

The African Telatelist

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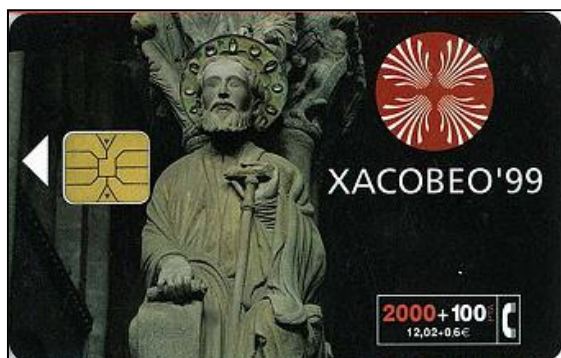
SANTIAGO de COMPOSTELA – THE FIELD OF STARS

By the end of the 8th century, most of the Iberian Peninsula had been conquered by the Moors. They had even made inroads into France but were defeated at the Battle of Poitiers in 732. The only areas not under Moorish control were Asturia in the west, Navarre in the centre and Barcelona in the east.



Pilgrim route to Santiago de Compostela

In the year 800, a hermit in the north-west of what is now Galicia (the Portuguese speaking part of Spain), saw a shaft of bright light in the sky. Following the beam to the earth, he came across a small mausoleum in a very ancient graveyard. Since a beam of celestial light could not possibly lead to just anybody's grave, he concluded that it must be the grave of St James – San Jago – Santiago. The spot became known as Compostela – the Field of the Stars.



Statute of St James in the cathedral

Legend had it that after the crucifixion, St James traveled to Iberia to convert the locals to Christianity. On returning to Jerusalem, he was beheaded by King Herod. The Christians in the

Holy Land put his remains in an unmanned boat, which, according to the legend, was guided to the coast of Spain by angels.



Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela

A church was built on the site and over time miracles and visions were reported from Compostela. The site became a place of pilgrimage for people from all over Europe, especially as Jerusalem was under Arabic rule. To do penance for their sins, they walked from various points in France to pray at St James' grave.

Because scallops were abundant in the area, the scallop became a symbol of the pilgrimage. Pilgrims would wear the shells as a sign of where they were going. Today the scallop is still called *Coquilles Saint Jacques* in France.

It is still a place of pilgrimage today.



Pilgrim with shell

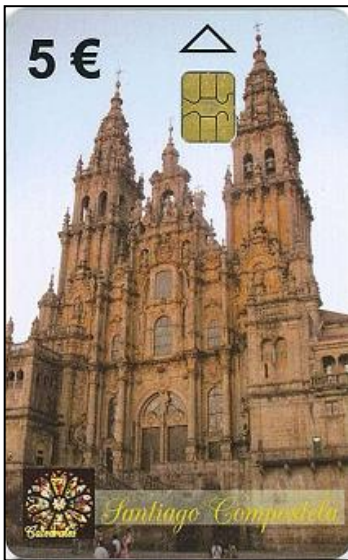
In the 10th and 11th centuries the Christian states in the north of Spain took advantage of the civil wars in the Arab empire and started to

push the Moors out of the peninsula.



Scallop shell and emblem of pilgrimage

Not surprisingly, many of the visions seen at Compostela at the time were of St James as a knight fighting the Moors and one of the rallying cries of the Reconquista was to protect his grave from the Moors.



Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela

In Castile, an Order of the Knights of Santiago was formed to fight the Moors under his patronage. As the knights pushed south, many churches, hospitals, forts and monasteries were dedicated to St James. One town, in the centre of Spain, in which a church was named in his honour, was Trujilla – the birthplace of Pizarro.



Scallop shell and route map

Unfortunately, liberation did not bring prosperity to the people of the region. The reconquered territory was divided up in estates for the Castillian nobles and knights. Land that once supported peasant farmers was now turned over to sheep. Impoverished farmers left the land for the cities or looked further a field to seek their fortunes.



Boots

Interestingly, the majority of the conquistadors, who sailed for America, came from poor families in this central Extremadura area of Spain, which at the time had no access to the sea – Cortez (a Spanish *conquistador* who led an expedition that caused the fall of the Aztec Empire and brought large portions of mainland Mexico under the rule of the King of Castile in the early 16th century. Cortés was part of the generation of Spanish colonizers that began the first phase of the Spanish colonization of the Americas), Pizarro (a Spanish *conquistador*, conqueror of the Incan Empire and founder of Lima, the modern-day capital of the Republic of Peru), de Balboa (a Spanish explorer, governor and conquistador. He is best known for having crossed the Isthmus of Panama to the Pacific Ocean in 1513, becoming the first European to lead an expedition to have seen or reached the Pacific from the New World), de Soto (a Spanish explorer and conquistador who, while leading the first European expedition deep into the territory of the modern day United States, was the first European documented to have crossed the Mississippi River), etc.

It was outside the church of Santiago in Trujillo that Pizarro chose the 200 comrades to accompany him on his expedition to Peru.

The Conquistadors adopted Santiago as their patron saint, calling on his protection on their voyages of conquest. All throughout the Americas there are churches named after him and cities in Chile, Cuba, the Dominican Republic and California.

In Peru the second largest city is Trujillo.

Cedric Edwards.