

The Camino de Santiago

IB Diploma

Extended Essay

Subject: World Religions

“How have the historical traditions of the Camino de Santiago shaped the modern spiritual practices of the pilgrimage?”

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Introduction

The Camino de Santiago is an ancient pilgrimage that is still frequently travelled today, however not with the same religious devotion as centuries before. Today, the Camino is used in the hopes of achieving better health, meeting an array of interesting people, experiencing Spanish culture, etc. Yet, all who travel the Camino admit that they feel spiritually enriched by the experience. The Camino is an intriguing mix of cultures as people from all over the globe come to be pilgrims, but it also seems timeless as modern pilgrims sit in the very cathedrals, and walk along the same dirt path as Roman soldiers, Charlemagne, and thousands of pilgrims before them. Rich with history, modern pilgrims debate what constitutes a “true pilgrim,” as modern day pilgrims have so many more materials at their disposal than the original pilgrims, such as transportation, and technology. This essays seeks to investigate the historical and modern traditions of the Camino de Santiago, in order to see how they have shaped the spiritual practices of the ancient pilgrimage. This essay will study the religious background of the pilgrimage, as well as modern approaches and reasoning for travelling the Camino. This includes the legends and origins of St. James, the routes involvement in Medieval history, and the typical ensemble of ancient pilgrims in comparison to the practices and ensemble of modern pilgrims. This research question is worthy of investigation because the Camino de Santiago is a glimpse into how the practice of pilgrimage has stayed alive in modern culture and spirituality as technology and other advances make the practice of religion more and more obsolete. We see that despite generations of sceptics, the human spirit still yearns for some sort of sustenance as it searches for meaning.

Body

I. History of the Camino

The Camino de Santiago began about 1200 years ago at the beginning of the 9th century, because it was believed that the remains of Saint James, the evangelical apostle of the Iberian Peninsula, were buried at Santiago de Compostela, Spain.¹ The pilgrimage is rich with history, to the point one “[swells] simultaneously between two worlds, the modern and the medieval.”² The discovery of the tomb has turned the city into the "most famous pilgrim routes in the Christian world."³

In the Bible, Apostle James the Greater is the brother of John the Evangelist. The title "the Greater" was given to St. James to help differentiate him from the shorter Apostle James "the Less."⁴ He was also one of the first disciples of Jesus. According to the Bible, as James and John worked with their father Zebedee in a fishing boat, Jesus called upon them.

“He walked along a little farther and saw James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They too were in a boat mending their nets. Then he called them. So they left their father Zebedee in the boat along with the hired men and followed him” (Mark 1:19-20).

St. James witnessed the resurrection of the daughter of Jairus, and Gethsemani’s agony. He was also the first apostle to be martyred. According to legend, St. James came to Spain and

¹ Mammano, Gina Marie. *Camino divina-walking the divine way: a book of moving meditations with likely and unlikely saints*. Strawberry Hills, NSW: ReadHowYouWant, 2016.

² Sibley, Robert C. *The way of the stars: journeys on the Camino de Santiago*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012, 5

³ "Camino de Santiago ." Camino de Santiago. Accessed August 23, 2017.

⁴ Online, Catholic. "St. James the Greater - Saints & Angels." Catholic Online. Accessed August 23, 2017.

preached Christianity for seven years before returning to Judaea, where he was martyred by King Herod.

“About that time King Herod laid hands upon some members of the church to harm them. He had James, the brother of John, killed by the sword, and when he saw that this was pleasing to the Jews he proceeded to arrest Peter also” (Acts 12:1-3a).⁵

The night before Peter was supposed to be sentenced, he was led by an angel out of the prison and went to the home of Mary, where believers gathered. He told them all that had happened and said, "Go, show these things unto James and all the brethren."⁶ St. James' disciples smuggled his body back to Spain and buried it near Padron, which is a few miles from Santiago. Theodomir, Bishop of Ira Flavia was thought to reveal the location of the tomb in the year 813. Another legend says that St. James appeared on Clavijo's battlefield, near Logrotio, in order to aid the Spaniards against the Moors.⁷ St. James then became known as Santiago Matamoros, or Saint James the Moor Slayer.⁸

The height of Santiago's pilgrimages started in the Middle Ages, from the 9th to the 16th century. "Ultreya," was a pilgrim motto of encouragement during that time, which is Latin for "go forward, go beyond."⁹ In the 13th century, the Camino was an active way to follow "the way of Christ."¹⁰ 5,000 people came each day to worship St. James. Pilgrims came from France,

⁵ Miller, OFM Fr. Don. "Saint James the Apostle." Franciscan Media. June 20, 2017. Accessed August 23, 2017.

