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Introduction

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The Way of Saint James

Volume II



Georgiana Goddard King

THE WAY OF SAINT JAMES

By

GEORGIANA GODDARD KING, M. A.

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of America

In Three Volumes

Volume II

Illustrated

With a new introduction by

George D. Greenia, College of William & Mary

Pilgrims Process, Inc.

Santa Fe, New Mexico

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Goddard King, M. A.

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Introduction

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It's a great service to bring Georgiana Goddard King back into print. Yes, she's a wonderful read, the first American to recount her pilgrimage on the Camino in the first-person narrative that's become such an explosive genre in the past thirty years. But more significantly, King is perhaps the first truly modern writer to place herself at the center of both autobiographical and scholarly Camino journalism from any country, including Spain.

King also knows her scholarly sources in their original languages and doesn't bother to translate much of what she cites. She had the good sense to separate the durable authorities from those that have been set aside by later researchers. She appreciates the work of Gaston Paris, Joseph Bédier and, almost amazingly, the fieldwork on Spanish ballads by José Menéndez Pidal before he became completely eclipsed by his son Ramón, the giant who overshadowed Spanish studies for virtually the entire century.

King is probably the last serious researcher to verify the intervals needed for Aimery Picaud's stages by mule and horseback over comparable trails – and she even ate the same dish of eels in pastry at Portomarín as mentioned in sixteenth-century guidebooks. What a delight.

Although her writing style is occasionally quaint, even precious, King can be amusingly frank about her professional colleagues' shortcomings. She knows the Mediterranean joke about *campanilismo*: "some very distinguished Frenchmen ... have fallen ... into the fault of not getting, intellectually, the sound of your own town belfry out of your ears" (I:10). On a journey that will end at the Praza de Obradoiro, the craftsman's work yard, King declares from the outset that what matters is not cranky debates on French style and Spanish innovation but who was carving the stone.

That detachment from adulation of all things French serves her well. There's something charming about how King mentions Lourdes as merely another train station on her way south toward the Spanish border in Vol. I. The apparitions that made Lourdes a site of pilgrimage occurred in 1858, a full fifty years before she passed that way, but its architecture and cult are far too new to be of any interest to her. She even has a wry comment on Lourdes in Vol. II, about its spotty performance when it comes to miracles.

King's survey of Las Huelgas is also a disciplined one: she limits herself to the High Middle Ages with its French influences in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and its churning embellishments until the fifteenth. She looks sternly aside when Spain moves into the Plateresque, and she only skims the fine Mozarabic coffered ceilings in the cloisters and inlaid wooden doors.

Best of all, she's the pilgrim traveler. She knows the pride of innkeepers who can boast a clean, wide, guest room overlooking "a garden that smelt of lilies and roses under the dew-fall" (I:143). She reflects on the psychology of the bone-tired sojourner: "There the traveler foredone may subside upon the conventions of the trained servant, a mechanism more perfect than any lifeless [device].... As on a featherbed, the exhausted personality declines and sinks" (II:4).

It's fair to recognize that Georgiana Goddard King exercises a woman's assessment of history and culture. Her traveling companion Jehane by her side, King notes the long and, for the first three centuries at least, successful independence of the Cistercian nuns of Las Huelgas. Their royal station and papal connections helped fend off male ecclesiastical encroachment until the sixteenth century, not only for Las Huelgas but also for its daughter houses near the Camino, at Cañas and Gradefes. Her cordial reception by the abbess of Las Huelgas in 1917 notes the sisters' continued refinement, neither bored, nor impatient, nor moved by unseemly curiosity. King was plainly moved by their honest prayers for her safe travels.

Elsewhere she tries to rationalize the spirituality of the inevitable peasant *beatas*: "Every town has these little churches, that stay open after dark for a few veiled, whispering women. They have a special feeling, like the scent of dried leaves, like the taste of night

air, like the hushed Friday evening of the return from Calvary in Ribalta's painting. ... The subdued glow of light, the warm smell, the rustling human figures, offer something of the attraction of the hearth, without the *ennui* of home" (II:66-67). This is more folk anthropology than science, but it's entirely sympathetic.

This is the Camino before any regular signage, before squabbles about definitive or "original" routes, and even before major portions along the Camino Francés were accessible on a routine basis. King never made the trek from Burgos to Frómista because neither mules nor carriages could be had from local farmers during the months she happened to be in Spain. But it *is* the same Camino with all the stops and monuments we know, many in their former ruined state and none gentrified. For many stretches of the pure Camino de Santiago, Georgiana Goddard King is still among our best and freshest companions.