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HIST 129A Midterm | Teo Ruiz
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The Divine Milky Way: A facilitator for the transformation of Spanish society

As their feet dig into the earth, the peasants making their way to Compostela turn their necks up to the sky in awe of the clear milky way above them. It is a cathartic experience. One which validates that they have made the right choice in committing to the faith and embarking on such a long, treacherous and expensive journey.

The myth of St James was the driving force behind this journey. St James' body was supposedly brought back to Spain from the holy land by angels and miraculous intervention. This marked the Iberian peninsula as a place that was divinely chosen. At the end of a long string of relics, St. James' skull was at Compostela. The journey to Compostela was, in itself, a wholly religious experience. Passing by relics and major cathedrals along the French roads to St Jean Pied de Port, pilgrims visually took in a cohesive Christian history whilst atoning for their sins. In securing the peace of the pilgrimage to Compostela, the Christian faith and political entities of Spain were able to expand due to strengthened trust with the masses and an influx of wealth into Northern Spain. This expansion of political and religious power facilitated cultural changes that were reflected in church practices and a rising merchant class.

The road to Compostela was a representation and mechanism of Christian political power in Northern Spain that led to the convergence of political and religious ideology. The myth of St James can be seen as a political tool used to strengthen the Christian presence in Northern Spain. Threatened by encroaching muslim rule and to rival the other pilgrimage routes, the nobility needed to mark the Iberian peninsula as a place of religious relevance. The myth directly filled this need. The Asturian kings in Leon, around the ninth century, aligned their power with the faith by becoming patrons of St James (Lecture 2, Week 1). By commissioning churches built for crowds and securing peace of the road, political entities in Spain proved that they had a vested interest in the masses' religious experience. The kings of Castile demonstrated this interest by paying tribute to the Cluny who would facilitate Christianity in the region. These acts represent an early alignment with the crown and the Church - the myth of St James was essentially a jumping point off which political power holders could be seen as promoters of the faith. Later on, in 1332, we see the cathedral at Compostela as a site of political events when Alfonso XI is knighted on the steps (Ruiz, S.C.C. 135). While the pilgrimage itself was a religious one, it would not have been possible without the political support and investment of the kings in Spain.

The connection between political and religious ideology not only bolstered the relationship between the state and the masses, it also introduced elements of militarism which helped idealize the crusades later on. In the Codex Calixtinus, which describes the pilgrimage, there are images of knights dressed in red with their swords drawn (Lecture, W1). The account also describes Charlemagne's travels into Compostela after being urged by St James in a dream to liberate him from the Moors. Both of these narratives in the Codex Calixtinus can be seen as implicating the faith with a military agenda. Pilgrims were exposed to this directly when viewing the violent statue of St James slaying Moors in the cathedral at Compostela. On their journey, they likely would've stopped at Clavijo and visualized the battle, which we now know as myth, of St James winning against the muslims. The military defeat of the Moors was idealized in art, church facades and literature as a means of garnering support for military intervention from the public. The power of St James against the Muslims was corroborated when the relic was seen as such a threat to the Muslim political leaders in the south that Al Manzor raided Compostela in 999CE. The fact that St James remained in the city against all odds was proof that the faith could prevail. It also solidified Compostela as a key political asset that could be used to undermine Muslim dominance, despite the fact that Al Manzor was successful in the raid. The myth of St James and the pilgrimage was thus used to validate violence and opposition to the Muslims.

