

Significance of the Scallop Shell



The scallop shell of Saint James is believed to promote courage, strength and hope.

For centuries, the scallop shell, which is typically found on the seacoast in Galicia, northern Spain, has been the symbol of the Camino de Santiago, and its pilgrims – Los Peregrinos. Pilgrims returned to their countries of origin wearing the scallop concha shell over their habit or hat to demonstrate that they had reached Santiago and its famous gothic cathedral.

The shell of Saint James or La Vieira is the traditional emblem of Santiago and is popular with pilgrims on the Way of St James (El Camino de Santiago – or simply, El Camino) travelling to the apostle's shrine at Santiago de Compostela in Galicia. Medieval Christians making the pilgrimage to the shrine often wore a scallop shell symbol on their hat or clothes.

The pilgrims also carried a scallop shell and would present themselves at churches, castles, abbeys and so on where they could expect to be given as much sustenance as they could pick up with one scoop of the shell. Probably they would be given oats, barley, and perhaps beer or wine.

The scallop shell had been chosen because, according to tradition, when the remains of St James were originally unearthed, it was said to be covered in scallop shells.

The scallop shell is said to be a metaphor, its lines representing the different routes pilgrims travelled from all over the world, all walking trails leading to one point: the tomb of Saint James in Santiago de Compostela.