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Pilgrims and Politics

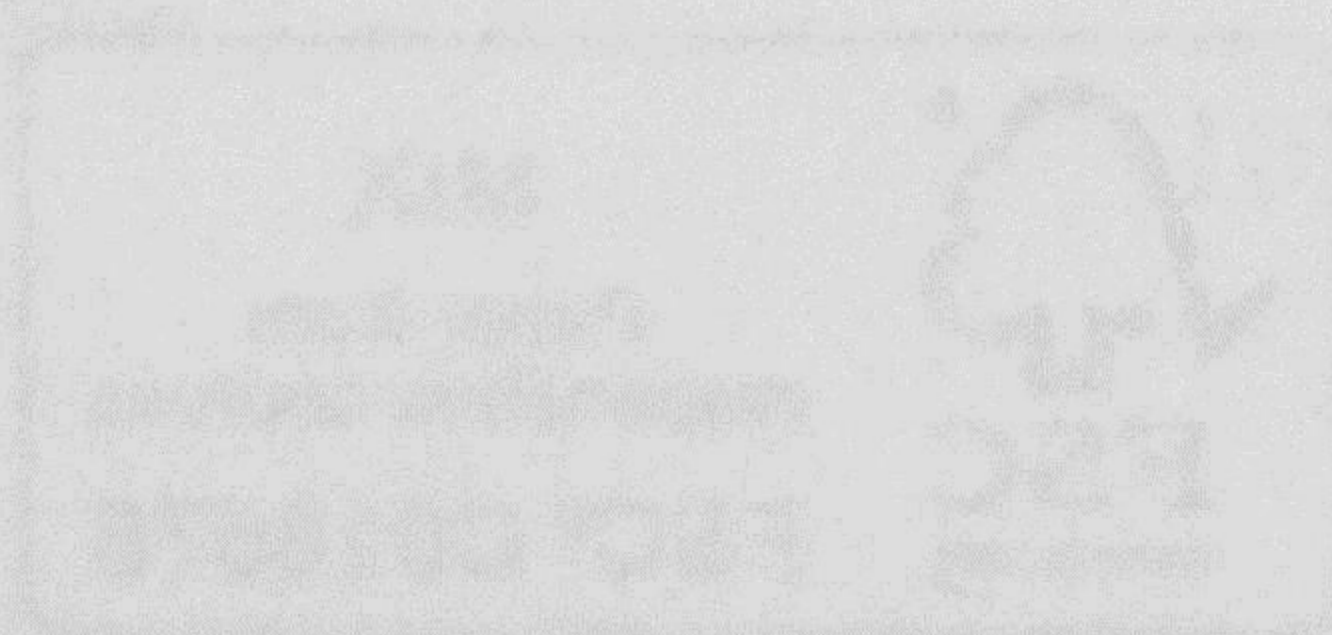
Rediscovering the power of the pilgrimage

Edited by

ANTÓN M. PAZOS

Instituto de Estudios Gallegos "Padre Sarmiento", CSIC, Spain

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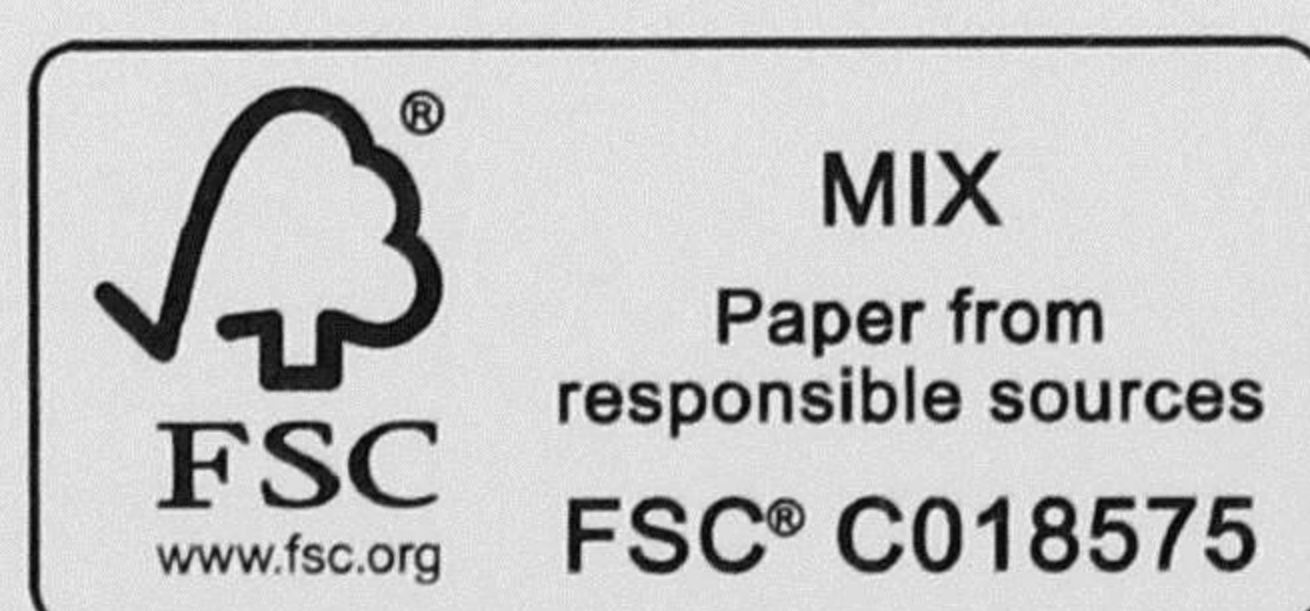
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Contents

<i>List of Maps and Tables</i>		<i>vii</i>
<i>List of Contributors</i>		<i>ix</i>
Introduction		1
1	The Pilgrims' Way of St James and Islam: Pilgrimage, Politics and Militias <i>Ana María Carballeira Debasa</i>	9
2	Political Pilgrims and Political Saints in Medieval England <i>Robert N. Swanson</i>	29
3	The Ordeal of Bishop Aaulfo: An Insight into the Relationship between Religion and Politics in the Beginnings of the Cult of Saint James <i>Carlos Baliñas Pérez</i>	47
4	Between Warfare and Conflict Resolution: Pilgrimage and Politics in the Holy Land <i>Yvonne Friedman</i>	55
5	The Role of the Order of St John in Pilgrimage and Politics: The Case of the North of Portugal <i>Paula Maria de Carvalho Pinto Costa</i>	69
6	Pilgrimage with Added Benefits: Pilgrims and Politics in the Rome of Innocent III <i>Brenda Bolton</i>	83
7	Lucca and Pilgrimage in the Later Middle Ages: A Two-Way Traffic <i>Christine Meek</i>	103

While it makes no claim to be covering all aspects of the relationship of pilgrimage and politics, the book as a whole provides an original perspective by means of which we may approach a human phenomenon that spans territories, eras and religions. Far from belonging to a medieval or superstitious past, it demonstrates that pilgrimage is still a vital and growing force. Catapulted by the ease of contemporary travel, it grows in such an unstoppable way that each year new places of pilgrimage are put on offer – or are invented by political and tourist agencies alike – intertwining contemporary awareness and its confused search for ‘meaning’ and transcendence.

Chapter 1

The Pilgrims' Way of St James and Islam: Pilgrimage, Politics and Militias

Ana María Carballeira Debasa

In order to understand the image that Muslims in the Middle Ages formed of the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, this paper reviews a series of Arabic narrative texts which mention it and which provide insight into its religious, political and military implications from the perspective of Muslim authors. This is one aspect of the cult of St James which has received little attention until recently¹ and which constitutes an interesting facet in contrast to its more familiar image in Christian circles.

