

# Introduction

## Background

On 20 April 1994 my walking companion and I wearily climbed the staircase of the then Pilgrim Office on Rúa do Villar in Santiago de Compostela to present our stamped *credencial* documentation and request *Compostela* certificates. It was customary at that time for all such supplicants to be personally interviewed by the Canon of the cathedral, Don Jaime García Rodríguez, and having stated to him what our pilgrimage motives were, he then turned to our itinerary and asked from where and when we started our journey. On learning that we had departed from St Jean-Pied-de-Port on the French side of the Pyrenees on 12 April, he quickly responded that we could not possibly have walked the 800 kilometres in the intervening period. His irritation was compounded when we explained, somewhat unsettled, that we walked over 100 kilometres across six key sections and drove our car for the remainder. Our hopes for a *Compostela* were dashed at the moment he handed us back our *credenciales*. Unknown to us, the cathedral administration had revised its distance rule in preparation for the previous 1993 Holy Year and had introduced a new stipulation for granting the *Compostela* that comprised walking the last 100 kilometres (effectively within Galicia) to the tomb of the Apostle. But the Canon then asked where we are from, to which we responded: 'Northern Ireland'; he then asked what religion we are and, on hearing our different responses, Jaime García Rodríguez clapped his hands and joyfully exclaimed 'Reconciliation!'. The curtain divide behind us suddenly opened and one of his staff walked out with two certificates on a burgundy coloured cushion, which were then signed by a smiling Don Jaime with a flourish of his black ink pen. Our pilgrimage was officially recognised, the Canon had exercised his discretion in our favour, and I had received my first *Com-*

*postela*. Thus began a personal twenty-five years' interest in the Camino de Santiago which has informed the content of this book and made its authorship an enjoyable task that draws on several very long walks to the shrine of Saint James in north-west Spain.

## Pilgrimage and the Purpose of This Book

Pilgrimage has been defined as a journey undertaken by a person in quest of a place or circumstance that he or she believes to embody a valued ideal (Morinis 1992: 4). Both the journey and the destination are important to the pilgrim and are denoted by being different from whence people have come. Religious sites fulfil that criterion where devotion at a shrine constitutes a significant moment of arrival and engagement with the ideal of sacredness. But the quest for adventure and personal enrichment, along with wider cultural ideals related, for example, to liberty, sacrifice, atonement and understanding, can also sponsor journeys that may be either secular or spiritual depending on how each individual perceives the pilgrimage undertaking. The British Pilgrim Trust, for example, established in 2014, sees its main goal as advancing pilgrimage as a form of cultural heritage that promotes holistic wellbeing. Pilgrimage is regarded as a spiritual activity open to all without religious prescription (see <http://britishpilgrimage.org/the-bpt/>). In this vein Reader (2007: 226) suggests 'that it is wrong to see the growth in pilgrim numbers as a universal manifestation of a revival of religious sentiments' but rather as a turn towards more 'personalised spirituality'. As argued by Stanford (2021: 14), with 'its essential intertwining of arduous journey and openness to personal transformation', pilgrimage 'fulfils an intrinsic need in the human condition'.

Within the academic literature the book by Victor and Edith Turner (1978), *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, is hailed as having a formative influence in this research arena. Their argument is that pilgrimage involves travel to a sacred site located at some distance from the pilgrim's place of residence (ibid.: 4) and requires giving up temporarily the routines of ordinary life in a 'betwixt and between' liminal phase (ibid.: 2) that gives emphasis to seeking salvation and release from the tribulations of the world. Subsequently, the enriched pilgrim returns home to 'a former mundane existence', but having made 'a spiritual step forward' (ibid.: 15). They state that 'One motive for going on pilgrimage is the feeling that a saint's shrine has a sort of "hot line" to the Almighty. One purifies oneself by penance and travel, then has one's prayer amplified by asking a saint at his own chief shrine to forward it directly to God' (ibid.: 16).

