novela de culto jacobeo</i> .....	683
	313

# The 'Prelude' to the Camino. The Way of St. James and The Cultural Identity of Kuyavia and Pomerania

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Presenting the history, impact, advantages and possibilities offered by the Way of St. James is not an easy task, because it is such a broad phenomenon that escapes simple paradigms. It is not enough to indicate the routes on a map that each year hundreds of thousands of pilgrims pass, especially in the final stages of the Spanish Way. The Camino is not only well-trodden paths and roads, marked by the sign of a shell, which refers to the figure of St. James, the apostle of Christ, who is buried in the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela. The Camino is not something you need to do «quickly». The Camino consists of meeting people not only from different cultures, and languages, but also history and sensitivity. This is also a meeting with the culture of the country through which pilgrims pass on their Way to Compostela, because the Camino is not a concrete tunnel, insensitive to what is happening outside. Interaction with the surroundings is one of the important dimensions of every religious pilgrimage. Moreover, the real pilgrimage – contrary to the platonic view – is a matter of soul and body. So, the impact will concern both, the body and soul.

The pilgrimage as an experience should be understood in a biblical framework that allows a broad vision of the human being as *homo peregrinus*<sup>2</sup>. The idea of pilgrimage in the Bible is rooted in the conviction that in this life we are as pilgrims: we have a way to realize and this, our journey, has a clear supernatural end<sup>3</sup>. The Bible presents many pilgrims (starting from Abraham) as examples of the

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1 This article relies on a presentation that was delivered in a seminar during „Open Days” in Brussels, 2014. This text uses information collected through the international grant «Harmonia» from National Centre of Science in Poland, UMO- 2013/10/M/HS1/00548. My gratitude to Marcus Harper for his proof-reading of this article.

2 P. Roszak, *Homo peregrinus - kim jest prawdziwy pielgrzym*, w: P. Roszak (red.), *Camino de Santiago - nie tylko droga. Historia i współczesność Szlaku św. Jakuba*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK, Toruń 2011, p. 21-41.

3 M. Ostrowski, *Teologia pielgrzymowania*, «Polonia Sacra» 12/56(2003), p. 277-294.

search for the will of God, but the main theological reference for the biblical image of pilgrimage is the Exodus, when the Israelites emigrate from Egypt. Pilgrimage was always a sign of a new *exodus*, realized in the pilgrims' souls, towards a new promised land; from the land of evil and sin to the land of good and true freedom. In every Christian pilgrimage something similar should exist: a kind of «transition» in which a really important, intrinsic change takes place inside the pilgrim.

The classic meaning of pilgrimage in the New Testament can be found in the sentence from St. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians in which he states we are only passersby on Earth. Paul refers to the status of «pilgrim» in Roman law, who does not have full rights as a citizen. Pilgrims were only «on the road» in the Roman Empire, making a business trip or on some political missions. The very etymology of the word pilgrim (*per-agros*, through fields) alludes to walking through the fields, without any indicated roads; or any signs that could help in choosing the correct way. In this manner, the same term *peregrinus* conveys the fundamental idea of being far away from home, to be dependent on the assistance of others, to exist with a higher level of uncertainty. It emphasizes encounters with danger, as Ortega y Gasset pointed out in one of his texts. While the pilgrim is away from his own home, in a foreign world, he builds bonds with those who go along with him for the same purpose to the sacred place (sanctuary). The Church Fathers of the Patristics era operated under such an understating of 'being in pilgrimage', and the complete expression can be found in St. Augustine's idea of *peregrinari ad Dominum*. Augustine referred to as pilgrims all citizens of the earthly city who aspire to reach the heavenly homeland, a synonym of excellence, beatitude. As Christians, Augustine reminds us, we are always on the way towards heaven. In other words, it means that the Christian pilgrim is a temporary *viator* in this world, and the term itself underlines the situation of doing something at this moment, here and now. As a consequence, the main challenge consists of understanding what is being done during the expedition, and that includes experiencing danger and different kinds of surprises. This conviction describes not only a physical journey towards one specific point on Earth. The case is, therefore, to «go and see» what corresponds to scholastic conviction of the necessity of the epistemological rule of «thinking with the feet». For the medieval masters, there was no other way to true knowledge than the consciousness of being a pilgrim. When we pass from the senses to spiritual truths, we make a kind of pilgrimage and that is why this phenomenon of

*peregrinatio* can serve as a description of a real human and unique anthropological experience<sup>4</sup>.

