

Eat, Sleep, Walk, Graffeti: tangible evidence of the modern pilgrims' mindset

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Abstract

The graffiti of the final 100km along the French Way of the Camino comprises ink scrawls of text. The graffiti is in the context of pilgrimage and the Camino, however, they are not sentiments of well-wishes or religious motifs as one might expect. Instead, the predominance of the gravity comprises a destination focused text. An example of this 'Santiago didn't start in Sarria', is suggestive of the competitive mindset of modern pilgrims that believe they have travelled further than those around them. Whilst this is certainly the case for some pilgrims, who have travelled from Burgos, León, Roncesvalles, or even St Jean Pied de Port (780km from Santiago de Compostela), others travelled from much further afield, and some from Sarria (100km from Santiago de Compostela). The underlying tone of such graffiti suggests a competitive element of pilgrimage and challenges the concept of a 'real pilgrim' amongst those that travel the Camino.



Introduction

Whilst on pilgrimage, it might be expected to experience heirophany (Skousen 2018). However, the route to Santiago de Compostela suggests an alternative mindset to one of sacred devotion (Dunn 2016). Indeed, the presence of sacred manifestations in objects, including trees, stones and even the modern waymarkers is prevalent (Photo 1 is an example of an untouched waymarker). Trees and branches dripping in scallop shells and ribbons (Photo 2), stones with the remains of written well-wishes and blessings, and waymarkers laden with pebbles and former pilgrim boots are indicative of the more personal and mindful focus of the pilgrim; they are a statement of belief and presence (Candy 2007).

Certainly, there is evidence of heirophany along the final 100 kilometers (km) of the St Frances' Way of the Camino. However, more prevalent is the remains of an alternative mindset; one of self-righteousness and a 'holier-than-thou' discourse as modern pilgrims approached their destination of Santiago to receive their Compostela (the certificate of completion). The waymarkers along the final 100km of the Camino are littered with scrawls and pilgrim graffiti is comparatively prevalent to the previous km. They form the tangible remains of modern pilgrims' mindset and their attitude to those they perceived were only travelling the mandatory km to their collective destination (100km if walking and 200km if cycling to receive the Compostela).



Historical graffiti artists?

Graffiti is not a new concept, and remains of such have been identified throughout the world and over centuries. Moreover, graffiti associated with pilgrimage and pilgrims has been identified in places of worship and along pilgrim routes. A recent study of historic pilgrim marks and etchings at Chichester Cathedral (UK) identified the possible pilgrim route within the Church (Ingram 2015). The medieval graffiti formed symbols, such as crosses, geometrics, and text, which were identified as common themes of this period (Pritchard 1967). These marks are not formed of pen and ink, however, they do confirm that graffitiing pilgrims are not confined to the 21st century and the graffiti of this discourse is similarly prosaic.

The evidence of a mindset

The evidence of a pilgrim's mindset is left as text predominantly on the Camino waymarkers (Photos 3, 4). The text, as depicted in Photos 3 and 4, commenced at and throughout the last 100km of the Camino. The text included words that could be deemed disparaging, competitive or written in jest, in some instances. *Santiago/Jesus didn't start in Sarria* is the main theme of the graffiti. Certainly, the graffiti depicted here does not provide evidence of all pilgrims' mindsets along the Camino. Rather, a few pilgrims that wish to 'voice' their thoughts and make known to fellow pilgrims that they may not believe that a real pilgrim takes on the minimum effort necessary to be confirmed as a pilgrim of the Camino. The presence of this graffiti has provided valuable evidence of how a modern pilgrim may approach their fellow travellers. However, it is also likely that individuals that graffiti such negative connotation may also provide

evidence of the individual aims and objectives of taking on pilgrimage and view the Camino as a sport, rather than religious or spiritual. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that the graffiti provides evidence of all pilgrims' mindsets.

Whilst the concept of a 'real pilgrim' has, perhaps, changed over the centuries, the need to define and control the definition has remained constant throughout the centuries and is also evident in the modern period. Moreover, it appears that pilgrims themselves contribute to the concept as much as the associated organisations.



Conclusion

The definition of a real pilgrim may have changed throughout history. However, the need to define and distinguish between those that travel along the Camino and those that have 'truly' earned the Compostela of the Camino is prevalent today. The graffiti along the last 100km from Sarria is evidence of just such. The motifs are not evidence of personal heirophany, rather evidence of a prosaic thought process, of competition, and the need for affirmation that some pilgrims require to feel as though they are indeed a real pilgrim of the modern era.

Reference List

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