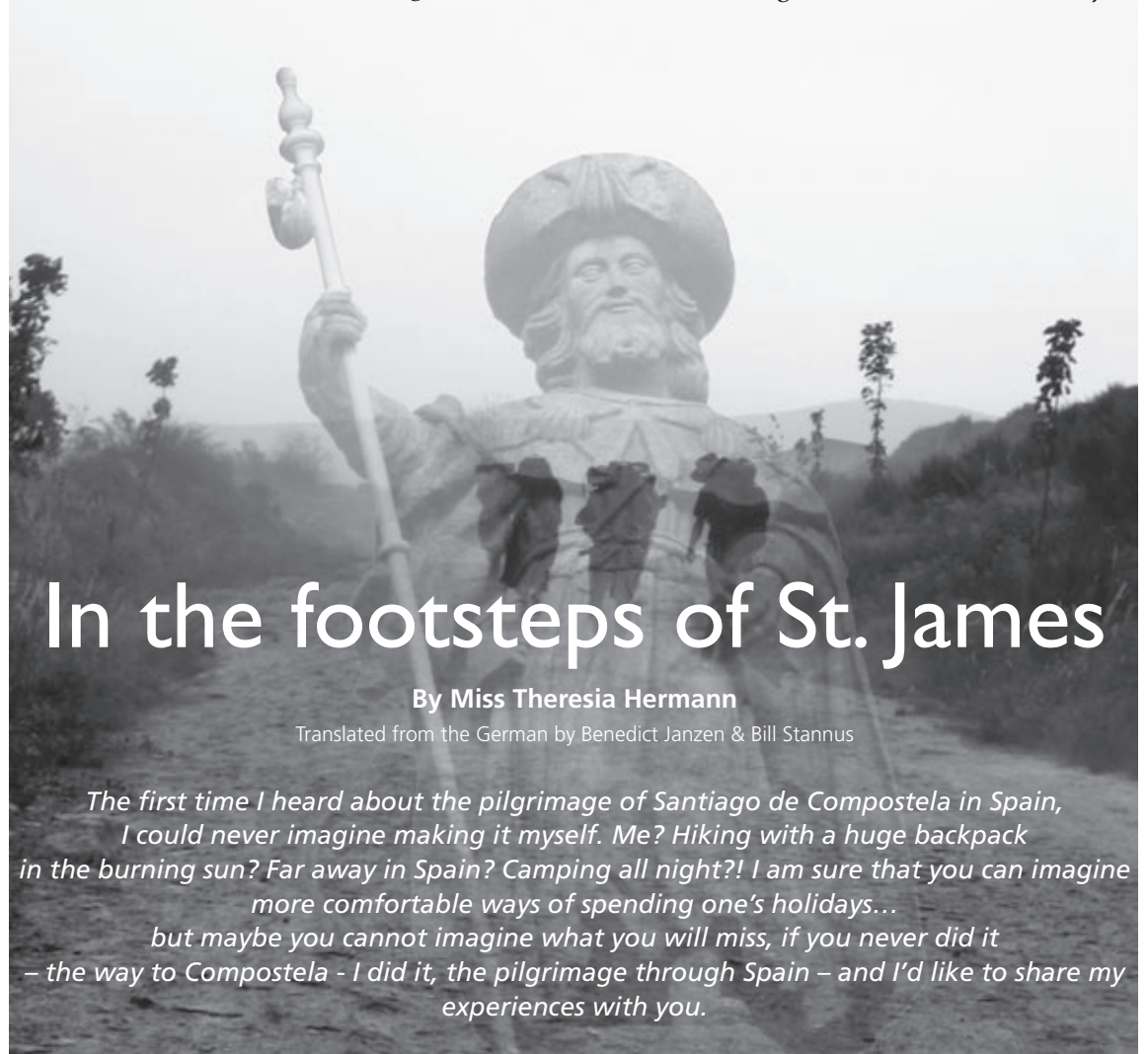


The legend of James

James the Greater, one of the twelve apostles of Jesus, was the son of Zebedee and the brother of John. Legend tells us that after the Ascension of Christ, James traveled to the roman province of Hispania, known today as Spain, to spread the Christian faith. Apparently, he did not have much success, and he returned to Palestine, where Herodes Agrippa seized him, then tortured and beheaded him. Herodes forbade the body of the Apostle to be buried, but the followers of James stole his body during the night and brought it, in a marble coffin, on board a small boat, whose crew consisted of angels. They then sailed their precious cargo across the sea. The current carried the boat to the Spanish province of Galicia, at the roman port of Iria Flavia, where they buried the Saint secretly in a nearby forest. Thus runs the legend in Spain. There is another legend, that Emperor Justinian presented the bones to the monastery in Sinai. With the invasion of Islam, the monks brought the relics

