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Cristina Sánchez-Carretero *Editor*

# Heritage, Pilgrimage and the Camino to Finisterre

Walking to the End of the World

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Cristina Sánchez-Carretero  
Editor

# Heritage, Pilgrimage and the Camino to Finisterre

Walking to the End of the World



Springer

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# Foreword

The pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela is a pilgrimage to Land's End. The far northwest corner of the Iberian Peninsula where Santiago—the capital of the autonomous community of Galicia—is located was known from ancient times as Finisterre. The multiple connotations of the term Finisterre, now the place name of an Atlantic cape, are one of the factors behind the present recuperation of pilgrimage and its new forms.

The pilgrimage to Santiago in the twenty-first century is a complex phenomenon in which postmodern cultural hybridization is made manifest. It is religious and secular, spiritual and corporal, local and global, real and virtual. Although this pilgrimage has always had an international dimension, this has been intensified with the improvement of technology and the communication media characteristic of globalization, to the extent of facilitating virtual and transnational experiences. In Brazil, for example, the Saint James's routes have been reproduced offering itineraries to places presided by statues of the saint.

Despite this delocalization, the valorization of the Saint James's Way as cultural heritage has emphasized the spatial dimension of the pilgrimage. Today it is seen as a journey into the past which must be done on foot, as it was before the days of motorized transport. Pilgrims follow historical routes in the footsteps of medieval pilgrims, imitating their practices. This illustrates the difficulty of separating the tangible and intangible dimensions of heritage. The senses are inevitably linked to concrete things: monuments, places, paths, and even the act of walking. Thus, the current revival of the pilgrimage can help develop the localities the routes pass through on their way to Santiago. Many towns and villages see the St. James's Way as an opportunity to overcome their situation of marginality—caused by their distance from large geographic centers—and to be placed on the new international map of pilgrimage.

The link between pilgrimage and territory and local space is the main theme of this book, which has assumed the challenge of analyzing such a complex phenomenon. To do so, it focuses on one of the St. James's routes that is probably the most obvious manifestation of the pilgrimage's current transformation. At the same time, the book shows this particular route as a laboratory in which

one can observe many of the features which characterize the pilgrimage revival in general. The route is the continuation of the way from Santiago de Compostela for approximately a further 90 km, to the region of Costa da Morte, where Cape of Finisterre is located. This cape has now become a new non-religious goal for the pilgrims, who conclude their journey watching the sunset over the ocean and performing other renewal rituals.

The recuperation and promotion of the route were part of the “Xacobeo” programs set up by the autonomous government of Galicia in 1993. Thus, the rich and diverse heritage of Saint James’s Way was placed at the forefront of the government’s tourism strategy. In recent years, the route has also received support from the European Union by means of rural development programs whose philosophy is based on managing local resources and cultural heritage in particular.

The economic and sociocultural effects of these programs, particularly those related to the promotion of the Saint James’s Way, have not been analyzed with the thoroughness they deserve. Unfortunately, academic research on pilgrimage in the twenty-first century in Galicia has not kept pace with the rate at which it has become a relevant social phenomenon. The design and implementation of tourism, culture, and heritage policies lack input from the social and human sciences, as do the processes of creating public opinion and social debate.

This book is therefore a necessary and relevant contribution. The anthropological perspective which guides this work is worthy of note for various reasons. Firstly, its global perspective takes into account the multiple factors which intervene in the transformation of social practices and cultural meanings. Another specific contribution is its ethnographic perspective, based on field observation and interaction with participants, in this case, mainly pilgrims and the inhabitants of the places through which the route passes.

Although pilgrims are acknowledged as the protagonists, their motivations and experiences are often stereotyped by publicity images or statistics. The local inhabitants are frequently forgotten about. As in many other tourism contexts, the heritage policies linked to the Xacobeo programs have taken more the “guests” than the “hosts” into account. This book emphasizes the importance of studying the perspectives of both agents and the relationship between them. It is crucial to look beyond the magic words which are repeated over and over again and which support an entire system agreed on by apparent common consent. “Heritage” is one of those words. This research proves on the contrary that the idea of heritage that encourages a pilgrim to go to Costa da Morte differs from that of the inhabitants of this region. Not even local governments share the same concept of heritage. No doubt this is a huge obstacle for the implementation of the model of rural development promoted by the European Union whose philosophy sees heritage as a meeting point between residents and visitors where the interests of both parties are brought together.