With the provided peace from political entities, the road became a hub of economic exchange between both pilgrims and the Church. The pilgrimage economy allowed the church to expand and spurred major structural changes in terms of class and property. It's important to note that the pilgrimage to Compostela was a costly one. Pilgrims would have to forgo their jobs and bring with them offerings to be made at St James' relic and relics along the way (Bell). In this way, the pilgrims engaged in a sort of reciprocal relationship with the church. In exchange for their financial investment, they would receive "miracles" and indulgences on the final stretch of the journey. Shrines were, in a sense, a place of business. The business of collecting offerings at the shrines allowed the church to grow tremendously. With growing financial power, the church began building new infrastructure which increased its physical presence in the north. The importance of a robust physical presence cannot be overstated. Often, cathedrals were the largest buildings in a single town or city, sometimes even bigger than any palace or castle. This allowed the church to develop visual hegemony in the region and increasingly Christianize northern Spain over time. The church was not the only benefactor of the pilgrimage economy. Along the road, economic transactions took place in many forms. People advertised banking services, food vendors and offerings to be made at shrines. As is depicted in the Codex Calixtinus, pilgrims would buy shells and walking sticks on their way as signals to cathedrals and onlookers that were making the holy trip. In this way, all of Northern Spain was a benefactor of the pilgrimage. The growth of economic transactions between those in Spain and pilgrims from all over Europe strengthened trade routes between Spain and

the rest of Western Europe (Ruiz, S.C.C. 18-19). The influx of pilgrims brought with it an influx of merchants, many of whom began to settle in Spain. Economic restructuring occurred as these merchants bought land and capitalized off of a growing population. Eventually, these merchants began buying common lands that took away a sense of communal space and ownership. In a way, this can be seen as a very early beginning of privatized property which contributed to a wider gap between the rich and the poor. This influx of wealth for the church and economic restructuring was enabled by the political stability of the region as well as increased transactions due to the nature of the pilgrimage.

Briefly, it's worth understanding how these political and economic transformations led to cultural changes within the church and between the public. The rise of a merchant class and their values clashed with the church practices of the middle ages. Indulgences were exploited and material goods rather than a true devotion to the faith became common in the merchant class. The church, which at the time saw this exploitation as sinful, had to accommodate for this newfound issue that plagued northern Spain. Purgatory was one change the church made to help merchants maintain their faith (Lecture 2, Week 1). In efforts to attain eternal salvation, merchants also began helping finance church building projects and giving major donations. This dually helped the church expand and so, in a way, the church was inclined to adjust for the merchant population. The pilgrimage, perhaps most importantly, contributed to a generally increased Christian religiosity of the region. It was so awe-inspiring and overwhelming that it would contribute to the kind of religious fervor that would help to justify violence against all Muslims and Jews in later centuries.

The pilgrimage to Compostela can be seen as an essential mechanism for the transformation of Spanish society. In later centuries, the military ideology and political power fostered by the pilgrimage would be used to validate and encourage the Reconquista.

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In A Sea of Red and White, Out Emerges the Spanish Crown and Catholic Faith

How festivals are used in medieval Spain to shape the social hierarchy and cultural norm

Colors of red and gold peak from the horizon, indicating to the people of Vallavoid that the festival is about to begin. Infanta Dona Leonor can be seen faintly as she's led by the King of Castile with her brothers at her side. Peasants can hear the thunderous rumble of horse hooves hitting the ground, pushing dust up to their sides as another signal of the princess' arrival.

Historians often analyze a point in time in relation to political or economic events and how those events transform society. In the case of medieval Spain, social events such as festivals were dually the influenced and influencer. Festivals were a reflection of social norms yet also shaped the future of social life by deploying consistent themes. Importantly, the Spanish festivals were fun, exciting and drew the attention of peasants from all over. As time passes in the medieval world, we will explore how these festivals slowly began to reserve the "fun" for the nobility and increasingly exclude the public. Though the nobility of medieval Spain originally deployed secular and inclusive festivals, they gradually narrowed the scope of the festivals to protect the power of Catholicism and promote a more rigid social hierarchy. Through the use of visual elements and rituals, the Spanish festivals defined the social system and aligned the faith with political agendas.

