



**Javier Callado Cobo**

## **The Way of St James in Pre-Romanesque Spain**

The term 'Romanesque' refers to a variety of artistic styles (Cluniac, Cistercian, Lombard, etc.) which emerged in north-west Spain from around 1060 onwards. Therefore, when we talk about pre-Romanesque, we are referring to a period of time rather than a specific style. The term 'pre-Romanesque' thus encompasses a period of artistic styles prior to a religious change.

Conversely, the discovery of the tomb of St James (whether legendary or factual) occurred during the reign of Alfonso II of Oviedo in 813, at the height of the Asturian pre-Romanesque period. In honour of this discovery, a temple in the Asturian style was built between 820 and 830. This temple was followed by a larger one in 899, also in the Asturian style. After Almanzor attacked the Kingdom of León, another temple was built in the León pre-Romanesque style in 1003. This final temple resulted from the demolition of all the pre-Romanesque cathedrals in the Kingdom of León following its adherence to the Roman schism in 1054. Construction began in 1075 under Alfonso VI of León and was completed in 1211 under Alfonso IX of León. However, this cathedral was built in the Romanesque style, in accordance with the new religious canon of Rome and the Abbey of Cluny.

The three successive pre-Romanesque cathedrals mentioned above attracted pilgrims. For reasons unknown, however, most of the Christian population of the peninsula, spread across the twenty-one Andalusian bishoprics, did not choose Santiago as their destination. However, there are references to Egyptian (Coptic), Syrian, Greek and Armenian pilgrims. They followed the route from North Africa, through which Christianity had presumably entered Hispania from Carthage in present-day Tunisia. They crossed the Emirate of Córdoba en route to the tomb of the Apostle James. Pilgrims from the Hispanic March – the Frankish kingdoms on the peninsula – have also been recorded, as have trans-Pyrenean pilgrims from Aquitaine and Burgundy.

During the Pre-Romanesque period, the Feast of Saint James was celebrated on 30th December, in the middle of winter. This tradition is still observed in some villages in the former Kingdom of León. The pilgrimage route from Africa must have followed the roads that guaranteed the crossing of the peninsular rivers in winter, the Vía de la Plata, from Seville to Astorga via Mérida, Alcántara, Salamanca, Zamora and Benavente. However, the Portuguese route cannot be ruled out, which in some cases involved taking boats to cross rivers and went from Mérida to Lisbon, Coimbra, Aveiro, Oporto, Ponte de Lima and Tuy. Later, under the influence of the Roman Church, the date of the celebration was moved to the summer.



The northern route was established in order to seek out inhabited and safe territories. Initially, it had to follow the Cantabrian coast, passing through the bishoprics that remained in Gallaecia after the arrival of the Emirate of Cordoba: these included Oviedo, newly created; Lugo, the seat of the kingdom's church at that time; Britonia, located on the north coast of present-day Foz; and Iria. Episcopal sees such as Astúrica (Astorga), Legio (León) and Auriense (Orense) would not be restored until years later, in the second half of the ninth century.

From 900 onwards, Alfonso III and later the kings based in Legio secured a significant portion of the territory up to the Duero. This resulted in the Frankish pilgrimage route first moving to the foot of the Cantabrian mountains (the Forgotten Way) and then to the French Way, as the cities regained their population, walls and trade: Amaya, Castrum Sigerici, Saldania, Legio, Asturica, Bergida... This is considered the first attempt to establish the route we now know as the French Way. However, in the second half of the tenth century, a series of events triggered a reaction from the Caliphate of Córdoba, which moved its borders northwards. The Kingdom of León was subject to continuous raids and the northern pilgrimage route had to return to the Cantabrian foothills, even recovering the path that passed through Oveto, the former royal seat.

During the final stage of the pre-Romanesque period, from 1010 onwards, the Caliphate collapsed, enabling the kings of León to stabilise their kingdom and restore the French Way as we know it today. The Apostolic See of Gallaecia, in north-western Spain, gained greater importance but came into conflict with the Patriarchs of Rome over the claim to the Apostolic Bishopric. The autonomy of the Andalusian Christians, led by the see of Toledo, and the Christians of the north, led by the see of Compostela, was incompatible with the centralising ideals of the monks of Cluny, who occupied the Roman see.

Around 1060, Sancha and Ferdinand, the Kings of León, rebuilt the Palatium Regis of León with the help of French stonemasons. However, they built the Palatine Chapel for the Spanish or Toledo rite, rather than the Roman rite. Although they negotiated with the new church born of the schism, they were not fully convinced to abandon the secular rites and liturgical books of Toledo. When their son, Alfonso VI, finally came to power with the covert help of his older sister, Urraca, Rome became the preferred option. The Way of St James grew dramatically in importance as a political and religious landmark in the Kingdom of León and the rest of Europe.

Forged over two and a half centuries in the pre-Romanesque period, it was dotted with multicoloured Christian buildings featuring semicircular arches and no visible sculptural decoration beyond vegetation. It then underwent an artistic revolution, experiencing an influx of people and the creation of a route combining the religious, commercial, and political. This marked the arrival of the Romanesque period and the end of the pre-Romanesque one in León, as well as the decline of the Andalusian world.

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