Theological reflection reveals more contents for reflection and offers a specific spiritual meaning. The term *peregrinatio* was used for the first time in the writing of Tertulian for describing a scene in the Gospel: the Mother of Jesus wants to reach her Son, but it is impossible because so many people are around him. How we can link this episode from the New Testament with the Christian experience of the Camino? The answer that comes to us from the treasury of Church tradition is the following: Crossing the cordon of people, matters and temptation in order to reach Christ is the effort which is the principal motive of each pilgrimage<sup>5</sup>. We can imagine how many pilgrims from all over Europe traveled to Compostela. They came not only from different cultures, but also from different languages; and different modes of thinking and sensitivity. However, in this diversity, they found an unbreakable thread of unity. This thread was the Christian truth about humanity and the world that comes from the Gospel. It was a difficult and demanding truth, but the only one able to offer real happiness. On this foundation, it was possible to build what is known as «christianitas».

Let us continue with a short history of the Way, which dates back to the beginning of the ninth century, when the monk Pelagius discovered the tomb of St. James in the same place where Santiago de Compostela is today<sup>6</sup>. This amazing news spread around the whole of Europe, reaching the court of Charles the Great. The Camino de Santiago quickly became one of the most important pilgrimage routes of medieval Europe, next to the Holy Land and Rome. In the Middle Ages almost half a million people a year traveled this Way. In our times, thanks to the Pilgrim's Office in Santiago, we know that every year more than 200 thousand people pass the last 100 kilometers on foot or 200 kilometers by bicycle in order to receive the document called the *Compostela*. It is possible to talk for many hours about the Camino (at my university, I have 30 hours for it), but I wish to emphasize only one more aspect of this religious route. The Way of St. James was an important factor in the establishment of an international law – specif-

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4 See J. Barrio Barrio, *Pasado, presente y futuro de la peregrinación a Santiago de Compostela*, «Revista Compostela» 36-37(2005), p. 10.

5 See J. M. Anguita, *Peregrinatio: la conformación de un concepto, la transformación de una realidad (s. XI)*, in: *Identidad europea e intercambios culturales en el Camino de Santiago (siglos XI-XV)*, p. 154-160.

6 See H. Manikowska, *Jerozolima-Rzym-Compostela. Wielkie pielgrzymowanie u schyłku średniowiecza*, seria Monografie-Fundacja na Rzecz Nauki Polskiej, UW, Wrocław 2008.

ically, the legal protection of pilgrims (*ius peregrinandi*) was the genesis of transnational efforts to guarantee the safety of movement<sup>7</sup>. It was something like a medieval Schengen Zone, because, let us not forget, the «European Union» also existed in the Middle Ages!

After the Reformation of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, the Camino underwent a crisis and decline<sup>8</sup> and had to wait to be rediscovered until when John Paul II made his two apostolic journeys to Santiago in 1982 and 1989<sup>9</sup>. This was a starting point: with the visits of the Pope began an era of new initiatives, the flourishing of associations and the organization of events which presented the profound history of the Camino de Santiago. It served to unite people who wanted to take care of the pilgrims, to build new infrastructure useful for the walkers, and to rebuild the spirit of Christian hospitality. And important route was (re)discovered in the heart of Europe a Way of concordance and values<sup>10</sup>.

## 1. WHY IS THE CAMINO SO IMPORTANT FOR EUROPE?

Goethe said that *Europe was born on the pilgrim road to Santiago*: born in the dust of the road, where the people met each other, where they remained open to others' ways of thinking. Therefore, the Camino is still today a school of European values. It teaches us to open up to other people, who can offer us a new perspective. The difference is not

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7 See T. Białobrzeski, *Ochrona prawna pielgrzymów*, in: P. Roszak, W. Rozykowski, *Camino Polaco: Teologia-Sztuka-Historia-Teraźniejszość*, t. 2, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK, Toruń 2015, p. 77-91.

