Leyendas y milagros del camino de Santiago
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For hundreds of years pilgrims have been making the journey to the tomb of Saint James the Apostle in Santiago de Compostela, Galicia, near the “End of the World” at Finisterre. In the Middle Ages the route was busy with people from many different countries and walks of life, all contributing to the myriad stories that have grown up around the Way.

For this collection Galician anthropologist Xosé Ramón Mariño Ferro has drawn on various medieval sources, chiefly the 12th century *Liber Sancti Jacobus, Codex Calixtinus*.

The stories tell how St James preached in Galicia, how, after his martyrdom in Jerusalem, his body, still clasping its severed head, was brought back by his disciples to Galicia by sea and how, after encounters with the wicked pagan Queen Wolf, a dragon and raging bulls, they made a tomb for him in Compostela. Through the Dark Ages the tomb lay forgotten until its rediscovery, at a time when much of Spain was under Moorish rule, made it a symbol of great significance for Christianity. Pilgrims were soon flocking from all over Europe and the miracles multiplied.

According to one legend it was Charlemagne himself, guided by a vision of St James and by the Milky Way pointing towards Galicia, who set out to find the tomb and free Spain from the infidel. The figure of the saint is interwoven with the tales surrounding Charlemagne’s expedition into Spain against the Moors, ending in that of the defeat at Roncevaux that later grew into the *Song of Roland*. In these he is transformed from a fisherman, holy man or pilgrim into St James the Moor-Slayer, a knight on a white horse with a shining sword who appears in battle to urge on the Christian troops.

The book culminates in a collection of enchanting medieval ballads, *romances* and *pastorelas*. These range from the gory tale of the sinful monk, tricked by the devil into castrating himself, to the sighs of a young girl pilgrim for her love.

Religious and historical figures, bishops, nobles and kings, saints and sinners rub shoulders in these legends with a cast of merchants, maidens, dragons, giants, inn keepers, pages, monks, farmers, weavers. There is a rich feast of images: boats turn to stone, a chalice froths with blood, doves emerge singing from an oven. And alongside the tales of mighty deeds, damsels dishonoured, the giant who snatches up handfuls of knights in armour, there are also glimpses into the everyday life of the Middle Ages.

Clearly written and with a useful commentary by the author after each story or poem, this is a pleasing and accessible book. There are many illustrations, taken from carvings, sculptures and manuscripts.

A treasure trove of folklore for any reader, it would also, of course, make a perfect companion for the many people who still today undertake, or even only contemplate, the long walk to Santiago de Compostela.