This book analyzes how the promotion of the pilgrimage is affecting the transformation of the Costa da Morte area and the ways of life of its inhabitants. To do so, new concepts are coined and proposed to identify realities and new phenomena related to the pilgrimage. From the 1990s onward, pilgrims have certainly ceased

to be a foreign feature in this region's landscape. But the results of the development programs based on heritage and pilgrimage have not met expectations. While there has been a certain degree of improvement in some municipalities, the region still suffers an important demographic decline and emigration flux.

This book will undoubtedly help to detect and rectify these errors. The research has been carried out using a participative methodology which allows all participants to have their say, therefore gaining a deeper and more accurate understanding of this pilgrim's way. This insight focuses not only on the walkers but also on those who live on the periphery of the way and who should be the first to benefit from the development encouraged by pilgrimage in the twenty-first century.

Nieves Herrero



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# Chapter 1

## To Walk and to Be Walked... at the End of the World

Cristina Sánchez-Carretero

*To be a pilgrim consists of letting the Camino go through you...  
you are walked by the Camino*

(pilgrim, fieldnotes 7-2-2011)

### 1.1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>

To walk... and to be walked; this expression is used by many pilgrims on the Camino to describe the act of walking as a transformative experience. Walking the Camino is not so much about hiking but about 'letting the Camino go through you' as the pilgrim in the initial quote explains. In this book, we will analyze the expression 'to be walked by the Camino' from the viewpoint of those living in the towns and villages through which this pilgrimage route passes.

At a pilgrimage conference in 2011, in Antwerp, I asked the audience to close their eyes, breathe deeply, and visualize a place, person, object or scene related to

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<sup>1</sup>The chapters presented in this book are part of the research project 'Processes of Heritagization in the Camino: Santiago-Finisterre-Muxía' funded by the Galician Government (INCITE09606181PR). In addition, this chapter is linked to the network TRAMA3, funded by CYTED, Science and Society Area; and the project NEARCH funded by the European Commission CULTURE program, this publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

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the Camino de Santiago; whatever came to mind. When they opened their eyes, I asked how many had visualized the Camino landscape: 90 %. Sixty percent had visualized a pilgrim; 30 % visualized some of the paraphernalia associated with pilgrims such as shells, walking sticks or a backpack; 10 % of the audience, houses, buildings or a church in a village, town or city; when I asked how many had thought of the inhabitants of those towns or villages, the answer was unanimous: nobody.<sup>2</sup> Most of the conference attendees visualized a rural landscape, half of them thought of pilgrims, but no one had visualized the local residents.

This anecdote illustrates the one-sidedness of studies on the Camino to Santiago de Compostela. The large number of studies concerning the pilgrimage route contrasts with a near-absence of research into both the effects of the pilgrimage on the daily lives of the people who live along the route, and the commodification processes that result from the exploitation of the Camino for tourism purposes. This book seeks to contribute to redress this imbalance by analyzing the Camino from different perspectives: that of the processes of ‘heritagization,’ that of the effects of pilgrimage on local communities, and that of the perceptions of the pilgrims. To do so, the book focuses on a rather new and unknown section: the Camino to Finisterre and Muxía.

The project ‘Heritagization Processes along the Camino de Santiago: Route Santiago-Finisterre-Muxía’ addresses three issues: firstly, the consequences of pilgrimage on the daily lives of those living in the towns and villages through which the route passes; secondly, the heritage construction processes (heritagization) taking place along the Camino; and thirdly the ideas of the walkers on the history and mythology of the region and the perceptions of them on the qualities and the religious or spiritual dimensions of the route (Fig. 1.1).

This book is the result of a three-year research project (2010–2012) at the Institute of Heritage Sciences (Incipit), Spanish National Research Council (CSIC) in collaboration with the Meertens Institute (Amsterdam). It is based on multidisciplinary collaboration between anthropologists, sociologists, historians and archaeologists. Various complementary methods were used for the project: historical, mythological and ethnographic studies of the route (Chaps. 2 and 3); data surveys to analyze the socioeconomic impact of the pilgrimage on businesses along the route and in Finisterre (Chap. 5); ethnographic fieldwork, particularly in three places on the Camino: Vilaserío (municipal district of Negreira), Olveiroa (municipal district of Dumbría) and Finisterre (municipal district of Finisterre) (Chaps. 4 and 6); and surveys to analyze the pilgrims’ motivations (Chap. 8).