Drawing on classical Arabic texts has proved extremely useful on account of the wealth of information they contain. Moreover, the limitations of the archival material for the Islamic West (al-Andalus and the Magreb) in the Middle Ages have increased the value of this type of material even more. Allowing for this, it is essential to consult historical and geographical sources on the topic as these provide a more extensive flow of information. What we are dealing with here are a dozen works, penned in Arabic by authors from both the Islamic West and the Islamic East, which include information gleaned from their reading as well as references passed on by word of mouth. Although it was commonplace for these authors to draw on data from their own experiences, the same cannot be said in the case that concerns us here, as none of them was personally acquainted with Christian territories. Likewise, when these writers were not describing a contemporary situation, they very frequently referred back to earlier works to

¹ On this, see A. M^a. Carballeira Debasa, 'El fenómeno jacobeo en la narrativa árabe', in *Actas del Congreso Internacional "In marsupiis peregrinorum. Circulación de textos e imaxes arredor do Camiño de Santiago na Idade Media"* (24-28 de marzo de 2008) (Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2010), pp.385-400); idem, *Galicia y los gallegos en las fuentes árabes medievales* (Madrid: CSIC, 2007), pp.78-85; idem, 'La peregrinación jacobea en la literatura árabe medieval', *De Madrid al Camino. Boletín Informativo de la Asociación de Amigos de los Caminos de Santiago de Madrid. Actas del Seminario José Antonio Cimadevila Covelo de Estudios Jacobeos. Edición 2008* (June 2009), pp.8-11; C. de la Puente, 'La campaña de Santiago de Compostela (387/997): yihad y legitimación del poder', *Qurtuba*, 6 (2001), pp.11-13.

write their texts; hence the existence of reiterated information. The absence of a critical approach explains why contradictory versions are sometimes put forward for the same facts. Nevertheless, this compilation of data is praiseworthy, as it has led to the conservation of texts extracted from other works that are no longer extant.²

However, it should be noted that this kind of material has its limitations, notably that information on Jacobean pilgrimages is fragmentary and scattered within the documentary corpus. Moreover, the absence of references to this question in a large number of Arabic texts is explained by the fact that certain authors, when they describe al-Andalus, do not venture beyond the Islamic frontiers of the Peninsula. Despite all this, the fact that some of the authors who mention the Jacobean cult are not of Andalusí, but of North African or Oriental origin, makes it clear that this pilgrimage had transcended the boundaries of the Peninsula.

Likewise, the various authors' geographical and chronological positions may have limited the perspectives of these Arabic texts. In general, their knowledge of the geography of the Christian north is weak, such that imprecise, inexact and incongruent statements are frequently found. The authors from the Islamic East were not alone in holding inaccurate notions of peninsular geography as the Andalusí themselves also had very imprecise knowledge of the topography of the northern, and more particularly the northwestern, quadrant.

In what follows, I shall gather together the threads of information in medieval Arabic sources that relate to the shrine of St James at Santiago de Compostela, as well as to the routes trodden by the travellers on their Jacobean pilgrimage, just as they are set down in the work of a twelfth-century Muslim author. Subsequently, I will discuss the religious, political and military repercussions which arose from the cult of St James in the Islamic world, including a special mention of the way in which the city of Santiago and its church were sacked towards the end of the tenth century by the might of al-Andalus.

The Shrine at Santiago de Compostela

Various Arab-Muslim authors dedicate passages in their works to more or less extensive and detailed descriptions of the Jacobean pilgrimage. The greater part

² More detailed information on Arab authors and their works may be found in Carballeira Debas, *Galicia y los gallegos en las fuentes árabes*, pp. 27-48, 187-8. As a complete list of the sources used to prepare this study may be found in the appendix at the end of this chapter, henceforth only abbreviated references to these same sources are used.

of these accounts refer to the shrine at Santiago de Compostela,³ which means that it is usual to find such references in the various depictions of the city of Santiago made by these authors in their geographical repertories. In general, we are dealing with accounts which are usually very brief and scarcely replete with detail, although they do indicate the religious importance accorded to this city both within and beyond the medieval Christian world.⁴ In fact, the renown of Compostela frequently appears to be overshadowed by the fame of the shrine sheltered within the city walls. It is precisely this inextricable link which made Santiago an inevitable landmark for Muslims in the northwest of the Peninsula.

Just as the representation of this urban area is undermined by constant references to its most important monument – the shrine sheltering within its walls – very few authors include biographical details of the apostle in their works and they do so, in general, in quite a superficial way. Curiously, all of them are located in the context of the Magreb. It is a strange fact that these types of accounts are not found in the works of Andalusí authors, who might be expected to include some biographical note in their writings, on account of their geographical proximity to the north of the Peninsula. The absence of a brief biography of the apostle is not so surprising in texts penned by authors from the Islamic East, precisely because of their own geographical remoteness.

³ Among the studies based on Arabic sources concerning the city of Santiago, its church and the apostle, see S. Abboud, 'La ciudad del templo de oro', *La aventura de la historia*, 8 (June 1999), pp.77-9; Carballeira Debasa, 'El fenómeno jacobeo en la narrativa árabe', pp.387-393; idem, *Galicia y los gallegos en las fuentes árabes*, pp.77-81; idem, 'La peregrinación jacobea en la literatura árabe', pp.9-11; J.-P. Molénat, 'Shant Yakub', in *Enciclopedia del Islam*, IX, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1997), pp.304-5; Puente, 'La campaña de Santiago de Compostela', pp.11-13. For a more complete view of this Galician city in the medieval period see, for example, F. López Alsina, *La ciudad de Santiago de Compostela en la Alta Edad Media* (Santiago de Compostela: Ayuntamiento-Centro de Estudios Jacobeos-Universidad de Santiago, 1988).

⁴ With regard to the importance of Compostela as a place of pilgrimage, an illustrative example is the visit made by Algazel, a poet from Jaen, as the highpoint of his embassy – as a representative of the emir of Cordoba 'Abd al-Rahman II – to a Viking leader, a little after the Viking invasion of the Iberian Peninsula in the year 844. Having fulfilled his mission, Algazel left the Viking camp accompanied by the king's ambassadors. They carried a missive addressed to the governor of Santiago and took the opportunity to make a pilgrimage to the tomb of the apostle. Their stay lasted two months, after which Algazel returned to the Umayyad capital. See Abboud, 'La ciudad del templo de oro', p.77; Carballeira Debasa, 'El fenómeno jacobeo en la narrativa árabe', p.387; idem, 'La peregrinación jacobea en la literatura árabe', p.9; A.A. El-Hajji, *Andalusian diplomatic relations with Western Europe during the Umayyad period (AH 138-366/AD 755-976). An historical survey* (Beirut: Dar al-Irshad, 1970), p.181. With regard to this anecdote, the account of the pilgrimage to Compostela at a time when the Jacobean cult was still at a formative stage is quite striking.