⁶ "All Bible Characters." All Bible Characters - Bible Characters - Bible Study - BibleWise. Accessed August 23, 2017.

⁷ "El Camino de Santiago de Compostela Pilgrimage in Spain The Way of St James." Camino de Santiago. Accessed August 23, 2017.

⁸ Sibley, 33

⁹ Ibid, 5

¹⁰ Mammano, Gina Marie.

Britain, Germany, Italy, Scandinavia, as well as Spain. As a holy place, Santiago was almost considered an equal of Rome and Jerusalem, as no European Christian pilgrimage route is was extensive or continuous. Pilgrims sought out enlightenment in Spain, rather than having to travel as far as Jerusalem or Rome.¹¹ The most popular day in Santiago was the feast day of St. James, on the 25th of July. Charlemagne- who led his army across the Pyrenees into Spain to free Christians from Muslim rule¹²- Calixtus II, Alfonso II, “El Cid;” Emperors, popes, King’s, Knights of the Templar, noblemen, priests, farmers, beggars, travelers, the sick, the healthy, the homeless, the rich. All pilgrims were treated equally in their travels.¹³

The Camino de Santiago has 1,800 ecclesiastical and secular buildings along the route that are of great historic interest, which resulted in the most vertible material record for these ancient of activities.¹⁴ According to these records, the pilgrimage began to lessen during the 14th century due to wars, epidemics and natural catastrophes.¹⁵ As the 16th century came to an end, European Reformation, as well as the Spanish and English war caused a decline in the amount of Santiago’s pilgrims. The relics of the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela were lost by the Bishop of Compostela when, in 1589, Sir Francis Drake attacked La Coruna. The relics were found nearly 300 years later, and the pilgrimages continued.¹⁶ In response to the damage the route had suffered, the Camino’s recovery began in the late 19th century.¹⁷ Today, Santiago is an

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Sibley, 30

¹³ Pilgrim. "El Camino de Santiago, The Way of St James." El Camino de Santiago | The Way of St. James. February 25, 2015. Accessed August 23, 2017.

¹⁴ "Camino Journeys in Spain, Portugal, France, Italy and Japan." Walk The Camino. Accessed August 23, 2017.

¹⁵ "Camino de Santiago." Camino de Santiago.

¹⁶ "El Camino de Santiago de Compostela Pilgrimage in Spain The Way of St Jame."

¹⁷ "Camino de Santiago." Camino de Santiago.

UNESCO (The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) World Heritage Site.¹⁸

The pilgrims of the time wore heavy capes, sandals, staffs and felt hats. The scallop shell was, and still is, a symbol of hospitality along the route. It also represents the many startling places of pilgrimages, who walk their own path from the edges of the shell's own outer grooves, moving all the way down to the meeting of pilgrims and grooves on the shells.¹⁹ In other words, "the grooves on the shell all lead to a single point at its base. The grooves represent all the ways to get to the tomb of St. James in Santiago de Compostela."²⁰ The emblem is said to date back to when Lord of Pimentel swam across the ocean, emerging from the sea on the other side covered in scallop shells. The scallop shell was also used in the crusade Santiago Cathedral against the Moorish invaders.²¹

The amount of human traffic going towards Galicia resulted in creation of hospitals, albergues (hostels designated for pilgrims), churches, monasteries, abbeys and towns all along the route.²² These hospitals and hospices were meant to take care of sick and weary pilgrims. Occasionally, the pilgrims were cared for by Benedictine and Cistercian monks, as well as the Knights Templar of the Spanish Order, and of the Red Sword, who were in charge of Northern Spain's pilgrims safety from bandits and criminals.²³ To this day, churches and albergues continue their duty of caring for pilgrims. As recent pilgrim Robert Sibley remembers,

¹⁸ "Camino de Santiago." CaminoWays.com. Accessed August 23, 2017.

¹⁹ Mammano.

²⁰ Schirm, 31

²¹ "El Camino de Santiago de Compostela Pilgrimage in Spain The Way of St Jame."

²² "Camino de Santiago." Camino de Santiago.

²³ "El Camino de Santiago de Compostela Pilgrimage in Spain The Way of St Jame."