8 The proof of this crisis, linked to the emergence of a movement *devotio moderna*, a purely external treatment of certain signs of piety, but also the Protestant challenge of the cult of saints, is symptomatic in this sentence of Erasme from Rotterdam in his *Enchiridion militis Christiani* from 1501: „Is it so great a thing if thou go to Hierusalem in thy body, when within thine own self is both Sodome, Egypt, and Babylon? ... Thou believest perchance all thy sins and offences to be washed away at once with a little paper or parchment sealed with wax, with a little money or images of wax offered, with a little pilgrimage going?”. It was not the first critique of this kind of practice – work of Guilber of Nogent in *De sanctis et eorum pigneribus* should also be mentioned.

9 E. Mendyk, „*Europo – tchnij życie w swoje korzenie*”. „*Akt Europejski*” a *renesans Drogi św. Jakuba – rozważania w drodze*, in: A. Jackowski, F. Mróz, „*Akt Europejski*” *bl. Jana Pawła II a renesans Drogi św. Jakuba*, Wyd. Czuwajmy, Kraków 2012, p. 107-119. The author proposes as a factor in determination of the identity of Europe the characteristic movement towards the end. A European is someone who is committed to the various kind of objectives which permit him to learn and know something new. Similarly, contemporary pilgrims want to experience something during their road, although they do not always know what and how. But this is both an opportunity and a responsibility.

10 See K. Orzechowska-Kowalska, *Europejski Szlak Pielgrzymkowy Rady Europy nośnikiem wybranych wartości kulturowych*, in: M. Leniartek (red.), *Komercjalizm turystyki kulturowej*, Wyższa Szkoła Zarządzania, Wrocław 2008, p. 289-298.

a reason for violence<sup>11</sup>. That is why the Camino is like an earthquake (change everything in the life of pilgrim) which causes that we do not deal with a classic tourist but with a pilgrim. And it often happens on the Camino that someone starts as a tourist, but ends as a pilgrim<sup>12</sup>.

So, the Camino is not a classic religious route, it is not something that should be «conquered» or «managed», but it consists of discovering the right way (so important particularly in the time of crisis...). The question of the European meaning of the Camino goes beyond the shallow notion that we deal only with traveling through different countries. In times of cultural homelessness, the Camino develops and strengthens basic issues of European identity, such as solidarity, freedom and the conviction of belonging to the community. The latter is a particularly interesting philosophical term which includes the question of identity. This challenge, which is carried out by returning to the sources, finds its roots in a tradition from which it grows and is able to bear so many fruits. The awareness of the roots, therefore, plays a key role in this process. Showing the heritage of the past, the Camino wants to build a proper hermeneutical space, the field of meanings, within which it is possible to read one's own identity. It is enough to have a short conversation with the pilgrims or analyze articles or books dedicated to the pilgrimage to Compostela in order to figure that out.

Besides, among the pilgrims' values, more actual now than before, I would mention two which are particularly important on the Camino de Santiago.

a) *Awareness of gratitude*: for Thomas Aquinas this virtue is a special part of justice, a specific kind of «debt» that we owe God<sup>13</sup>. The pilgrim experiences this when he or she arrives in a «foreign land» and meets with the kindness of the people who live there. It is a glass of water or breakfast offered to the pilgrim or the information exchanged, a short, but friendly conversation, in general the «loss of time». The pilgrim cultivates in himself this attitude of gratitude, which opens him up cognitively: the world seen through the eyes of a man who does not demand (like a tourist, who pays for everything during his stay and therefore he demands), but he is able to perceive the logic of the «gift» as a main existential rule. The philosophical reflections of J.-L. Marion on the «ontology of gift» shed new light on the experience of the

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11 It is similar to the Christian view of the Holy Trinity, where the difference between Persons is not a reason for violence, but expresses a perfect harmony. See R. J. Woźniak, *Różnica i tajemnica. Objawienie jako teologiczne źródło ludzkiej sobości*, Wdrodze, Poznań 2012.