of the Saint to Spain for safety. As the Muslims began to conquer Spain as well, the people hid the relics at the precise spot where Santiago de Compostela lies today.

For many years, the grave of Saint James was forgotten. In the time between 818 and 834, a hermit named Pelaya had a vision: He saw strange lights and heard singing. Pelaya told the story of his vision to Theodemir, the bishop of Iria Flavia, who called for an investigation, which uncovered the grave of the Apostle. Afterwards, King Alfonso II proclaimed James the patron of his kingdom and had a chapel built on the site of his grave. Because of the strange lights, the people called the place in Latin "Campus Stellae", which signifies 'the Field of the Star'. The name was later changed by the people to "Compostela". History records many visions and miracles which occurred there. The legend goes on to say that the Apostle stood beside King Ramiro I in his stand against the Muslims in the year



In the footsteps of St. James

By Miss Theresia Hermann

Translated from the German by Benedict Janzen & Bill Stannus

The first time I heard about the pilgrimage of Santiago de Compostela in Spain, I could never imagine making it myself. Me? Hiking with a huge backpack in the burning sun? Far away in Spain? Camping all night?! I am sure that you can imagine more comfortable ways of spending one's holidays...

but maybe you cannot imagine what you will miss, if you never did it - the way to Compostela - I did it, the pilgrimage through Spain - and I'd like to share my experiences with you.

848. More and more pilgrims began to travel to Compostela. The chapel soon became a cathedral and developed into a popular place of pilgrimage. In the 12th and 13th centuries, the city grew to be even more famous. It was at this time that Pope Calixtus II proclaimed that all who traveled in a Holy Year to Compostela would have their sins forgiven. A Holy Year is always celebrated when the feast of Saint James (25th of July) falls on a Sunday – as it does this year. Pope Alexander III declared, a short while later, that Santiago de Compostela is a Holy City, just as much as Rome and Jerusalem. Thus, one can receive in Santiago, as well as in the aforementioned cities, a plenary indulgence. The pilgrimage to Saint James is one of the three great pilgrimages of Christianity.

Pilgrimages in the Middle Ages

The pilgrimage ranks among the most important phenomena of the piety of the Middle Ages. With no exceptions of rank, nationality or education, all took the staff of the pilgrimage: rich and poor, clerics and farmers, kings and professors, men, women and children. We can be sure that almost every man, in the height of the Middle Ages, depending on rank, funds and availability, made at least one pilgrimage to a nearby or far-away location. Bible-tradition speaks of Abraham, who left his home in Ur of Chaldea, as the first pilgrim. But after all, the life of every Christian symbolizes a pilgrimage; he is journeying to his real home. The pilgrim is not like the modern traveler, always looking for change and comfort. He is rather seeking for well-being through the forgiveness of his sins. Once the pilgrim arrives at his destination, he is hoping for forgiveness, intercession, healing of infirmities and protection from danger – It did not changed through centuries.

If one tries to understand the motivation behind the pilgrimages in the Middle Ages, he will find three types:

- 1-Pilgrimage of devotion;
- 2-Pilgrimage of penance;
- 3-Pilgrimage of delegation.

The pilgrimage of devotion is the purest form and can be divided into the pilgrimage of petition and the pilgrimage of thanksgiving. Necessity is usually the motive for such a pilgrimage. Often, pilgrimages were made as the result of a

vow or a promise, even as they are today. Another kind of pilgrimage is one of penance. At first, it was solely done in relation to the sacrament of penance. Indeed, Canon Law used to ascribe pilgrimages as penances for more serious sins. But it soon became voluntary and popular. This new tendency began at the time of Charlemagne and developed through the centuries. The pilgrimage would be made, for example, in reparation for a murder or a theft. If one arrived safely in Compostela, he received forgiveness. The pilgrimage was long, difficult and dangerous, and the criminal, journeying away from his home for a great while, would sometimes die along the way. The third kind of pilgrimage, dated from the late Middle Ages, is the pilgrimage of delegation, when one travels for the intentions of a particular person or group. The deputation of the decided journey made it possible that pilgrims could receive money, as one receives wages for a job.