These dimensions to the Turnerian notion of pilgrimage have endured well albeit that there is now an established critique which contests this

model. Firstly, Eade and Sallnow (1991: 5) point out that a recurrent theme in pilgrimage is the maintenance or reinforcement of social boundaries and distinctions, rather than their attenuation or dissolution. This observation challenges a determinism that prejudices the complex character of the pilgrimage experience which the Turners allege (op cit.: 13) changes pilgrims into ‘a throng of similars’ or ‘a likeness of lot and intention’ out of which emerges a commonness of feeling labelled as *communitas*. Havard (2018: 89) argues that there is actually conflict within *communitas* due to differences in, for example, pilgrim personality, cultural background, perceptions of resource scarcity and transformational stress. A humorous review of pilgrim behaviour on the Camino de Santiago (Downing 2021: 60) counsels that a ‘pilgrimage condenses many of the character types we meet through life and squeezes them into a few weeks. There are the garrulous, the overbearing, the down-right boring. They lead to pre-dawn departures and impulsive minor changes to the day’s planning, as we hang back or walk further than intended to avoid them’. Secondly, Coleman and Eade (2004: 2–3) suggest that an over-emphasis is bestowed on the place-centredness of sacred travel rather than a deeper appreciation of movement to, at and from the destination sites. And thirdly, as argued by Reader (2007: 219), Victor and Edith Turner pay scant attention to the role played by religious authorities in ‘creating sacred centres’ and securing ‘new religious clienteles’. In that regard pilgrimage routes and destinations can be perceived as being continuously re-made by powerful institutional agency, thus reshaping over time pluralist pilgrim experiences and behaviours. Even the encounter with liminality, core to the Turners’ conceptualisation, has been curtailed, it could be argued, by the Internet, data roaming and social media connectivity to the wider present and keeping people more tied to where they have come from, notwithstanding the advocacy of digital detoxing as a beneficial outcome of pilgrimage activity. Pilgrimage, in short, is characterised by contested meanings, diverse motivations, varied behaviours and a multiplicity of curators. This book explores these themes with reference to the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage that brings people from across the world to the shrine of the Apostle, Saint James, in north-west Spain, which, as suggested by Alonso González (2018: 970), can be viewed ‘as a form of social wealth reproduced and sustained by the “community of the Camino”, an extended network of social actors comprised of pilgrims, civic and religious associations, tourism entrepreneurs, and public institutions and trusts’.

The Camino de Santiago commands celebrity status as a journey to be undertaken which is evidenced by a substantial body of writing related to descriptive itinerary guides and personal accounts of transformative experience. Film, television and radio media add considerably to that con-

sciousness of appreciation. This book offers a more critical examination of this contemporary phenomenon through the conceptual lens of pilgrimage as heritage and tourism. However, rather than repeat much of what has been already been said on these topics in the academic and popular literature, the purpose of this book is to explore how the curatorship of the Way of Saint James is being played out in Spain. This institutional arena incorporates the preparation of capital investment guidelines, the exercise of land use planning regulations, environmental stewardship, information dissemination and museology. These activities are key to the long-term sustainability of a heritage resource base increasingly under pressure from tourism growth and they operate within a governance setting which is multi-dimensional, comprising Church, state, civil society, business and university interests. It is, however, an institutional context denoted at times by conflicting ambition and fragmentation that reflects a deeper struggle in reconciling the sacred and secular attributes of pilgrimage. Accordingly, the narrative transcends the much rehearsed pilgrim experience, important though this is, and argues for a more thoughtful engagement that can curate the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage as heritage and tourism.

## **Book Structure and Narrative**

The book is in three parts, the first of which seeks to set the wider context within two chapters containing perspectives on pilgrimage as heritage and tourism, albeit from a predominantly Christian tradition and with particular reference to Ireland and England. In Chapter 1 the key attributes of pilgrimage that comprise the journey and the destination are examined in diverse geographical settings. The pilgrim quest engages not only with holy places but also with other settings that offer scope to deal with personal experiences related to death, atrocity and suffering. Accordingly, mention is made of what is commonly termed ‘dark tourism’. The important point here is that these micro-landscapes of suffering can be equally sacred to visitors and give rise to emotional impacts as powerful as those pertaining at religious centres. The discussion then examines pilgrimage routes as heritage and tourism by giving attention to official designation and ritual at varied spatial scales, from the supra-national to the local. Special centres of pilgrimage are also shaped by institutional and devotee behaviours and these interactions are illustrated with reference to the Sanctuary of Saint Patrick at Lough Derg in north-west rural Ireland.