12 It is a kind of internal pilgrimage that, in the Middle Ages, was called *axis mundi*.

13 See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 106.

Camino along these lines. In this way, the Camino builds awareness that we simply received many things in this life, without earning them through work or merit. They were given to us as a 'task'. We are entering in the form or figures that just existed before our life, in the established order as one of the following generation. So, what is our task? Perhaps one of the most urgent now is the development of a special «culture of gratitude», through which we can better recognize the real sense of our life. The ancient philosophers always reiterated that the optimal environment for philosophical investigation, for knowing the truth, is always through the friendship<sup>14</sup>. The pilgrim is not just a walker, who do not want to entry in relation with other people when meet them during his stroll<sup>15</sup>. On the contrary, the relationship with other pilgrims is what we remember from our pilgrimage to Compostela.

b) Another current value of Camino is *sense of responsibility for others* that cures the disease of culture and transmits European values to the younger generation. It is awareness that you have to give a personal response to what was received, the legacy of faith and cultural identity. Therefore, in Santiago, John Paul II so often returned to the theme of «memory» as a source of attitudes of modern Europeans. Each of these values requires a separate and complex reflection, which could be presented in a historical perspective or theological. During the Middle Ages such an attitude, drawing your pattern from the life of Christ and the apostles, was referred to as «inner pilgrimage». Many modern publications that wish to prepare a pilgrim for this experience; frequently propose a spiritual reading which refers to the pilgrim's aretology (the teachings of virtue).

Frequently, the Camino is called *the longest street in Europe*, which makes it a favorite place for meeting, where the hope of restoring harmony and communication among Europeans is still alive. In times of dominant individualism and particularism, the Camino carries the message of the necessity of unity, awareness of exchange which benefits our societies<sup>16</sup>.

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14 P. Roszak, O „kulturze przyjaźni” z perspektywy Tomasza z Akwinu i M. Ricciogo, in: P. Roszak, P. Orłowski, O przyjaźni. II Dysputy Nawarryjskie, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK, Toruń 2015, p. 55-72.

15 Z. Bauman, *From Pilgrim to Tourist – or a Short Story of Identity*, w: S. Hall, P. du Gay (red.), *Questions on Cultural Identity*, Sage, London 1996, p. 18-36; See also D. Tidball, *The pilgrim and the tourist: Zygmunt Bauman and postmodern identity* w: C. Bartholomew, F. Hughe (red.), *Explorations in a Christian theology of pilgrimage*, Ashgate Publishing Company, Burlington 2004, p.184-200.

16 This brings attention to the fact that for Christianity the most important word is *traditio*, which literally means to transmit, to give oneself. See M. Gelabert, *Predicar el Evangelio en una sociedad laica*, «Ciencia Tomista» 142(2015), p. 157-172.

## 2. THE CAMINO POLACO IN THE KUYAVIA AND POMERANIA REGION

It is not a coincidence that we talk about the Camino in the Kuyavia and Pomerania Region as a «prelude» or threshold to the Way of St. James. In my opinion, it is a really good word for describing what the Way of St. James is in our region. It is some kind of prelude, like in music, in symphony: it manifests that in a moment the main part of musical piece will start. Although Santiago is only 3500 km from Kuyavia-Pomerania, many people understand that these first steps are often the most important on the whole Camino.

In 2007, the first section, running from Iława to Toruń, was marked by the Municipal Branch of PTTK in Toruń, under the leadership of its president, Henryk Miłoszewski. The campaign was supported by the authorities of Toruń, as well as those from Brodnica, Kurzętnik and later also Kruszwica. Less than a year later, they marked another southern section of the Camino Polaco: from Toruń to Trzemeszno. In 2012, PTTK established a special «Kujavian-Pomeranian Badge of St. James», awarded to those who walk at least 100 km of the Kuyavia-Pomerania portion of the Camino Polaco, or will who travel at least 150 km of the Kuyavia-Pomerania portion of the Camino Polaco by bicycle. While wandering along the Camino Polaco in the Kujavia and Pomerania Region and in the diocese of Toruń, pilgrims have the opportunity to visit the towns identified below<sup>17</sup>. We indicate them already in the proposal stages, which may help in organization of the route

- Stage 1 Iława - Nowe Miasto Lubawskie
- Stage 2 Nowe Miasto Lubawskie - Bachotek
- Stage 3 Bachotek - Mszano
- Stage 4 Mszano - Szafarnia
- Stage 5 Szafarnia - Ciechocin (Elgiszewo)
- Stage 6 Ciechocin - Toruń
- Stage 7 Toruń - Gniewkowo
- Stage 8 Gniewkowo - Kruszwica
- Stage 9 Kruszwica - Gębice
- Stage 10 Gębice - Trzemeszno

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17 See T. Bielicki, P. Roszak, *U progu Camino. Przewodnik po kujawsko-pomorskim odcinku Szlaku św. Jakuba*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK, Toruń 2012. In 2015, an English translation of the guide was published, titled: *On the Threshold of the Camino. A Tourist Guide to the Way of St. James in Kuyavian-Pomeranian Province*.