The first Arab geographer to emphasize the religious facet of this Galician city was the eleventh-century Andalusí, al-Bakri, who wrote of Compostela as the city of the Church of Gold, where a religious festival was held to which people from the land of the Franks, from Rome and from all the neighbouring regions flocked.⁵

Although the descriptions in the Arabic texts reflect the great importance that the Muslims themselves gave to this Christian sanctuary, it is al-Idrisi, the famous twelfth-century geographer from Ceuta, who refers to the magnificence of the church in the greatest detail, in the following words:

This church is known as a destination and place of pilgrimage. The Christians come to it on pilgrimage from all places and no church is more impressive, with the exception of the one at Jerusalem. It resembles the Temple of the Resurrection (Holy Sepulchre) because of the beauty of its construction, the breadth of its space and the treasures that it guards, the fruit of very generous offerings and gifts of alms. There are within it great quantity of crosses wrought in gold and silver, encrusted with different kinds of precious stones, red hyacinth and topaz, and, more than this, the number of wrought crosses is over three hundred betwixt large and small. There are nigh on two hundred altarpieces everywhere ornamented in gold and silver. One hundred priests officiate at the services, without counting the helpers and other servants. [This church] is made of stone and lime cement in alternate layers, and is surrounded by houses in which the priests, the monks, deacons, the acolytes and the choristers live.⁶

The texts of other authors project a similar image, which reflects the transcendent role played by this shrine throughout Christendom as well as its singularity, which was acknowledged by the Muslims themselves. Such is the case of al-Zuhri, a twelfth-century Almerian geographer, who situates the church at Santiago in the middle of an isle in an inlet, pointing out that there is only one entrance to it.⁷ His work highlights the importance of this church, finding similarities with that of Jerusalem. This same geographer also states that the church in question was consecrated with the name of an apostle of Christ known as Jacobo (James), which endows it with sufficient merit to turn it into a place of pilgrimage for Christians from the lands of Syria, Constantinople, Rome and so on. Al-Zuhri underlines the fact that Christians from the Islamic East who wished to gain the title of pilgrim had to travel to Compostela, whereas those who found themselves in Santiago had to walk to Jerusalem in order to achieve that same

⁵ See al-Bakri, *Kitab al-Masalik wa-l-mamalik*, ed. p.60 and trans. p.16.

⁶ See al-Idrisi, *Kitab Nuzhat al-mushtaq*, ed. Saavedra, pp.62-3 (my translation).

⁷ This description is reminiscent of the 'ria' or firth of Muros/Noya, near the city of Santiago.

honour.⁸ In this context it should not be forgotten that, in the Islamic tradition, the title of "pilgrim" (*hajj*, in Arabic) precedes the first name of the Muslim who has made the pilgrimage to the Holy Places of Islam. The fact of having complied with this Koranic precept, at least once in a lifetime, bestows on that individual considerable social prestige within the Muslim community, whose members profess great respect towards him.⁹ In the passage quoted above, al-Zuhri exalts Jacobean pilgrimage in the light of the importance of pilgrimage in Islam.

Other texts contribute little or nothing to this question. Thus, Jacobean pilgrimage is not given any special attention by Muslim authors of the thirteenth century. In fact Ibn Sa'id al-Magribi from Granada, the only geographer who contributes some sort of information in this respect, says nothing more than that the tomb of the apostle Iago (James), who is held in high esteem among the Christians, is located in Santiago.¹⁰

Nor are Arabic sources from the fourteenth century characterized by an abundance of accounts relating to the subject in hand. For example, the oriental geographer Abu l-Fida' attributes the great veneration that Christians feel for Compostela to the shrine of the apostle Iago.¹¹ Likewise, the testimony of the prolific author, Ibn al-Khatib, contributes certain nuances to this idea, noting that it is the most important shrine for Christians in the territory of the Peninsula, if not the entire continent.¹² For his part, the fourteenth-century Magreban historian Ibn 'Idari includes some biographical notes on St James the Great in his work. He tells us that this figure was one of the 12 apostles of Christ and the closest to him, on account of the kinship between them. He affirms that, like Jesus, St James was also the son of Joseph, the carpenter, for which reason Christians called this apostle "the brother of God". According to the evidence collected by Ibn 'Idari, St James was bishop of Jerusalem and preached throughout the world. One of the places that he visited on this journey was Galicia, returning later to the land of Syria, where he died at the age of 125 years. His disciples carried his body to the northwest of the Peninsula and buried it in a church that was found close to the place that he had once visited.¹³ It is curious that, in this case, mention is made of a pre-existing church, contrary to the Christian tradition, which holds that it was erected at the site of his burial.

⁸ See al-Zuhri, *Kitab al-Dja'rafiyya*, ed. pp.201-2.

⁹ On pilgrimage in Islam, see, for example, F.E. Peters, *The Hajj. The Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca and the Holy Places* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

¹⁰ See Ibn Sa'id al-Magribi, *Kitab al-Jugrafiya*, ed. p.114 and trans. p.322.

¹¹ See Abu l-Fida', *Kitab Taqwim al-buldan*, ed. pp.182-3 and trans. II, 1st part, p.246.

¹² See Ibn al-Khatib, *Kitab A'mal al-'alam*, ed. Lévi-Provençal, p.67.

¹³ See Ibn 'Idari, *Bayan* II, ed. pp.294-295 and trans. pp.491-2.

However, al-Himyari, a fifteenth-century Magreban geographer, in addition to mentioning the importance of this church for Christians, clarifies that it was built over the remains of the apostle Iago (James) to commemorate a religious festival that is celebrated each year on an appointed day. He refers to the martyrdom of St James in Jerusalem and to his disciples having subsequently placed his body in a boat. This sailed the Mediterranean until it entered the Atlantic and, finally, ran aground on the coast close to the site of the church in question.¹⁴

The last evidence for this is that recorded by al-Maqqari, the great seventeenth-century Magreban compiler. This author, basing his writings on earlier works, affirms that the existing church at Santiago was the object of great veneration among Christians, it being equivalent to the Mosque at Jerusalem or the Ka'ba at Mecca for the Muslims. He adds that Christians from various places flocked to the annual gathering that was held in that city, where they visited the shrine of one of the twelve Apostles of Jesus, son of Mary, known by the names of Iago or James. Likewise, in his *Nafh al-tib*, al-Maqqari informs us that the Christians who went on pilgrimage to the shrine at Compostela were granted the title of pilgrim. Regarding the figure of James, al-Maqqari repeats the same themes as his predecessors. Thus, he limits himself to saying that he was Christ's most dearly loved apostle, who was bishop at Jerusalem and had preached the Christian religion all over the world. On his return to the land of Syria, he died at a very advanced age, his mortal remains being transported and laid to rest at the church of Compostela.¹⁵

The Jacobean Routes

Although information concerning the city of Santiago and its famous church is not particularly rare in medieval Arabic sources, authors generally remained silent over the routes followed by the pilgrims in order to reach the shrine of the apostle.¹⁶ Among the exceptions, mention may be made of a brief reference

¹⁴ See al-Himyari, *Kitab al-Rawd al-mi'tar*, ed. p.115 and trans. p.141.

¹⁵ See al-Maqqari, *Nafh al-tib*, ed. I, pp.413-16 and trans. I, pp.193-6.

¹⁶ For an extensive and detailed study of the Jacobean routes to Compostela, interpreting the information gathered by al-Idrisi, see C. Dubler, 'Los caminos a Compostela en la obra de Idrisi', *Al-Andalus*, 14 (1949), pp.59-122; see also idem, 'Idrisiana hispánica I. Probables itinerarios de Idrisi por al-Andalus', *Al-Andalus*, 30 (1965), pp.89-137. This question has been approached, although in a more cursory way, by Abboud, 'La ciudad del templo de oro', pp.79-80; Carballeira Debasa, 'El fenómeno jacobeo en la narrativa árabe' pp.394-399; idem, *Galicia y los gallegos en las fuentes árabes*, pp.81-85 and idem, 'La peregrinación jacobea en la literatura árabe', pp.8-9.

in the work of al-Zuhri to what was known as the French Pilgrims' Way. This geographer limited himself to saying that the road that leads to Santiago is found to the north of the river Duero.¹⁷

In reality, the only author to offer a detailed description of the Jacobean routes is al-Idrisi, who dedicates eight pages of his geographical work to this. Even though it is certain that he had travelled the Iberian Peninsula, it appears quite unlikely that he had ever reached Christian territory. Thus, it is worth asking how this geographer managed to provide such a detailed description of the Jacobean routes for his readers. It is evident that the author not only draws on his own experience in his geographical treatise, but also on data taken from other sources of information – classical geographers and authors such as Ptolemy and Orosius as well as tenth-century Arab geographers such as al-Mas'udi, al-Razi and Ibn Hawqal. Moreover, al-Idrisi gathered abundant data on the Pilgrims' Way of St James from oral sources and certain phonetic elements in his work led Dubler¹⁸ to conclude that some of those interviewed might have included Galician-Portuguese sailors, Muslims from the Islamic-Christian area of Coimbra, Gascons from Bayonne and Castilians with some knowledge of the *Codex Calixtinus*. It should be borne in mind that Compostela reached its zenith in the twelfth century during al-Idrisi's lifetime, such that it had become a crossroads for people from all regions. Thus, all these sources formed a solid framework for this geographical description, on which I shall now focus my attention.