Visual elements of the festivals were used purposefully as symbols of royal power, of the growing militarism in Spanish society and of the Churches influence. Colors were an essential tool of communication for the nobility. Red and white were common colors which conflated the faith with the crown. When Don Blanca was received at Briviesca in 1440, there was a massive fight spectacle with a hundred knights dressed in white and a hundred in red. This theme was consistent throughout the Spanish festivals. At Vallavoid in June of 1428, the king of Castile wore all white as a representation of God atop a horse adorned in red. These colors were symbolic of the rising power of the Christian church and, coupled with violent spectacles, crafted a narrative that militarized the faith. It's worth noting the overinflated ego of the nobility throughout these festivals. They are put on a pedestal, celebrated to the point where the king can dress like God and not be criticized. To stand out from the scenes of red and white, kings would occasionally wear unique colors to represent their individual rule and jurisdiction. The king of Castile, for example, wore green to signify his position as "King of the Woods" during the festivals in Vallavoid (Ruiz, S.S. 241). Contrastingly, Infante Don Enrique and his knights dressed in blue and brown. All of these colors helped convey messages of the nobility to the public watching from afar. The consistency of red and white as a central theme supported the church's role as a key power holder politically and within culture.

While colors were a successful tool in conflating the Church with military prowess, other visual elements helped show off the financial capabilities of the throne and the villages themselves. In Lopez de Hoyo's description of the Corpus Christi in 1572, he explains the massive arches with facades glorifying the monarchy (Ruiz, S.S.156). The mere scale of the festivals can be analyzed as a political tool - all of the arches and towers erected specifically for the festival overlooked each village. The scale was a testament to the nobility's power, a way of communicating to the peasants that the crown had the financial and administrative means to put daily life to a halt. At Vallavoid in 1428, gold, silk and ermine adorned horses and banners as a display of luxury and wealth. Feasts worked in the same way visually with fountains of wine and long tables filled to the brim with colorful foods. It did not matter that the peasant spectators starved through most of the year and struggled day to day; these fantastical shows of opulence awed them and made them forget about their struggles. This was a key goal of the nobility. Festivals were a sort of bread and circus, a way of placating the peasantry and garnering their support by making them feel included and prideful. Since the nobility often gave partial responsibility to the villages to prepare and put on the festivals, the grandness of it all lent the peasants a special sense of pride for their own region. These representations of wealth confirmed the social hierarchy by magnifying the interdependence of the public and the nobility.

While festivals began as inclusive events which strengthened the relationship between the nobility and the masses, over time, festivals were used by the nobility to strictly define the social hierarchy. In the late Middle ages, inclusivity was a common theme throughout the festivals. During Don Blanca's reception into Briviesca, Jews carried Torahs through the streets and Muslims held their Qurans. Even during the Corpus Christi, as accounted in 1481, Jews and Moors were encouraged (and somewhat required) to participate in the events (Ruiz, S.S. 165). Plays at the festivals would also incorporate Muslims and Jews as actors and within the content of the play itself. These acts of inclusion reflected the secular nature of festivals and society of the time. By the early modern period, this inclusion was no longer commonplace as the Reconquista expelled all the non-Christians. The transition to exclusively Catholic festivals strengthened the church narrative and the coinciding conquests. Festivals did not only become religiously exclusive. As power was centralized throughout Spain, notably in Castile, the nobility found themselves further removed from the public sphere. In the late middle ages, festivals highlighted a sense of closeness that helped foster a sense of unity and identity. We see this in Jaen in the 1460s and in Briviesca where kings and queens were active participants in festivities. They could be seen closely by the public and their engagement showed the peasantry that they were likable and similar, even though they weren't. There is a shift to private spaces that occurs during the early modern period which can be attributed to power centralization that provided the nobility with immense amounts of money. After the victories of the Reconquista, the nobility no longer needed a close relationship with the peasantry to

maintain control. The newfound private nature of the nobility is communicated as they begin to observe the festivals from afar, either from behind a curtain or the balcony of royal palaces. These transitions from secular to religious and public to private were directly correlated to the Reconquista and changing social relationships in Spain.

Spanish festivals were central components of daily life in medieval Spain that promoted the social hierarchy and reinforced an increasingly religious culture.

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