Chapter 2 explores the curatorship of pilgrimage places through five core themes of management practice. Firstly, the preparation of invest-

ment guidelines is considered on the basis that their availability is key to the ongoing renewal of pilgrimage routes and destinations. They identify both challenges and opportunities and can connect all stakeholders to a funded plan of intervention over a period of years. Their application is illustrated by the case of Lourdes, a town in south-west France with a world-famous Marian shrine. An adjunct to the role played by investment guidelines in place-making is the contribution made by regulatory planning to the control of land use change in settlements and countryside. Pilgrimage itineraries and destinations derive much of their physical character from their immediate setting and the wider zones of visual influence that enclose them. Thus, secondly, the chapter considers the nature of statutory townscape conservation practice with reference to Walsingham, acclaimed as England's Nazareth. Concern about environmental breakdown is now in the mainstream and the sacred landscapes of pilgrimage are not immune to the impulses of degradation and destruction. Accordingly, environmental stewardship comprises the third curatorship theme introduced in this chapter, which is exemplified by progress made to correct footpath erosion on Croagh Patrick, labelled Ireland's holy mountain. Information in multiple formats seeks to offer insight and guidance to visitors at places of pilgrimage and thus its availability and dissemination is important in managing sacred routes and destinations as heritage and tourism. This fourth theme is unpacked using ephemera pertaining to Walsingham that have functional, educational and emotional intention. Finally, the chapter addresses the museology of pilgrimage and the stories that are offered for purposes of education, entertainment and self-discovery, but which in turn require a curated construction of a presented past. The case of Knock shrine in the west of Ireland is considered against these attributes. In all these matters the underlying question being pursued is how the activities of an institutional web of multiple interests are shaping the pilgrimage drama in ways that are frequently invisible to the transient spectator.

Part Two of the book focuses specifically on the Camino de Santiago with Chapter 3 providing commentary on its historical context linked to the cult of Saint James, his multiple representations as apostle, knight and pilgrim, and the appropriation of Saint James and the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela by the Franco regime to bolster a Spanish State ideology of National Catholicism. The contemporary codification of a widening lattice of pilgrimage itinerary options is mapped and set against longitudinal Camino pilgrim data. Attention is drawn to the promotion of the Camino de Santiago as official heritage within Europe and its accompanying impact as tourism development instrument. The discussion concludes by examining the varied characteristics of the pilgrim consumers of this heritage complex along with their personal geographies.

Chapter 4 unpacks the stakeholder governance arrangements that have a bearing on responses to the rather prosaic question: ‘Who is looking out for the Camino de Santiago?’ The analysis examines the contributions made by Church, government, civil society, business and university stakeholders and gives attention to their engagement, at times contested, within spaces of collaboration. The chapter begins by drawing attention to the emergence in recent years of a more nuanced representation of pilgrimage to the tomb of the Apostle by the Church that is arguably located in the context of the growing celebrity status of the Camino de Santiago as a journey to be undertaken for frequently perceived non-religious reasons. Church-supported organisations that assist with curating the Jacobean pilgrimage and its built heritage are identified. The relationship between multi-level governance across the state and the Camino de Santiago is then unpacked with the cross-cutting character of the latter illustrated by an analysis of the administrative structure and affiliated entities of the Xunta de Galicia in the Autonomous Community that hosts the shrine of Saint James in Santiago de Compostela. The significance of partnership-working at national, regional and local scales is highlighted. The chapter concludes with a commentary on the engagement by international civil society, business and the academy in the pastoral oversight, economic commodification and promotion of the pilgrimage as heritage and tourism.

In Part Three the discussion turns explicitly to curating the Camino de Santiago. It critically examines the role of heritage management within this arena of pilgrimage places and tourism economies. Engagement, of course, brings responsibility for sensitive and effective intervention and thus a sequence of five chapters examines a variety of curatorship practices in Spain. Chapter 5 deals with regulatory planning and begins by tracing the emergence of policy measures at national level to protect the Camino de Santiago during the Franco years. The adoption of a new Constitution in 1978 heralded the shift of these responsibilities downwards to the regional administrations and thus the discussion turns to the evolution of regulatory protocols comprising Autonomous Community legislation and territorial plans. The commonplace formula of a protected corridor with adjacent buffer zones is examined. Local planning controls are frequently exercised by the municipalities and, accordingly, the contribution of special plans for the Camino de Santiago at this level of government is identified. The background narrative in this chapter is one of constant and varying heritage recalibration as a result of the interaction between official curators and a web of economic and social interests.