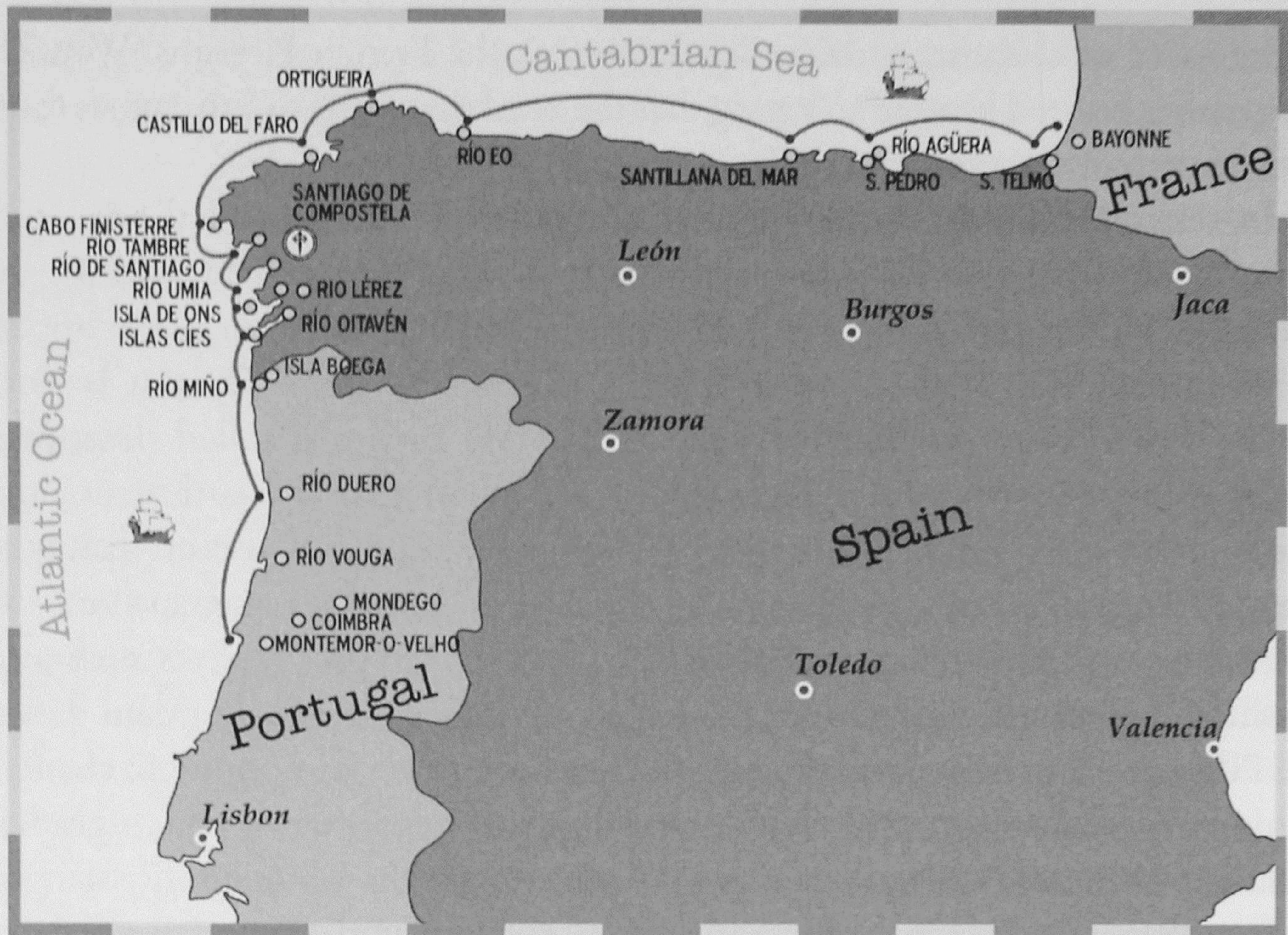
In the first place, al-Idrisi describes the maritime-river route from Coimbra to Santiago in reasonable detail, including the Atlantic coastline travelling in a south-northerly direction. On this route, he focuses on the estuaries of the main rivers of the Lower Rias in Galicia from the river Miño northwards. This itinerary raises numerous points relating to the ebb and flow of the Galician Rias – or firths – their navigability and other features of the coastline. These assessments are in general quite uniform in their content and accuracy.¹⁹

Interesting information may likewise be found on this matter in the short article by Á. Lorenzo Martínez, 'Noticias sobre el Camino de Santiago en dos geógrafos musulmanes del siglo XII', *Boletín de Estudios del Seminario "Fontán Sarmiento" de Hagiografía, Toponimia y Onomástica de Galicia*, 22 (2001), pp.63-5. The information contributed by al-Idrisi on the various routes of Galician geography may also be compared with the study of E. Ferreira Priegue, *Los caminos medievales de Galicia* (Ourense: Museo Arqueológico Provincial, 1988).

¹⁷ See *Kitab al-Dja'rafiyya*, ed. p.202. See also Lorenzo Martínez, 'Noticias sobre el Camino de Santiago', p.64.

¹⁸ C. Dubler, 'Los caminos a Compostela en la obra de Idrisi', pp.117-8.

¹⁹ See al-Idrisi, *Kitab Nuzhat al-mushtaq*, ed. Saavedra, pp.61-3 and trans. Saavedra, pp.74-7.