A number of different results were obtained through complex analytic framework. With regards to heritagization processes for instance, it is worth noting from an ethnographic viewpoint the differences between what is considered ‘heritage’ by institutions and by local townspeople (see the conclusions to Ballesteros-Arias and Sánchez-Carretero 2011; Sánchez-Carretero and Ballesteros-Arias 2014; and Sánchez-Carretero 2012).

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<sup>2</sup>The answers were not mutually exclusive. One person could visualize various things at once, for instance, a pilgrim in a rural landscape.



**Fig. 1.1** Map of the Finisterre-Muxía Camino. *Source* Anxo Rodríguez-Paz

As for the effects on the local population, the main conclusion from the study, based on sociological surveys, is that there is a clear connection between the increase in the number of pilgrims following the Santiago-Finisterre route and changes in the local communities' productive model, which in recent years has moved towards offering services related to the pilgrimage. These activities socially and economically boost local communities on the pilgrimage route (Parga-Dans 2012a, b). While the data reflects growth and revitalization of local communities resulting from this phenomenon, qualitative and ethnographic research has shown that this productive revitalization also brings about changes that can be a source of conflict in local communities, such as hidden economy, sharp increases in transient population at specific times of the year, interpersonal conflict and resource management by new institutional bodies.

## 1.2 The Pilgrimage to Finisterre

Instead of ending in Santiago like the rest of the Caminos, this route finishes at the Cape of Finisterre and Muxía on the Galician North-West Atlantic coast, ‘where the land ends and the sea begins’ (Vilar 2010: 9).<sup>3</sup> In Latin, *Finisterrae* means ‘the end of the earth.’ Both Muxía and Finisterre are part of The Coast of Death, a territorial label that aimed at forging emergent identity links among the inhabitants of one of the poorest areas in Galicia. The coastline is distinctive for its high cliffs, peninsulas and coves that give protection to small villages. This complex geography made the area quite inaccessible from other parts of Galicia. The name ‘Coast of Death,’ as explained by Paula Ballesteros-Arias in Chap. 6, was fully established in the 1990s to promote the coastal area between Cape Finisterre and the Sisargas Islands in Malpica. During that decade an association called Neria was founded to promote and coordinate rural development and it was linked to EU Leader funds for the development of rural areas. The main objective of Neria was to ‘promote and coordinate rural development, improve life conditions and to help end rural depopulation.’<sup>4</sup> The association wanted to promote the whole region and needed to find a good name for the area.

There are different accounts to explain the origin of the name Coast of Death. The term ‘death’ might be linked to the fact that this coastline represents Europe’s continental Finisterrae, where the land ends and the sun sets in a *mare tenebrosum* or dark sea, as the Atlantic Ocean was called in Medieval times; but the name could also be related to the numerous shipwrecks in the area. As the official guidebook for the area explains, there is a dark legend regarding Galician inhabitants who were believed to have provoked shipwrecks in order to steal their load.<sup>5</sup>

Cape Finisterre is part of the Coast of Death and it is said to be the westernmost point of continental Europe, although geographers have now shown that both Cape Touriñán—also in Galicia and very close to Finisterre—and Cape Roca in Portugal are further west. Other European mythical ‘ends of the world’ include Land’s End in Britain, Finistère in French Brittany, and Dingle in Ireland.

This research project was carried out on this particular section of the route because its promotion amongst pilgrims is relatively recent, although documentation shows that there were pilgrimages to the area from as early as the 12th century (Pombo 2000), with testimonies of pilgrims who visited the sanctuaries dedicated to Santo Cristo in Finisterre, Virxe da Barca in Muxía and hermit San Guillerme in Cape Finisterre (Vilar 2010). However, the links between pilgrimage to Finisterre and Muxía and the cult of Saint James are not that clear. Margry and Vilar explore these links in Chaps. 2 and 3 respectively and conclude that the

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<sup>3</sup>This route can be walked West–East towards Santiago, which is officially recognized by the Catholic Church. See Margry (Chap. 2) for an explanation on both directions.