“The first mass in Roncesvalles was special...The priest paused in front of each one of us to make the sign of the cross and offer a blessing. The ceremony goes back to the 12th century when the monastery and its hospital took care of thousands of pilgrims.”²⁴

Sibley also remembers the village of Hornillas del Camino, where “the church had once been an important pilgrimage stop, with a Hospital and a Benedictine monastery.”²⁵

Spain is rich with its religiously historic sites. A wonderful example of this is the saying, “In Italian you sing, in English you write, in German you negotiate, and in Spanish you pray.”²⁶

II. Current approaches to the Camino

The current Camino is a collection of paths, some of which are believed to be old Roman routes that joined parts of the Peninsula.²⁷ This includes the Via de Plata, or the Silver Way, which starts in southern Spain's' Andalusia, following an ancient Roman route merging with the Camino Frances.²⁸ The French Way, or the Camino Frances, is the most popular and social route on the Camino. It starts in northwestern Spain's Sarria, or France's Saint-Jean-Pied-De-Port. A pilgrim on this route goes through medieval Spanish towns, and Galician countryside, until reaching Santiago de Compostela (See Appendix A's map). The Portuguese Coastal Way is also a very popular Camino route that goes along the coastline of Portugal into Spain. It begins in the UNESCO-listed city Porto, following the Atlantic Ocean before taking a ferry to A Guarda, in Galicia, and the center of the Rías Baixas. The Northern Way, the Camino del Norte, begins in

²⁴ Sibley, 9

²⁵ Ibid, 72

²⁶ Kerkeling, Hape. *Im off then: my journey along the Camino de Santiago*. New York: Free Press, 2009, 50

²⁷ "Camino de Santiago." *Camino de Santiago*.

²⁸ Pilgrim.

San Sebastián, traversing along the coastline for a large part of the journey. The Camino to Rome finishes in Rome, opposed to Santiago. This route starts in Canterbury, England, crossing the channel to France, then going through Switzerland and Italy.²⁹ The Napoleon route also follows an old Roman route, and was used by Napoleon Bonaparte to invade Spain.³⁰

As one can expect, current day pilgrims are faced with more requirements for travel along these routes than the original pilgrims. The Camino requires that pilgrims carry credentials, which includes a passport that is stamped by businesses along the route in order to prove that they have walked at least the last 100 km. Without it, they are unable to receive their compostela, or official certificate of completion. Pilgrims often bring backpacks, which should generally be no more than 10% of one's body weight.³¹ It is also suggested pilgrims bring a water bottle, toiletries, sunscreen, soap, a first-aid kit with painkillers, antiseptic cream, bandages, blister plasters, and a sterile needle to drain blisters. Pilgrims often find themselves cutting down to two pairs of clothes, which they interchange and wash every night. Certain articles are even available in lightweight, thermal, and so on. Lastly, there are the hiking shoes, flip-flops, cameras, phones, and perhaps even cooking utensils. Walking sticks are also said to remove 30% of the weight from a pilgrim's legs.³² This is all more extensive than the original pilgrims could afford to carry with them, especially since one point of the pilgrimage was to detach oneself from material objects as a way to get closer to God.³³

²⁹ "Camino de Santiago." CaminoWays.com.

³⁰ Sibley, 20

³¹ Schirm, 100

³² Ibid, 35

³³ Martin, Craig. "Walking the Camino de Santiago: A Beginner's Guide." Outside Online. March 13, 2017. Accessed August 23, 2017.

The revitalization process of the Camino, at the end of the 20th century, resulted in an abundance of change that came with the added social, tourist, and cultural components of the journey. During the middle ages, people would walk out of their front doors to start their journey to Santiago, but nowadays, with cheap air travel, a great deal of modern pilgrims fly to their starting point, or do different sections of the Camino in different years.³⁴ However, this is something that has contributed greatly to the current pilgrimage experience. As pilgrim Gabriel Schirm puts it,

“The people on the Way are a huge part of this international experience. So many people from so many walks of life walk the Camino for a myriad of reasons...It always amazes me that you really can have a conversation without having a clue what exactly the other person is saying.”³⁵

Despite the variety of people who travelled the Camino during its origin years, the diversity has increased significantly with modern technology. According to Robert Sibley, “the ubiquity of the internet and social media means that none of us are complete strangers even if we wanted to be.”³⁶ In fact, it is not uncommon for pilgrims to create life long friendships along the route, such as Sibley’s Brazilian Bombshell, a lively woman named Andrea from Brazil.³⁷ Another example of this would be Schirm’s Barista.³⁸ Both were people who had a significant impact on these pilgrims, earning themselves clever nicknames in their books on the experience. However, peregrinus- the Latin root for the word “pilgrim-” means “alien.” With “this ancient understanding of pilgrims,” one wonders if this newfound diversity of the Camino truly goes

³⁴ "Camino de Santiago." Camino de Santiago.