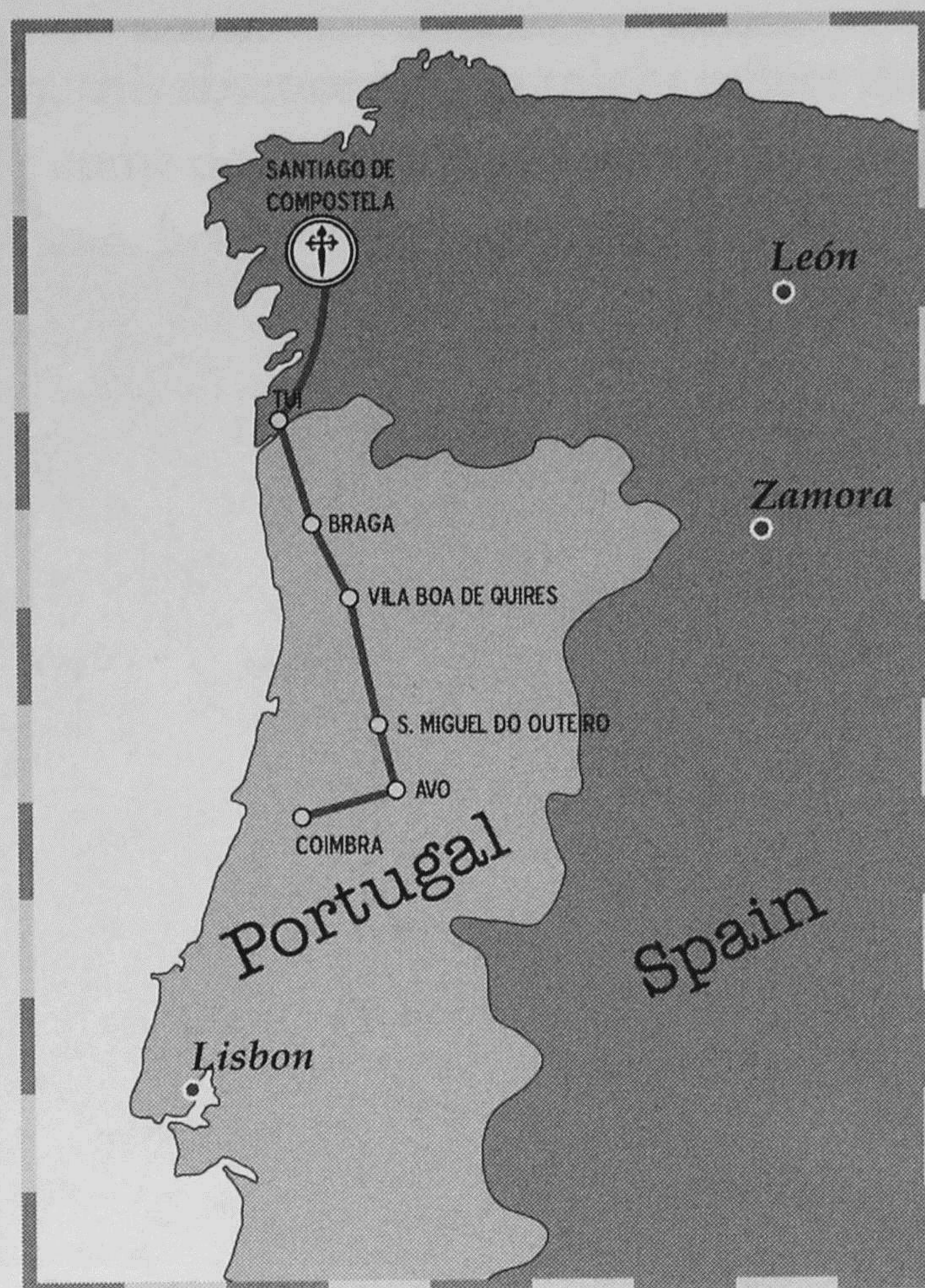
Map 1.1 Maritime routes Coimbra-Santiago-Bayonne

Al-Idrisi then follows the maritime route from Santiago to Bayonne in France, the precise detail of which is reasonably satisfactory as far as Ortigueira, but thereafter very cursory and weak in its description of the Cantabrian coastline up to the Bay of Biscay. On this occasion, the author appears to merge three different itineraries with very diverse features. The first, from Santiago to Ortigueira, leaves from three specific points: Cape Finisterre, La Coruña and Ortigueira. The second closely follows the Cantabrian coastline, the distances as marked out by al-Idrisi being far too short and names along the coastline extremely scarce. In the last section of this coastal itinerary that takes in the places near Bayonne, the number of toponyms is very much higher.²⁰

Subsequently, al-Idrisi moves south to describe the route overland from Coimbra to Santiago, an account that includes relatively few errors. This itinerary pays special attention to the stages of the journey through Portuguese lands, establishing the link to Santiago from Tui. Although the author does not make too many mistakes in this description, the scarcity of data contrasts with the detailed information on the maritime-river course from Coimbra to Santiago.²¹

²⁰ See al-Idrisi, *Kitab Nuzhat al-mushtaq*, ed. Saavedra, pp.63-5 and trans. Saavedra, pp.77-80.

²¹ Ibid. ed. Saavedra, p.66 and trans. Saavedra, p.80. As may be seen, Coimbra is the starting point for both a sea route and a land route to Santiago, given that this city linked the Christian and



Map 1.2 Overland route Coimbra-Santiago

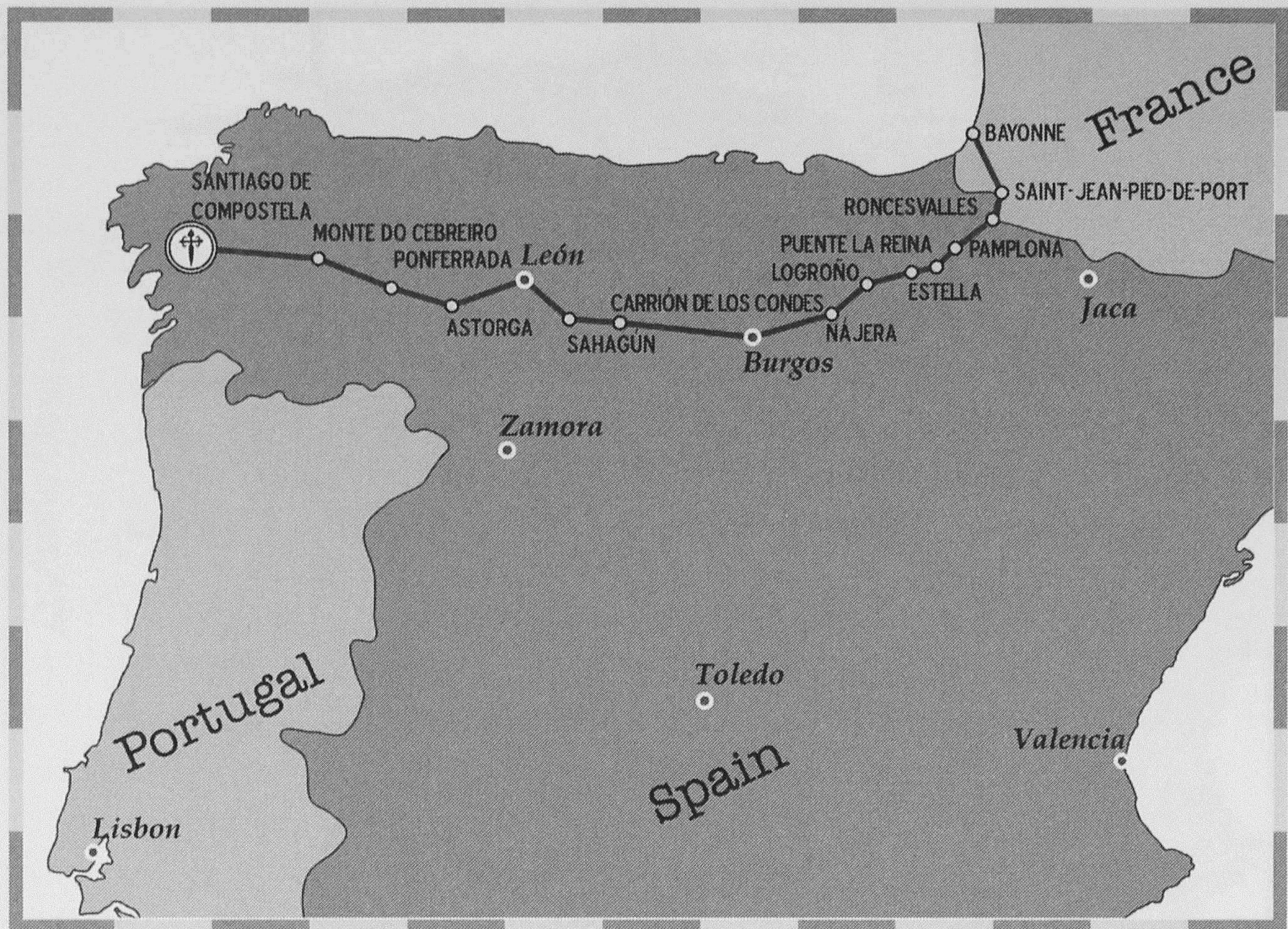
Finally, al-Idrisi provides information on the overland route from Bayonne to Santiago. He does so first of all in a westerly direction, setting out from Leon, although without the precision that characterizes the eastern leg of the journey. Neither are the stages in Galician territory marked out, it merely being indicated that, on leaving Santiago and passing through many villages and cultivated lands, one arrives at Mount Cebreiro, located close by the ravine of Piedrafita. Subsequently, the description of the route moves eastwards until it reaches France.²²

The extensive information that al-Idrisi offers the reader is offset by the presence of incongruities, doubts, repetitions and imprecision, largely resulting from the impossibility that he could personally have visited all the places to which he refers, as well as to the fact that only a first draft of his work has survived.