In preparation for the pilgrimage

Before the pilgrim could begin such a long and dangerous journey, he would first have to put his personal belongings in order and prepare his soul for possible death. It was necessary that the parish priest and the wife of the pilgrim give their permission. In the end, financial support had to be arranged and a will written up. The basic inventory of things needed for pilgrims of Saint James was a pilgrim staff, a bag and a little bit of money. Every traveler who had to go by foot required good, practical shoes and also comfortable traveling clothes. Often, he wore a special leather covered coat and a wide felt hat, which protected him from the rain and cold.

From the time of the 11th century, the pilgrim used the Saint James seashell as a symbol. It was the sign that he had truly completed his trip. Later, in the 13th century, the pilgrim received a special document, "la Compostela", saying he had indeed been a pilgrim to Compostela. The seashell also had a practical use, as he could use it to drink water. Unlike today, the pilgrim received the seashell only for his journey home and wore it either on his hat or coat. After the pilgrim's death, the shell was buried with him in his grave. Soon after this period, this special apparel became a kind of uniform of the pilgrims to Saint James of Compostela, used throughout the centuries.



Meliade



Santiago de Compostella



Portomarin

El Cebreiro



The way to Compostela

To the question, where does the pilgrimage begin, the Spaniards usually answer: "El Camino comienza en su casa" – "The journey begins at your house". And that is true. The way to Compostela is like a net which extends all through Europe. There are four well-known ways – from Paris, Vezelay, Le Puy and Arles through France, across the Pyrenees by Roncevalles and Somport, which is, from Puente la Reina, a 600 km long path, and is the so called "Camino Frances". This was the route through northern Spain in the height of the Middle Ages, and connected the great cities of Jaca, Pamplona, Estella, Burgos and Leon with one another. The path passes through holy places and one could find Romanesque Art all along the way.

Until the 11th century, most of the time, the pilgrims could stay overnight at the Benedictine monasteries. They were allowed shelter at the monastery hospitals and hospices. From that century until the present time, many more hospitals and special hospices were built especially for the pilgrims, by kings, bishops, the rich, and orders of knights and societies. If there were

