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Foreword

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ROUTLEDGE STUDIES IN RELIGION, TRAVEL,
AND TOURISM

The Camino de Santiago in the 21st Century

Interdisciplinary Perspectives
and Global Views

Edited by
Samuel Sánchez y Sánchez
and Annie Hesp



Routledge Studies in Religion, Travel, and Tourism

Edited by John Eade, Roehampton University, Ian Reader,
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and Global Views

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Foreword

We are in an age when many travelers prefer not to be explorers. Adventurers in prior generations longed to be the first to sojourn to China, sail around a storm-wracked cape, or find the source of the Nile or the true North Pole. Our modern era has turned travel into more easily repeatable forms of venturing outward with the goal of not being the first to arrive but joining a continuous stream of “virtual returnees” who take fleeting possession of the once new.

These contemporary travelers are far from deceived or dishonest. They know they are not pioneers, but they gladly echo the gestures of those they admire. They repeat arduous treks in usually far less risky ways, honoring their predecessors' accomplishments and earning the right to savor a goal achieved through slogging effort. The business of adventure travel is now decidedly a commercial enterprise, and like many commodities, it encourages a democratization of experiences. Expeditions once led only by wealthy traders and well-financed scientific entrepreneurs are now accessible to those of more modest means and from every nation at once. The hierarchy of valiant captain and intrepid naturalist is also gone. Every hiker is scout, provisioner, and summiteer. In a global age, all travelers are citizens of the planet, and their passport is their will to venture out.

Pilgrims are world citizens too. They wander the same trails and territories as traditional explorers to survey foreign landscape for their spiritual significance. They are all “repeaters,” never first-time adventurers, and they prefer it so. The re-creation of the journey matters the most, and they long to recover not the first foray but the footprints of those repeaters before them. Pilgrims are nostalgic for nostalgia.

Those who have made the trip to Santiago de Compostela and the tomb of St. James the apostle seek the saint, but more doggedly they seek the collective memory of seeking a saint than needing the apostle himself.

This collection of essays gathered by Samuel Sánchez y Sánchez and Annie Hesp document the longings of one mighty stream of travelers who have become, unexpectedly in these incredulous times, the iconic modern pilgrims. The Jacobean routes draw hundreds of thousands from across the world who have become model seekers, if not precisely model believers.

Largely unaffiliated, they invariably respect the mosaic of faith and doubt harbored by their companions of the trail. Tourism is a journey that seeks an authentic other, while pilgrimage longs for an authentic self.

Pilgrimage studies was interdisciplinary from the start when Victor and Edith Turner invited fellow scholars into a conversation on anthropological approaches to faith and community. Since then the expanding discussion has often sobered researchers on tourism and sometimes vexed those in religious studies. It has been no small advantage that as the exchange of ideas widened, no one discipline has been able to impose its paradigm on the study of pilgrimage, not sociology or history, not the fine arts or migration studies, not economics or sociology. For many in the beginning, travel for transformation seemed more of an academic curiosity than a pressing social issue, and all too often a mere runaway metaphor as eager joiners baptized their jaunts to the grocery store and commuting to work as “pilgrimages.” For those determined to keep humanities research secular, positivist, and targeted toward humane causes, this ever-widening ambit of travel bore the scent of things too foreign, antique, and *vaguely National Geographic*. It was easy to set aside pilgrimage as a boutique curiosity.

But in the last thirty years, quests for deeper meaning have mushroomed into a world phenomenon, a major force in global travel and a vast map of contested places—often contested by pilgrims superficially on the same page in the same place, whether it’s visitors to Holocaust camps, Ground Zero in New York, or oxygen-depleted summits in the Andes or Himalayas. Soviet-era memorial monstrosities in steel and concrete were erected without irony but now attract throngs of gawking Russian millennials—visitors President Vladimir Putin seems determined to talk out of their sardonic detachment. The Temple Mount in Jerusalem commands the reverence of multiple faith groups, some of whom will fend off unwelcome worshipers with guns. Routinely unscripted, pilgrimage invites interpretation by both travelers and hosts eager to announce a journey’s “true” meaning.

The Camino de Santiago deserves special attention, as Sánchez y Sánchez and Hesp and their contributors so ably prove. Scholars struggle to understand all the energies in play. Over the past half century, it has become arguably the iconic pilgrimage in Western culture. Historically Catholic, it now makes room for trekkers from every mainline creed, perhaps a majority of whom are doggedly unaffiliated with any church. The ostensible goal of this pilgrimage is indeed visited by millions, but everyone seems to agree that the journey eclipses the destination. While till a first-world experience and adventure it lifts social classes and diverse nationalities from cautious tolerance to sincere camaraderie. It’s tourism that promises the authentic but also a spiritual venture that suggest that the true and valuable will arise from within.

The revival of the Camino de Santiago in the late 20th century seems insistent on not requiring denominational credentials of any sort, so everyone is welcome, from “industrial-strength Catholics” (now a wry joke

among many modern Roman Catholics trying hard to be tolerant of their excessively fervent brethren), to mainline Christians of every tradition, to bearers of aromas, crystals, and grudges against their former churches.

And who “owns” this pilgrimage (Gardner, Mentley, Signori)? Those who can convincingly dress the part whether in wool or Gortex (Dunn)? Did the social engineering and message manipulation of the Franco dictatorship taint the Jacobean experience or pave the way for its redeployment as Spain’s humblest gift to the modern world (Talbot)?

If this sort of trek implies a journey toward transcendence, could one ever measure its success? Those who turn it into modern graphic arts like films and comic book (Blanc-Hoang, Moore), or only those walkers who blog in first-person confessional diaries (Ogden, Rasch)? Their companions who carry them emotionally toward their goal, and bear their lost treasures a token of good faith (Sánchez y Sánchez)? Those who carry the message of hospitality out to the world (Genoni)?

On a planet bruised by grinding militarization, ruthless forms of commerce, and wearisome mass Americanization, the Camino de Santiago is a journey of explorations that heal, just as much as it demands that scholars patch together their disciplinary insights in fresh new ways.

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