We are now working on a special certificate that will be given to all pilgrims who complete the Camino Polaco. It will be not a «Compostela» like in Santiago; instead we call it «Iacobeum». The parish of St. James in Toruń will be in charge of preparing the document and organizing a special place for welcoming pilgrims. To achieve these objectives, the Jacobean Association in Toruń was established in April 2015.

### 3. ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL IMPACT

I think the best way to show what the Camino is today, is to look closer at Płonne and Szafarnia, two villages located on the Camino Polaco. They are two examples of how the Camino is changing a small local society. It all began with the appearance of the way-marker signs of the Santiago shell which provoke questions about its meaning among people. As a result, there was a greater conviction among the local inhabitants that they belong to a larger European culture. Moreover, the Way of St. James became the spine of their own, local identity. The Camino merged two parts of the region, separated by the river Vistula. So, the principal opportunity is the same presence of the pilgrims, who come to the parishes to receive stamps, yet also share their own culture and customs with the local inhabitants.

All of this has one more important impact: care for heritage. This was the motive for establishing the Jacobean Association there and for taking care of the church and historic cemetery in the village. In addition to these kinds of «actions», there was also the preparation of accommodation and exploration of local products—in the case of Płonne, it was a «biscuit in the shape of a shell». Furthermore, the Camino Polaco resulted in the creation of new services, because pilgrims eat, sleep and sometimes need transport.

Another important impact was social, manifested in the need to have people who can guide pilgrims and show them a church or talk about its history. In this manner the idea of the „guards of Camino» was born, that is, pensioners who immediately started to feel needed and involved in the theme.

### 4. GOOD PRACTICES

There is one point worth underlining here: the Camino operates differently in Poland than in Spain—during last 10 years, while I was working in Villamayor de Monjardin (Navarra), I saw similar chang-

es<sup>18</sup>. The hardest part was to convince the residents to accept hundreds of people passing through the village roads every day...

How did it start? Of course, the first point was marking the route. The next step was establishing shelters – *albergues*. It provoked an avalanche of needs. Pilgrims spending the night in the village could come to the evening Mass and ask for the blessing for pilgrims ...it opened many opportunities to interact. In the case of Poland, one of the most attractive things was the idea of «Weekend on the Camino», organized by many associations or groups of scouts, from parishes, etc. Another important moment was the creation of the Camino Laboratory at the Faculty of Theology, Nicolaus Copernicus University, for developing interdisciplinary research about the history of the Way of St. James in Poland. Next was the rise of the Jacobean Council, advising the President of the region about integrating tourist associations and representatives of city halls and in creating a coherent strategy of promotion. In sum, all people, from children to the eldest, are invited to collaborate, because the Camino does not exclude, but invites...

Let me finish with one interesting proposal. I talked about the past (history) and about the present (our actions). Now, at the end, allow me say a few words about the future. The challenge might be a project that we named at my university the *New Camino de Santiago, Camino of art, Camino of value*<sup>19</sup>. It would not consist in literally «passing» the Camino, but in doing it in a symbolic way. We could start this new Camino in Poland, stopping at several places in Europe (Germany, France, Italy...) and offering in each of them a different subject for reflection and art inspiration – e.g., freedom, solidarity, truth, justice. We would like to invite artists, philosophers, and theologians, for example, to talk about these topics, to create, to write ... I hope it could be an opportunity for all the regions. This is our chance. The Kuyavia and Pomerania Region is ready to become a prelude to this initiative as well.

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18 See C. San Martin, *Camino de Santiago y Villamayor de Monjardin*, in: P. Roszak, W. Rozynekowski (red.), *Camino Polaco. Teologia-Sztuka-Historia-Terazniejszość*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK, Toruń 2015, p. 251-270.

19 The project was submitted for implementation under the program HERA (Humanities in European Research Area) together with universities in Pamplona, Porto, Warwick, Hamburg and Toruń.