The author gathers information of a strictly geographical and toponymic nature in the description of these routes, on which I shall not dwell as such a task would go beyond the objectives of this essay. In any case, the annotations set down by al-Idrisi confirm the importance of the Pilgrims' Way of St James in the Christian medieval context and demonstrate that travellers were already on their

Muslim zones, thereby constituting an unavoidable point of reference.

²² Ibid. ed. Saavedra, pp.66-72 and trans. Saavedra, pp.80-6.



Map 1.3 Overland route Santiago-Bayonne

way to Compostela by the first half of the twelfth century. In fact, it was precisely in that period that this city rose to great heights in Christendom, having been granted the status of a metropolitan see, after which pilgrimages to this shrine were considered as meritorious as those made to either Jerusalem or Rome. It should also be recalled that the cult of Santiago arose in the context of the fight against Islam and was used as a symbol of Christian resistance.

Based on the data collected here it may be seen that references of a general nature to this Jacobean 'phenomenon,' rather than explicit references to the Pilgrims' Way of St James, predominate in Arabic sources. In fact, no more than two authors make explicit mention of the route followed by the pilgrims. In the other cases, the idea of the Pilgrims' Way may be understood as implicit in the texts. It is a curious fact that the geographers who followed al-Idrisi included none of the information in their works on the Jacobean routes that he had previously made available. This might lead one to think that the Muslims did not accord special consideration to the Way of St James. But the existence of explicit references to the importance of the Jacobean pilgrimage proves otherwise. Perhaps this absence of information on the Pilgrims' Way of St James has some relation to the scant interest shown by Arabic authors in pointing to anything that concerned the non-

Islamic world. Equally, this absence of data might reflect the fact that so many of the works which have come down us survive only in incomplete versions.

In general, an approach of a religious nature may be observed in the texts on the Jacobean pilgrimage. Among others aspects, one could highlight the similarity established between the shrine at Compostela and the Holy Sepulchre in the Islamic East, which confers on Santiago the image of a spiritual destination for Christian pilgrims in western Christendom.

Alongside this spiritual context, Arabic sources allow one to see that the Way of St James held neither political, nor military implications for the Muslims of al-Andalus. One might have thought otherwise if we recall that, before the start of the year 1000, frequent Muslim incursions into the north of the Peninsula had rendered pilgrimage to Compostela unsafe along the southern route, presently known as the "French way", for which reason use was made of the secondary road situated to the north of the Cantabrian mountain range. Some time afterwards, the displacement of the political centre of al-Andalus towards the south permitted pilgrims to follow the main roadway once again. At the point at which that route was no longer used on account of Muslim attacks, these had not formerly been directed against the pilgrims; this harassment was framed within the Islamic policy of breaking the expansion of the Christian kingdoms in the northern Peninsula. The testimonies, which tend to emphasize the eagerness of the Andalusí authorities to fight against the more northerly groups of people, are certainly quite abundant. In these cases, it should be borne in mind that the Muslims not only attacked the political enemy but also Christian infidels in the context of *jihad* or holy war,²³ so that their attacks were never free from an inevitable religious component. Proof of this can be found in the numerous expressions of a religious nature recorded in the Arabic chronicles that narrate such warlike episodes.

Thus, grounded in the information taken from Arabic sources, we may affirm that the Muslims of al-Andalus did not perceive the Pilgrims' Way of St James as a potential rival from the political point of view, but rather from a religious perspective. It was precisely this religious dimension, however, that unleashed

²³ In its military sense, the term *jihad* designates a holy war, the objective of which is the expansion and, on occasions, the defence of the Islamic religion. It was a religious duty for all free Muslim adult males which, because of historical and geographic contingencies, acquired special relevance in al-Andalus. See, as an illustrative example, M. Bonner, *Le jihad: origines, interprétations, combats* (Paris: Tétraèdre, 2004); C. de la Puente, 'El *yihad* en el califato omeya de al-Andalus y su culminación bajo Hisam II', in F. Valdés and P.L. Huerta (eds.), *La Península Ibérica y el Mediterráneo entre los siglos XI y XII-II: Almanzor y los terrores del milenio (Aguilar de Campoo, 28-31 de julio de 1999)* (Aguilar de Campoo: Fundación Santa María la Real-Centro de Estudios del Románico, 1999), pp.25-38.

occasional political and military campaigns, such as the well-known raid against Compostela in 997, led by Muhammad Ibn Abi 'Amir Al-Mansur – 'Almanzor' in the Christian chronicles – chamberlain to the caliph of Cordoba Hisham II (976-1009 and 1010-1013).²⁴

The Military Campaign Waged by Almanzor against Santiago

Almanzor led over fifty military expeditions against the Christian kingdoms of the Peninsula throughout the 25 years in which he assumed military leadership in al-Andalus. One of the zones that was most affected by the attacks of Almanzor was the northwest of the Peninsula, where a total of 32 campaigns were directed against Portuguese and Galician areas.²⁵ However, of all the expeditions led by Almanzor against Christian territory, it was the campaign against Santiago de Compostela in the summer of 997, which produced the greatest reverberations throughout the Islamic world.

The choice of the Galician shrine was hardly accidental. Let us remember that in the tenth century Compostela was gaining ground as one of the most prestigious religious centres in Europe. The Muslims of al-Andalus were very knowledgeable about the symbolism of this shrine for the Christian enemy. Its

²⁴ On the characterization of Almanzor see, among others, X. Ballestín, *Almanzor: l'exercici del poder a l'Occident musulmà medieval* (Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona, 2004); L. Bariani, *Almanzor* (San Sebastián: Nerea, 2003); A. Echevarría, 'El Azote del año mil: Almanzor, según las crónicas cristianas', in J.A. García de Cortázar (coord.), *Los protagonistas del año mil. Actas del XIII Seminario sobre Historia del Monacato* (Aguilar de Campoo: Centro de Estudios del Románico, 2000), pp.91-116; V. Martínez and A. Torremocha, *Almanzor y su época* (Malaga: Sarriá, 2001); C. de la Puente, 'La caracterización de Almanzor: entre la epopeya y la historia', in M.L. Ávila and M. Marín (eds.), *Estudios Onomástico-Biográficos de al-Andalus*, VIII (Madrid: CSIC, 1997), pp.367-402; P. Sénac, *Al-Mansûr, le fléau de l'an mil* (Paris: Perrin, 2006) and J.L. Serrano, *Almanzor: caudillo de al-Andalus* (Granada: Caja de Granada, 2009).