Chapter 6 examines programme and project investment guidelines and commences with an analysis of special development strategies prepared specifically for the Camino de Santiago. Of particular note is the manner in which these documents have assumed deeper significance as plans for

regional restructuring, thus highlighting the political capital of cultural heritage. Generic tourism plans and preparations for the 2021 Holy Year evidence comparable considerations and expose a tension between the religious and secular attributes of the pilgrimage. Nonetheless, while the discussion points to contrasting values and communications styles, it is concluded that the need for Church and state to support the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage as both heritage and tourism remains constant. The chapter then turns to an examination of measures for project funding, and a range of initiatives at the European Union, national and regional level that have common purpose with the Camino de Santiago are identified. The important point here is that the pilgrimage is not just about pilgrims and their mobility, but also the communities through which pilgrims travel.

Chapter 7 adopts a sharper focus on localism by considering how environmental stewardship plays out against the implementation of macro-scale projects that have transformational implications for the Camino de Santiago heritage. Three case studies comprising the reconstruction of Portomarín in the 1960s, the enlargement of the Yesa reservoir beginning in the 1980s and the re-opening of the Touro-O Pino mine on which an adverse environmental impact decision was reached by the Xunta de Galicia in 2020, are detailed. Again, an appreciation of political context is important in this assessment, not least in understanding the contribution of organised opposition. This was clearly suppressed at Portomarín and during the initial construction of the Yesa reservoir. The more recent reservoir enlargement project and the Touro-O Pino mine proposal have, however, witnessed enduring community protest. Nonetheless, while the heritage value of the Camino de Santiago has been constant throughout as a material consideration, the analysis demonstrates that the curatorial approach in each instance has favoured the adoption of mitigation measures. It is concluded that any notion of a permanent and unaltered physical heritage is illusory.

Chapter 8 explores information and its dissemination through varied media formats concerned with communicating awareness and engagement. The discussion commences by revisiting the Franco years and the role that the cinema documentary and newsreel played in harnessing the Camino de Santiago as state propaganda at that time. This visual material was deployed to underpin state legitimacy, to celebrate large group pilgrimages as political spectacle, to broadcast significant economic transformation and to project the allure of the *Camino Francés*, in particular, as a revenue-earning tourism product. This latter element is represented today on the Internet by a vast array of official promotional videos and images and through the availability of printed material in tourist information offices. Both central government and the regions are active on these

fronts, and their efforts suggest the creation of a new form of propaganda constructed around a Camino heritage that shifts between territorial interdependence and competition. Magazines and newsletters sponsored by Church, government, business and civil society organisations add a further dimension of fraternity and scholarship outreach. But for all these curators a colourful Camino de Santiago imagery, that combines tradition and modernity, remains a constant rallying point in their efforts to engage with devout pilgrims and secular tourists.

Chapter 9 turns to museums and storytelling in a range of venues along the Caminos de Santiago that host sacred collections, history and art, entertaining interpretation, prehistory, rural tradition and narratives of memory and healing. However, rather than merely describe the characteristics of each site, critical attention is given to exploring the drama of competing cultural meanings that are tendered by their content. While these museums and heritage centres rely on the enthusiasm of local communities and state support to both celebrate and commemorate these pasts in the present, the emotional engagement by visitors can be highly differentiated and reflect life experiences, beliefs, preferences, motivations and expectations. This complexity, in short, is also an explication of pilgrim personality and thus each of the centres examined in this chapter can provide opportunities for individualised pilgrimage encounters.

The book concludes with a synthesis of contemporary issues affecting the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage within the context of a wider scholarship on heritage and tourism, and links this with potential adjustments to curatorship praxis with regard to unrelenting pressure from the growth of pilgrim numbers, followed by the tragic circumstances and outcomes linked to the COVID-19 pandemic during and beyond 2020.