<sup>4</sup>[www.neria.es/quienes-somos.aspx](http://www.neria.es/quienes-somos.aspx), accessed July 23, 2014.

<sup>5</sup><http://www.turismocostadamorte.com/ga/upload/des/59aGuia%20Xeral%20Costa%20Morte%20GAL.pdf>, accessed 23 July, 2014.

Camino towards Finisterre is related to the Marian pilgrimage to Muxía, the Christ of Finisterre and the hermit of San Guillermo rather than to St. James, and therefore in its East–West direction is not an old Jacobean route.

There are two types of historical accounts that link Finisterre and Muxía with Santiago: On the one hand, there are studies that see the pilgrimage to Finisterre and Muxía as a medieval construction and a unifying Christian strategy against Muslims; on the other hand, there is the sun worship explanation of pre-Christian origin, mostly upheld by 19th century Galician nationalists. In addition, there are several legends that connect these places and which are explored in the first part of this book. The use of legends to establish links among sanctuaries was a common strategy employed by the Catholic church to redirect pilgrims from major sanctuaries to less popular ones (Herrero 2009: 168).

It was not until the late 1990s that this part of the route began to be promoted; therefore its connection with the pilgrimage route is relatively recent, as is the economic, social and cultural impact on the places along the Finisterre-Muxía route. Furthermore, economic and heritage policies are being developed and fostered in response to the rise in tourism.

The revival of the Caminos began in the 20th century thanks to the ‘Associations of the Friends of the Camino de Santiago’ and subsequently various administrations contributed to the project. In 1993, the year of the Camino’s inclusion on the World Heritage List and a ‘holy year’ or ‘xacobeo’,<sup>6</sup> the Galician Government initiated the ‘Xacobeo’ program. The Finisterre-Muxía Route was then included as one of the Caminos de Santiago (Vilar 2010). Between 1997 and 2004, the Galician Association of Friends of the Camino (AGACS) and Asociación Neria organized annual pilgrimages to Finisterre and Muxía. This part of the Camino de Santiago is not officially recognized by the Catholic Church and pilgrims walking the route do not receive the *compostela*, the recognition granted by the Catholic Church to those pilgrims who have walked at least 100 km of the Camino, as this route is less than 100 km long and does not end in Santiago. For these reasons, as well as its connection with sun worship, many local neighbors and pilgrims call this route ‘the Camino of the atheists’.<sup>7</sup> In fact, the Catholic Church keeps a firm grip on the heritagization processes of the rest of the Caminos, but maintains a clear *ignoratio* strategy in relation to the Finisterre route: the Church does not officially oppose this route, but neither does it recognize it.

The route from Santiago to Finisterre and Muxía consists of three to five stages. Some pilgrims walk for three days from Santiago to Finisterre, adding one more day to walk from Finisterre to Muxía. Others take four days to reach Finisterre; whilst some walk first to Muxía and then from Muxía to Finisterre. Others don’t go to Muxía at all, while many pilgrims simply catch a bus from Santiago to reach ‘the end of the world.’

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<sup>6</sup>A Xacobeo, jacobeo or holly year is a jubilee year that occurs when July 25th, the day of St. James, falls on a Sunday. For more information on this topic, see Vilar, this volume.

<sup>7</sup>This expression was recorded during ethnographic fieldwork among owners of small restaurants and hostels, as well as among pilgrims. However Margry, in his surveys and fieldwork, did not encounter it (Margry, Chap. 8).

There are various options of how to tackle the stages between the main points of the route:

Option 1:

1. Santiago-Negreira (22 km)
2. Negreira-Olveiroa (33 km): some pilgrims sleep at Vilaserío and walk directly from Santiago to Vilaserío; others walk from Negreira to Vilaserío (13 km)
3. Olveiroa-Cee (19 km)
4. Cee-Finisterre (16 km)
5. Additional stage: Finisterre-Muxía (31 km)

Option 2:

1. Santiago-Negreira (22 km)
2. Negreira-Olveiroa (33 km)
3. Olveiroa-Muxía: (28 km)
4. Additional stage: Muxía-Finisterre (31 km)

The structure of the route and its various alternatives—either finishing in Finisterre, in Muxía, or going to both places—is partly the source of conflict between the two arrival points, Muxía and Finisterre.