²⁵ These expeditions have been the subject of numerous studies relating to their chronology, itineraries or geographical situation. See O.A. Machado, 'Problemas de toponimia hispano-árabe en una relación de campañas militares de Almanzor', *Cuadernos de Historia de España*, 43-44 (1967), pp.338-44; J.M. Ruiz Asencio, 'Campañas de Almanzor contra el Reino de León (981-986)', *Anuario de Estudios Medievales*, 5 (1968), pp.31-64; L. Seco de Lucena, 'Acerca de las campañas militares de Almanzor', *Miscelánea de Estudios Árabes y Hebraicos*, 14 (1965), pp.7-29. These studies have been enlarged on and corrected by the works of L. Molina: 'Las campañas de Almanzor a la luz de un nuevo texto', *Al-Qantara*, 2 (1981), pp.209-63 and 'Las campañas de Almanzor. Nuevos datos', *Al-Qantara*, 3 (1982), pp.467-72. Two more recent contributions on the matter are those of A. Cañada Juste, 'Nuevas propuestas para la identificación de topónimos e itinerarios en las campañas de Almanzor', *Anaquel de Estudios Árabes*, 4 (1993), pp.25-36 and R. Sáez, *Las campañas de Almanzor* (Madrid: Almena Ediciones, 2008).

destruction therefore had wide repercussions in Islam as it was interpreted as the greatest onslaught on Christendom as a whole.

Apart from this marked religious dimension, the political background of the military campaign against Santiago needs to be taken into account. In general, one reason for the military expeditions undertaken by Almanzor against the north of the Peninsula was the non-payment of tribute by the Christian monarchs. Failure to comply with the peace treaties agreed between Christians and Muslims entailed punitive raids which destroyed the lands of the enemy. From this standpoint, the campaign to attack Santiago might well have been the result of the decision of the king of Leon, Vermudo II (984-999), to cease payments of tribute to Cordoba.

Another factor not to be overlooked in this context is the internal political crisis that the Umayyad caliphate experienced at the time. This had been provoked one year earlier, in 996, by the breakdown of the friendly relations formerly existing between Subh, the mother of Hisham II, and Almanzor. It appears that three groups fought between each other for power: Subh, who wished her son to take the *de facto* reins of power which up to then he held only nominally; other members of the Umayyad family who conspired to deprive the weak caliph of government and, finally, Almanzor, who sought and succeeded in making his post hereditary. Thus, sacking Santiago would have implied a distraction diverting the attention of the Andalusí population away from internal problems, as well as a demonstration of strength by the chamberlain of Hisham II. Almanzor, who was unable to justify his power through royal blood, sought to legitimize the usurpation of prerogatives of the Caliphate by means of holy war against the Christians, as he knew that one of the pillars of his influence was the popularity which he had achieved as a result of his victories. The support of his subjects depended, in good part, on his military triumphs and the figure of the warrior in Islam was an essential element of his government that legitimized, in the minds of his co-religionists, the delegation of absolute power in his person. As a consequence, it was no mere chance that Compostela was chosen as the military target, given that Almanzor needed an outright victory that would impress al-Andalus in order to justify his political and military mandate. From this point of view, the sacking of Santiago would have implied a demonstration of the strength of the government of the Caliphate, not only in the eyes of the Christian enemy but for the Andalusians themselves too.²⁶

²⁶ On the attack led by Almanzor on Compostela see, among others, Bariani, *Almanzor*, pp.228-32; idem, 'De las relaciones entre Subh y Muhammad Ibn Abi 'Amir al-Mansur con especial referencia a su «ruptura» (*wahsa*) en 386-388/996-998', *Qurtuba*, 1 (1996), pp.52-3; Carballeira Debasa, *Galicia y los gallegos en las fuentes árabes*, pp.164-9; idem, 'La peregrinación jacobea en la literatura árabe', p.11; Echevarría, 'El Azote del año mil', pp.106-9; M. Fernández

The campaign against Santiago involved the incursion of a Muslim army into Christian territory without precedent since the conquest of al-Andalus, as Umayyad troops had never penetrated into a region so far to the west. It is worth recalling that, from a military point of view, the expeditions undertaken by Almanzor were not intended to occupy new lands, nor to annex new regions; Arabic sources never talked of conquest, but of raids and sacked cities which were to ensure that the frontier area remained under the sway of the Umayyad caliphate. Punitive incursions into Christian areas neutralized troublesome focal points on the Muslim frontiers. As well as weakening the enemy, other benefits were also forthcoming, such as booty and the tribute that Christians had to pay in exchange for the concession of a truce.

With regard to the campaign against Santiago and according to the testimony recorded in Arabic sources, on 3 July 997 Almanzor set out from Cordoba at the head of his cavalry. A large fleet transported various divisions of infantry, military armaments and provisions to Oporto and then sailed up the river Duero to the spot that had been designated for the troops to cross the river. Having joined forces, the army continued its advance towards the north, crossing the river Miño at Tui. According to the testimony preserved in the Arabic chronicles, having crossed the river Ulla, Almanzor sacked Iria, where there was a shrine consecrated to the apostle. Finally, on 10 August, the Andalusí army arrived at Santiago de Compostela. The city, which had previously been evacuated by its inhabitants, was sacked and ravaged. The church was destroyed, with the exception of the tomb of the apostle, which was respected on the express orders of Almanzor; neither was the monk who cared for it, saying that he was related to the apostle, hurt. The sack of Santiago having ended, Almanzor began the return journey to Cordoba, carrying with him a large number of captives, along with the bells of the church and the panels of the gates to the city. The bells would be

Rodríguez, 'La expedición de Almanzor a Santiago de Compostela', *Cuadernos de Historia de España*, 43-44 (1967), pp.345-63; Martínez y Torremocha, *Almanzor y su época*, p.164; N. Peinado Gómez, 'La expedición de Almanzor a Santiago de Compostela en 997', *Boletín de la Real Academia de Córdoba de Ciencias, Bellas Letras y Nobles Artes*, 68 (July-December 1952), pp.76-288; R. Pinto de Azevedo, 'A expedição de Almançor a Santiago de Compostela em 997, e a de piratas normandos à Galiza em 1015-1016', *Revista Portuguesa de História*, 14/3 (1974), pp.73-93; Puente, 'La campaña de Santiago de Compostela', pp.7-21; Sáez, *Las campañas de Almanzor*, pp.60-3. Likewise, the identification of the places through which Almanzor marched on his way to Santiago has aroused controversy in the academic community; see F. Hernández Giménez, 'Los caminos de Córdoba hacia el noroeste en época musulmana', *Al-Andalus*, 32 (1967), pp.348-55; N. Peinado Gómez, 'La ruta de Almanzor a través de Galicia', *Boletín de la Comisión de Monumentos Históricos y Artísticos de Lugo*, 3 (1949), pp.250-6; J. Valverde Madrid, 'El camino de Almanzor a Santiago', in *Los Caminos y el Arte. VI Congreso Español de Historia del Arte*, II (Santiago de Compostela: Universidad, 1989), pp.193-201.

used as lamps and the doors for the panelling in the ceilings of the Great Mosque of Cordoba, which was in the process of enlargement at that time.²⁷ However, indifference is expressed in Arabic texts towards the assets stripped from the church; it appears that no riches worthy of mention were found to surpass those which already existed in Cordoba.

The details of the tales taken from Arabic sources raise various questions. On the one hand, it may be asked whether Compostela and its shrine really suffered such terribly devastating consequences as those depicted in the Arabic texts. In this context, the triumphalist and partisan overtones of the story should not be forgotten. It is well known that the Muslim authors who wrote their works in connection with the central political power tended to exaggerate the results of the victories won by Islamic forces over the enemy.