³⁵ Schirm, 18

³⁶ Sibley, 11

³⁷ Ibid, 70

³⁸ Schirm, 20

against what original pilgrims intended, as they wanted the teachings of God to be open to everyone?

But the modernization of the Camino has brought about other dilemmas in the world of pilgrims, such as the internal struggle of what it means to be a “true pilgrim.” Much unlike original pilgrims, modern pilgrims often find themselves taking taxis and buses as certain stretches of the route prove too harsh on their bodies. In response to this, pilgrims like Schirm often reported on the guilt he felt for taking the occasional taxi. Pilgrim Sibley thought that “the perennial debates among Camino pilgrims [on] who is or isn't a proper pilgrim... [is] a dogmatic notion of purity,” to which he responded “Pffftt...” as he did not agree with the “cult of authenticity”³⁹ As one reads more of these accounts of pilgrimage, it is difficult to not to judge pilgrims like Hape Kerkeling, who criticized the humble refugios, preferring luxurious hotels and expensive mineral water. As he is hitchhiking at the beginning of his journey, his driver comments, “You are lucky we are French!...The Spanish flatly refuse to pick up pilgrims. They feel that anyone who doesn't complete the route on his own steam doesn't complete it at all.”⁴⁰ But who is to be the judge of a pilgrim authenticity? Especially when considering the philosophy of the scallop shell, one finds that they must find their own path on the Camino, as all of the routes lead to Santiago.

III. Why is the Camino traveled?

The Camino was originally a form of proving one's devotion to God and Christ. Nowadays, the Camino is used for a variety of reasons, such as health. The 500 mile walk is used

³⁹ Ibid, 55

⁴⁰ Kerkeling, 29

as a form of exercise in order to lose weight, get in shape, and so on. When one arrives in Santiago to receive their compostela, it is one of the optional answers when pilgrims are asked why they travelled the Camino. However, many find that despite their original goals, the Camino helped them in their search for meaning. Pilgrim Gabriel Schirm turned to the Camino when he was in search for a new career.

“I need to focus,” he claimed. “I need to know what my purpose is. I need to know what career I should pursue. I need to know why I am here. Here on Earth that is...the agony of not being on your true path is hard to handle.”⁴¹

Robert Sibley also searched for meaning as he looked for a break from journalism. He saw the Camino as “a process of learning the things you need and the things you don't need.”⁴² He wasn't alone. Many of the people he came across, German, French, Austrian, Danish, British, professionals in their fifties who “weren't necessarily dissatisfied with their lives, but invariably... wanted something more.”⁴³ These people he came across often regarded the Camino as a form of therapy. Perhaps, this was from a newfound closeness to nature, which Sibley says he rarely came across in his everyday life. Sibley also found himself having “visions,” in which these “moments of intense memory granted [him] a glimpse of [his] own spirit, hinted at what gave [his] life a sense of meaning and purpose.”⁴⁴ According to Sibley,

“Each of us suffers a kind of homesickness and our journeys are a search for a home we have lost...maybe going on a pilgrimage...was the most human thing [we] could do.”

⁴¹ Schirm, 15

⁴² Sibley, 25

⁴³ Ibid, 48

⁴⁴ Ibid, 64

Even Hape Kerkeling -a critical, self proclaimed couch potato- went on a search for his sense of self, and God after recovering from surgery, claiming, “it's high time to readjust my own thinking.”⁴⁵ He seemed to struggle with existentialism, wondering whether he could live with nothingness, or a lack of God.

“Wouldn't life in this funny little planet seem altogether pointless?” he wondered. “I would image that everyone wants to find God...or whether he does, or did, or will exist...or something. Maybe the better question would be: who is God?...maybe I should start with smaller of these questions: who am I?”⁴⁶

IV. How the Camino is spiritually enriching

But how could walking over 500 miles help you find God or a sense of self? *Lectio divina*, or walking meditation has proven to be an effective means of spiritual growth in Christianity, Buddhism, and all sorts of religions.