The Finisterre Camino reintroduces the idea of reaching the end of the Camino as the purpose of pilgrimage. According to Margry, ‘modern pilgrimage to Santiago changed the idea of pilgrimage from ‘reaching a goal’ (the shrine) to ‘being under way’” (Margry, Chap. 8) and the Camino to Finisterre brings back that urge for an end to mark the experience. It is physically impossible to continue as there is no more land ahead, only the ocean. The same idea is described in a municipal video by the pilgrim hostel-keeper in Finisterre: ‘Pilgrims reach the end and cannot continue any further. Finisterre was the end of the Camino of the Stars, the Milky Way.’<sup>8</sup>

The construction of Finisterre as a tourist attraction is based, according to anthropologist Nieves Herrero, on a symbolic event (Herrero 2008: 123–138). Those on the margins are looked down on by the official discourse and are, at the same time, part of the emotional repertoire and symbolic universe of dominant culture (Shields 1991: 5, cited after Herrero 2005: 122). These characteristics—being rejected and on the margins—allow the ‘marginal places’ to become ‘mythical places’. The stigma of marginal places, such as the Coast of Death, calls for a reconfiguration process in order to change the emotional repertoire linked to such places. In the present case study, Asociación Neria and the mayor of Dumbría (one of Neria’s promoters) made a conscious effort to transform the Coast of Death, which has the stigma of being poor and isolated, into a tourist attraction; a place worthy of being visited. In fact, the same reasons that forged the image of an isolated, semi-abandoned and poor part of Galicia also turned the Coast of Death into a tourist destination.

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<sup>8</sup>Municipal video produced by Fisterre TV: <http://www.concellofisterre.com/ga/web/info.php?idc=37> accessed March 17, 2012.

**Fig. 1.2** ‘No fire’ sign with evidence of fire in Cape Finisterre. *Source* Peter Jan Margry



Many pilgrims are attracted to the nostalgic idea of an isolated ‘end of the world’ and long for traditional pilgrimage as opposed to *turigrinos* (‘tourgrims’). The history of nostalgia dates back to the mid-1950s (see Starkie 1957), although it was triggered by modernization rather than by today’s touristification.<sup>9</sup>

In the reconfiguration of Finisterre as a mythical place, various rituals were promoted and, at the same time, some of them were institutionally banned; the act of burning clothes, for instance. Some pilgrims symbolically burn objects that they have used during the Camino such as t-shirts, socks or boots, as well as notes, letters or postcards; they may even burn symbols that they have carried from the beginning of their pilgrimage for this purpose alone. This is described in many guidebooks and books on the Camino to Finisterre as a ‘purification ritual of the end of the Camino’ (Pombo 2004; Rudolph 2004: 44; Vilar, this volume). Margry, in Chap. 8, gives a detailed description of the different types of rituals carried out by pilgrims, concluding that one third of those arriving in Finisterre made a fire and ‘when it was not possible to execute the fire ritual, as it sometimes simply proved too wet to do it, the result was an ‘unfinished’ feeling’ (Margry, Chap. 8). Fires were banned in 2011 after strong winds caused them to spread on various occasions. However, there are only a few unofficially worded signs informing pilgrims of this (Fig. 1.2).

Due to the fire ban, some pilgrims started to hang objects on the radio antenna masts at the Cape, instead of the fire ritual. However the climbing involved is risky and this practice has also been banned. In spite of the ban, pilgrims have recently started placing the objects on smaller, more accessible masts at the Cape (Fig. 1.3).

Placing objects at the Cape and the burning of clothes are two recurrent themes that come up in the interviews with Finisterre locals as the main source of conflict between them and the pilgrims.<sup>10</sup> Some aspects of the behavior condemned by the locals are indeed part of the pilgrims’ mental map of what it takes to be ‘good

<sup>9</sup>See Margry’s comments on Starkie’s writing (Margry, Chap. 2).

<sup>10</sup>The conflicts between the various actors involved in the camino are explored in Chap. 4.