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*Pilgrimage to the End of the World: The Road to Santiago de Compostela* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2004; hardcover and paperback editions).

### Abstract

With the sole exception of warfare, pilgrimage to some especially holy site or to the relics of some miracle-working saint was the single greatest adventure a person could have for over a thousand years of Western culture.

Almost inexplicably, one of the great medieval pilgrimages, the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, not only continues to this day but is currently undergoing a remarkable renewal of interest in Europe and in the United States. In *Pilgrimage to the End of the World: The Road to Santiago de Compostela*, I recount my own experiences in undertaking this grueling medieval pilgrimage on foot from Le Puy in south-central France to Santiago in northwestern Spain--a journey of two and a half months and a thousand miles.

The book is composed of four parts, each with a distinctly different aim.

Unlike most other accounts of the pilgrimage, the core of this book (the second chapter) is not a day-by-day description of the journey but a series of reflections on a number of different levels of what is, ultimately, the internal experience for many. It is an attempt to evoke the texture of the pilgrimage, to evoke some of the impressions and feelings that I and others have had on it, and, to a certain extent, an attempt to bridge the chasm between modernity and this inherently pre-modern experience. It takes up a variety of different aspects of the pilgrimage through descriptions and personal anecdotes that range from the serious to the humorous: the astonishingly beautiful scenery; the people along the way; the complex layering of history that was and still is such an integral part of the pilgrimage; the great physical hardships of pain, hunger, thirst, exposure to the elements, and general deprivation of comfort and all that's familiar; and the effect that these extreme physical conditions had in inducing a mental state that sensed time, distance, and personal experiences in a way that is totally foreign to contemporary culture.

Because this book is meant to kindle the interests of a broad public, I have bracketed my account of the internal experience of the pilgrimage between two other parts. The first side of this bracket (the first chapter) provides a necessary historical basis from which to understand the pilgrimage. In writing this, I have tried to present the historical pilgrimage from the perspective of the experience of the medieval pilgrim as much as the medieval

sources would allow. The other side of the bracket consists of the third and fourth chapters. The third chapter addresses what might be called the external experience of the pilgrimage through photographs of the country encountered along the way, including the towns, people, churches, and other ancient sites that are such an important part of the pilgrimage. The fourth chapter might be called the reality of the road: pretty much everything a person might need to know and do in order to take the first step on the pilgrimage road--and the second.

*Pilgrimage to the End of the World: The Road to Santiago de Compostela* is a reflection on the multi-faceted experience that the pilgrimage is: a process of movement, of change, of the confrontation of cultures, the confrontation of insider and outsider, and the relation of all this to a deep and profound layering of historical cultures, including the present one. It articulates one of the central experiences in the formation of pre-modern Western culture in a way that is essentially a work of public history.