“These may include allegories of the souls solitary walk, the surprise party of companionship, nature as rugged and delicate partner, and communion with spirit within and Spirit without.”⁴⁷

Pilgrim Kerkeling seemed to make the same connection. He interpreted his pilgrimage,

“As a parable of my path through life. It was a difficult birth...At the beginning of the route-and in my childhood- I had trouble hitting my stride.

Until the middle of my path through life, no matter how many positive

⁴⁵ Kerkeling, 3

⁴⁶ Ibid, 11

⁴⁷ Mammano.

experiences I enjoyed, I experienced many twists and turns that sometimes threw me off course. But at about the midpoint of the journey, I started moving cheerfully towards my destination. It almost seems as if the Camino has seen to grant me a little peek into my future. Serenity might be a goal worth pursuing.”⁴⁸

It was thought by original pilgrims that by inflicting extreme physical challenges on themselves, the desire for the remissions of sins would be satisfied, and they would then be open to the prospect of a second baptism. If “pain is how the body somatizes psychological problems,” perhaps it's because there is a relation between having faith and not feeling pain.⁴⁹ Sibley claimed that,

“The strain in my legs provided a physical reminder that there was more to being in this work than thinking...such physical acts reminded me I was still a solid, separate entity confronting the world.”⁵⁰

However, lasting injuries, and even death can be suffered on the Camino. Achilles tendinitis is a common injury on the Camino, which can lead to permanent damage in the limbs, which could also result in the need for surgery.⁵¹

After the beginning stretch where the pilgrims have strained themselves physically, pilgrims come across the Meseta, which is considered the mental portion of the journey. The Meseta (Spanish for “plateau,” and “the roof of the world”) consists of the long, flat plains- mostly wheat, barley, and oats- at the heart of Spain. The lack of scenery provides less

⁴⁸ Kerkeling, 329

⁴⁹ Sibley, 80

⁵⁰ Ibid, 99

⁵¹ Schirm, 95

distractions for the mind. Some enjoy this portion of the journey more than others, as it is “a place that can drive you mad.”⁵² An example of this is the town of O Cebrero, a place that after the hard climb, pilgrims become susceptible to visions, or intense revitalization of memories, as mentioned by Sibley.⁵³ The last stretch of the journey is when the pilgrim is traversing across the knowingly beautiful Galician mountains. Seen as the spiritual leg of the journey, this is where, after the body and mind have been challenged, the spirit makes strides in the company of nature and companions.⁵⁴

Conclusion

The Camino experience is one unlike any other as it offers an interactive exposure to cultures of all kinds, history, and gives the opportunity for spiritual exploration. As explained by Sibley, “with the bounty of technology so readily available to make modern life comfortable and entertaining, there is something decidedly incourgous about undertaking a trek that entails considerable physical demands and long periods of solitude.”⁵⁵ With these advances, the need for faith seems to be diminishing. Then how is it that pilgrimages like the Camino are still traveled? “We too betray a kind of spiritual longing in our passion for relics- crumbling pyramids...although today we label our search a longing for history, not God.”⁵⁶ At the end of the journey, Sibley felt,

“A paradoxical mix of letdown, fatigue, relief and restlessness...the Camino had also journeyed through [him]. It had chipped away the carapace of [his]

⁵² Ibid, 76

⁵³ Ibid, 100

⁵⁴ Schirm, 107

⁵⁵ Sibley, 3

⁵⁶ Ibid, 14

everyday reality, uncovering memories, dreams, and reflections that had lain hidden beneath the sediments of career and consumption...The real gift of the Camino...was to have found a place I could return to imaginatively over and over, recreating that heightened awareness of the world.”⁵⁷

Because “in Santiago, everyone gets the reception he deserves,” no matter if he’s a “true pilgrim” or not.⁵⁸ Despite the vague spiritual preferences of modern pilgrimages, the deep religious history of the Camino still thrives in the attendance of mass, the stay in albergues, and especially in the arrival at Santiago de Compostela. Pilgrims still pay respects to St. James, despite their religious background. This is because the Camino is beyond all that, as St. James and the entire journey represent far more than religion or adventure. The Camino represents the relentless search for meaning in all of us, regardless of its form. The Camino accepts all who wish to travel upon it, as every step they take is for their own betterment.

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⁵⁷ Ibid, 142

⁵⁸ Ibid, 323

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Appendix A



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⁵⁹ "Map of Camino Frances." Lin's Camino de Santiago pilgrimage. Accessed October 25, 2017.