Moreover, one can but wonder who the monk who cared for the tomb of the apostle was and for what reason Almanzor respected that place of burial. Whereas the Arabic sources remained silent on the identity of the monk in question, the Christian tradition identified him as St Pedro de Mezonzo, at the time the prelate of the metropolitan see of Compostela. The fact that Almanzor refrained from destroying the tomb of the apostle may be attributed to the ties of kinship which, as we have seen, the Muslims established between St James the Great and he whom they consider to be the "Great Prophet Jesus". Likewise, it is possible that, by acting in this way, Almanzor was trying not to offend his Christian allies. It should be borne in mind that a section of the Galician-Portuguese nobility was implicated in the campaign to attack Santiago, which explains why the castles of the allied counts were bypassed by the Muslim army. Following the rupture of the truce with al-Andalus by King Vermudo II, these individuals had sided with the all-powerful Almanzor to ensure peace in their districts. In turn, Almanzor also needed to form local Christian-Muslim alliances that would guarantee the exercise of power by his descendants after his death.²⁸

Finally, the poetry that Ibn Darraj,²⁹ Almanzor's panegyrist, dedicated to the campaign against Santiago should be considered. These verses sang of the

²⁷ See *Dikr bilad al-Andalus*, ed. p.193 and trans. pp.203-4; al-Himyari, *Kitab al-Rawd al-mi'tar*, ed. pp.115-6 and trans. p.142; Ibn 'Idari, *Bayan II*, ed. pp.294-8 and trans. pp.491-8; Ibn Khaldun, *Kitab al-'Ibar*, ed. IV, pp.231-2; al-Maqqari, *Nafh al-tib*, ed. I, pp.413-6 and trans. II, pp.192-6.

²⁸ On this, see M. Torres Sevilla, 'Los aliados cristianos de Almanzor: las redes familiares como base del sistema clientelar amirí', in *Cuando las horas primeras. En el milenario de la Batalla de Calatañazor* (Soria: Disputación Provincial, 2004), pp.89-114.

²⁹ Ibn Darraj came to be the official poet of the Amiries, the family of Almanzor, such that his poetry had faithfully to mirror the activities in which Almanzor and his children were involved during their respective mandates, in political as well as military life. Hence the interest of the

triumph of Islamic arms at the same time as they described the desolation of the city and the apostle in the face of defeat and destruction. There are three poems: the first, dedicated to Almanzor himself; the second, to his two children, 'Abd al-Malik al-Muzaffar and 'Abd al-Rahman Sanchuelo and the third, exclusively to the latter.

In the first, Ibn Darraj portrays the shrine at Compostela, its impregnable position to the extreme northwest of the Peninsula and its prestige among Christian peoples, not only Europeans but also Africans, such as Ethiopians, who profess the Christian faith. He projects an image of pilgrims who make pilgrimage to the tomb of the apostle on foot, enduring the harshest of sacrifices. After referring to the fearful flight of Vermudo II, the poet mentions the conquest of Iria Flavia, also of great spiritual importance for the Christians, and the destruction that Almanzor inflicted on all these Galician towns.³⁰

In the second poem, Ibn Darraj congratulates Almanzor on the conduct of his two sons during the expedition against Compostela. In these verses, he recounts the devastation perpetrated by both of them in the area surrounding Lamego, close to Oporto, and in the coastal territories between the course of the Coroño, a stream that flows into the "Ria" – or firth – of Arousa, and the river Vouga to the south of the Duero estuary. He closes with a description of the state of Vermudo, fugitive from Muslim swords, to whom an exemplary punishment was meted out for treachery.³¹

The third poem is dedicated to praising the preponderant role of 'Abd al-Rahman Sanchuelo in the campaign against Santiago. Moreover, Ibn Darraj places emphasis on the resonance of the triumphs of Almanzor throughout the Muslim world and urges him to extend his authority from Cordoba to the Islamic East. The poet, addressing Almanzor, says: "Now that you have finished with the holy places of Christianity, the Muslim people in the east are awaiting your pilgrimage to the shrines of Islam to pay you their homage and obedience".³² On the one hand in this verse we see the ambitious desire coveted by the Andalusí warlord to form a colossal empire, whose capital would be at Cordoba. Perhaps

panegyrics of Ibn Darraj dedicated to the Amiries and motivated by their campaigns against the Christian kingdoms in the west. This poetry, apart from its literary value, constitutes authentic historical documentation. See, in this respect, the works of M'A. Makki: on the one hand, his critical edition of the *Diwan* of Ibn Darraj and, on the other, his study on 'La España cristiana en el Diwan de Ibn Darray', *Boletín de la Real Academia de Buenas Letras de Barcelona*, 30 (1963-1964), pp.63-104. See also the translation and study made by M. La Chica Garrido on the panegyrics that Ibn Darraj dedicated to Almanzor.

³⁰ See *Diwan*, poem no. 120, ed. pp.440-3; trans. pp.128-30.

³¹ See *Diwan*, poem no. 102, ed. pp.371-8; trans. pp.82-5.

³² See *Diwan*, poem no. 128, ed. pp.459-63; trans. pp.133-5.

the successes Almanzor gained in his military endeavours, crowned by the attack on Santiago, breathed new hope into his aspiration to see himself elevated to the highest position in the Islamic world. On the other hand, this verse stresses the importance that such an event had for Islam, as the poet equates the defeat of Santiago with that of all Christendom. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the victory of one religion over another is a topic to which Ibn Darraj returns in other poems in which he mentions the defeat of one or another of the lords of the north.

In these panegyrics, the poet emphasizes the religious element with regard to Almanzor. But the most relevant aspect is that such praise appears to have as its purpose the exaltation of the valour of his two sons during the battle, making them responsible for victory, perhaps with a view to ensuring that the power of his lineage would continue after his death. In this sense, C. de la Puente has pointed out that the panegyrics of Ibn Darraj in honour of the descendants of Almanzor might confirm his desire for government to remain in the hands of the Amiries, as the verses stress the bravery of Almanzor's offspring in contrast to the implicitly weak character of the caliph.³³

Concluding Remarks

In summary, the image of the Jacobean pilgrimage that may be extracted from medieval Arabic texts is that Muslim knowledge on this matter may be somewhat confusing at times. One must highlight the spiritual wealth that conferred on Compostela the image of a place of pilgrimage for the Christians in Europe. Likewise, it is notable that, alongside this spiritual wealth, mention is also made of the material wealth that, as early as the twelfth century, was generated by the considerable flow of visitors.

Likewise, the information provided by al-Idrisi on the different roads that led to Santiago in that day and age is multi-faceted. One should be aware that this author saw himself as obliged to interpret the multiple and incoherent data that he had gathered, either from his informants by word of mouth or from written sources. However, despite the imprecisions which may be attributed to him, on occasion the indications of this geographer are of an undeniable exactitude.

In references to the Jacobean pilgrimage as set down by Arabic authors, religious symbolism is always prominent, even in the military expedition that Almanzor directed against Compostela, a campaign motivated by the enormous religious repercussions arising from pilgrimage to the tomb of the apostle. Although this military attack was intentionally directed against the heart of

³³ See Puente, 'La campaña de Santiago de Compostela', p.16.

western Christendom, it also had a clear political motivation with a view to reinforcing Almanzor's power base both within and beyond Andalusian frontiers and to the possibility of perpetuating the Umayyad caliphate in the hands of his descendants. In this Amiri expedition, more than in any other, the manner in which religion and politics are closely interwoven is not to be underestimated. Nevertheless, allowance should be made for the fact that, in general, the military actions taken by the Andalusis, apart from looking, above all, for tangible political and territorial gains, involved an undeniable religious element, as they were directed against Christian infidels.

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