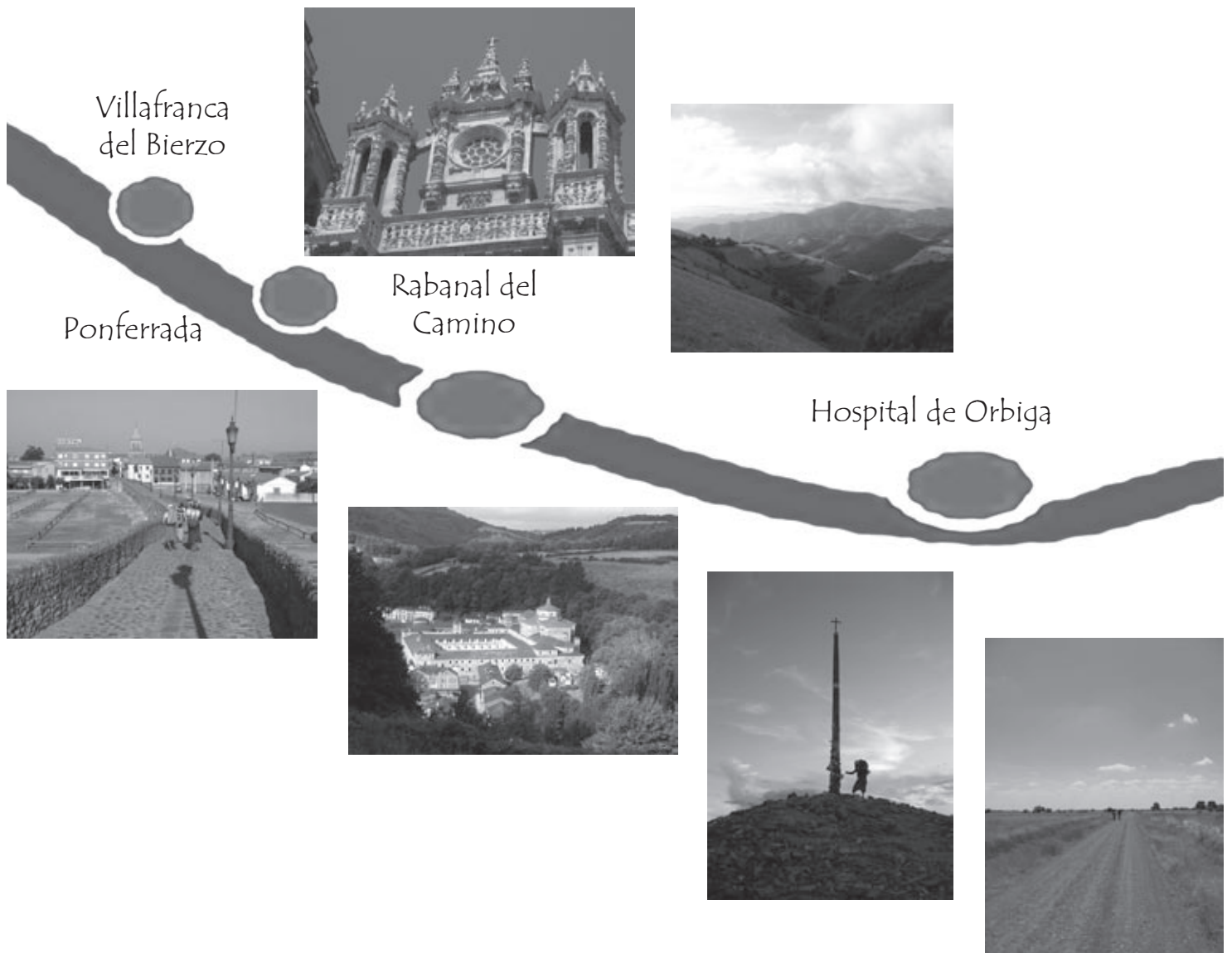
enough helpers in the hospital, they washed the hands and feet of the arriving pilgrims; this was always the custom after a long journey and was a commemoration of the Last Supper. Upon arriving in Santiago (Spanish name for 'St. James'), the pilgrims who were sick registered their names, places of birth and all their belongings, in case of theft or death. The length of time healthy pilgrims were allowed to stay at the same place was usually only one night, and never more than three. To control this, the pilgrim's staff would be marked. Many hospitals had, in memory of the twelve apostles, twelve beds. These beds usually had two or more sleeping guests in them, but sometimes there were also special sick rooms. All rooms usually had fireplaces that provided the opportunity to dry one's clothes and also shed light. The possibil-

ity for the pilgrims to shave, to wash, or to have their sandals mended, must have been something infrequent.

Good shoes were most important. A note from the 13th century from Astorga exempted shoemakers from punishment for working on feast days, when they would work for the pilgrims. Pious citizens frequently left stipends in their will for shoes for the pilgrims. Where the hostels offered care, it usually consisted of bread, water and vegetables. In the better equipped hostels, as those of Roncesvalles, there was also offered wine and meat at the table. When spiritual help was provided, the Church assisted the dying pilgrims not only with the sacraments, but also with the preparation of their will, and would provide them with a Christian burial and then properly dispose of their remaining belongings.

A pilgrimage today to Santiago

The pilgrimage has remained essentially unchanged over the centuries. Even now pilgrims come from all countries to Spain to walk the path to Compostela. We also did this with a small group of friends from three different countries in the summer of 2008. We started at Leon, about 300 km from Compostela on the Camino Frances and planned to walk between 20 and 30 km per day. Our backpacks weighed between 8 and 16 kg and we were equipped to sleep in our own tents even on cold nights and could easily survive two weeks. Of course there were the already mentioned shelters along the path. There, one could spend the night in a bed for a reasonable price. Because the rooms are usually large dormitories and mostly mixed, it is more pleasant to pursue one's way independently from the main stream of pilgrims.



The day for the pilgrim begins early in the morning. He is walking already before sunrise in order to profit from the cool morning. He frequently needs a flashlight to identify the path and the corresponding directions. The paths are so well marked, that he does not need a map. Everywhere there are seashells and yellow arrows to follow. Frequently one meets other pilgrims with backpacks and hats, dressed for hiking with solid footwear. Again and again you will meet the same people and exchange conversation in the most varied languages. The persons whom one meets in Santiago (= St. James in Spanish) differ greatly and are not infrequently surprising and of all ages. Exteriorly, the pilgrims appear more modern with their functional clothing, but good shoes are always priceless. As a symbol of sorrow for his sins, the pilgrim carries a stone in his backpack. It is a tradition to place it on the Iron Cross, close to Ponferrada. The hill with stones grows and grows, but there is a huge difference between the sizes of the stones. Gravel is found there, as well as little rocks.

cult. Almost every day the surroundings change and one sees the beauties of the Spanish landscapes. The view into a valley is indescribable after a long, difficult climb, as is the sunrise in the early morning. Nature's game of always changing colours is also hard to describe. However, the weather changes little. The nights are cool or cold, but days from noon to early evening are hot. It does not rain much, but when it does, it is heavy and long. Most pilgrims walk from early morning until noon and then take a long break with a siesta. When possible, they then wash their clothes and take a shower in the shelter. Afterwards, they walk through the early evening as far as they are able. All of the pilgrims carry their own supplies. Along the way, there are sufficient villages and towns for regular grocery stops. It is not complicated and everything one needs can be easily found. When we are honest with ourselves, we find that it is actually not as much as one would think.

Unlike the three-day pilgrimage from Chartres to Paris, the body becomes quickly used to the routine of the walk. Even the backpack is no longer heavy after the 2nd day. We suffered more from the beating sunshine, as there was almost always a light wind, and many underestimated the heat and were badly sunburned. But almost no one we met had serious difficulties with their

The roadside changes quite a bit, and so does the surrounding countryside: From sandy and dry to steep and stony, from pleasant to diffi-



Fromista

feet. The opinions differed greatly as to the proper footwear. From hiking shoes to sandals, flip-flops and casual loafers, we saw everything, but mostly hiking shoes – which we also chose to wear. As we were accompanied by a priest (Rev. Fr. Jürgen Wegner), we had daily Mass. Usually, we were able to find the key for a church for Mass and often it was a very beautiful and old church. However, when we were too far from a town, it was possible for the Mass to be said in the open air. One advantage here was that the altar server could not fall asleep as easily as in the comfortable chair-stall of some churches. We greatly enjoyed our independence and took each day as it came. The planning was very flexible, according to our needs.

Arriving at the goal of the pilgrimage

We reached Compostela on a weekday morning, together with many other pilgrims, and our first stop was the imposing cathedral where the bones of the Saint rest. A never ending stream of pilgrims forms a queue in front of the relics of Saint James, and unfortunately, at peak hours, it is impossible to pray there for very long. (However, during our stay in Compostela, we were able to have daily Mass at one of the cathedral's side altars, for which we were very glad). We had reached our goal and were happy, but also tired; we sat in front of the cathedral and consulted each other as to the continued orga-

nization of our pilgrimage. It is not unusual to be approached by some citizens of Compostela, who invite the pilgrims to stay in their homes at reasonable rates. Of course, this is not without risk, but often such invitations have the advantage of being right in the city, whereas the hospices and hotels lies far from the city or are quite costly. This we also experienced during our stay in Compostela. Without a doubt, the cathedral with the relics is the central point of this city. But also impressive is the whole city's center which, together with the cathedral and the Camino, forms part of our cultural heritage.

Unlike in the Middle Ages, we are no longer used to traveling long distances on foot. And of course, there are days when one wishes for a lounge-chair in the shade. However, as in the days of old, it is still possible for us, when we honestly try, to reach inner quiet and to become recollected on the way to Compostela. Much of what occupies our minds and weighs on us in our daily lives becomes suddenly secondary and passes to a lesser importance, where it actually belongs. One is alone, with oneself and with God. We invest much time and money in important or seemingly important things. Do we not frequently overlook the essential?

We will be there, on the way to Santiago, to Compostela – but what about you?



Burgos