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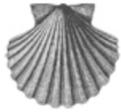


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Pursuing the Chemin and the Coquilles St. Jacques in Paris

By **Kathy Gower, PhD, Friends of the Road to Santiago, KathyGower@hotmail.com**

Paris has been known for centuries as a gathering point for pilgrims making their way on the Camino de Santiago. The Chemin du St. Jacques, as it is known in France, is particularly marked by both a starting point, the Tour St. Jacques, the only surviving tower of a church built



in the 16th century, and the rue St. Jacques itself, which extends kilometers from the center of Paris. The philosopher Pascal did his barometric experiments on the Tour St. Jacques in 1648. It seems the Tour has been shrouded in scaffolding almost since then. (This photo is from 1900, but I did see it uncovered in 1986.)

Pilgrims (pèlerins) arrived in Paris from many points and Paris, as it is today, was a stop and a lure for many diversions, not just the medieval churches and hospitals that proliferated there. It is entirely possible that pilgrims may have visited the Basilica of St. Denis, which the Abbot Suger had built (1136) to honor St. Denis, a patron saint of Paris before the Cathedral of the Notre Dame was built (1190).

If one walks down the rue St. Denis from one of the city portals within the environs of Paris (a somewhat seedy place now), one will pass by the remains of many Camino sites. The Convents of the Daughters of God (no longer in existence) was built near the rue St. Denis by St. Louis, a king of France, to rehabilitate prostitutes and to make honest women out of them in the 13th century. This part of rue St. Denis has similar challenges today.

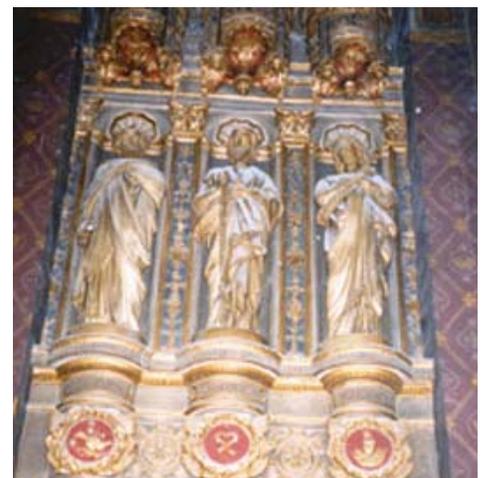
Continuing down rue St. Denis, one comes upon the site of the Hospital St. Jacques, where St. Ignatius Loyola was one of the many administering to pilgrims up until the 17th century. The site was demolished in 1825. On the corner of rue du Cygne and rue Pierre Lescot there is a house with designs of pilgrim staffs, gourds and scallop shells.



The church of St. Leu & Gilles is a little further south, still standing, on a little street once known as rue du Pèlerin de St. Jacques. The church had its apse removed by the broad hand of Baron Haussmann when he "redesigned" the streets of Paris to prevent small gatherings after the revolution and to make Paris a "modern city"..

The area around what is now Les Halles and the Central Culturel Georges Pompidou (the Beaubourg) is steeped in Camino lure. At 51 rue Montmorency, just north, is the oldest house in Paris, built in 1407 as the home of Nicholas Flamel and his wife Pernelle. He was an alchemist and scrivener who endowed many of the churches and orphanages in the area during his time, supposedly with the "gold" he made after interpreting an ancient book in his possession with help from a mysterious fellow pilgrim on the Camino. He was buried in the Cemetery of the Holy Innocents that was dug up to create Les Halles, in part, a vast market place. The Tour St. Jacques was a tower of St. Jacques du Boucherie, a church for the butchers in the area. The gravestone of Nicholas Flamel is located on one of the stairways in the Cluny Museum, having been discovered after many years preserved as a cutting block when a meat market was razed to build the abominable Les Halles.

Pilgrims stopping in to St. Eustache(built 1532-1640), next to Le Halles, housing a famous pipe organ, will see a lovely statue of St. James with his pouch and shell between two other apostles on the left inside of the south entrance.





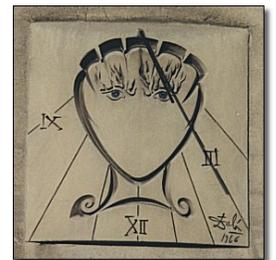
If one takes up rue St. Denis and St. Martin, a parallel street, the coquilles St. Jacques makes its appearance in interesting ways. At the corner of rue St. Martin and Rue Etienne Marcel look up to find a grinning statue of St. James at the top of the ground floor awnings.

At the church of the Lombard money-lenders, St. Merrie, also shrouded in scaffolding for many years, there is a 19th century statue of the saint near the middle of three portals. It isn't visible try as one may. There are many sites of abbeys, hospitals and churches in the area, all lost through the ages.

By now we've reached Notre Dame, just a few blocks south of the Tour St. Jacques on the Ile de la Cite, which was started in 1163. A visit here requires some time to take in the enduring magnificence, rebuilt several times. A representation (all originals destroyed or in the Cluny) of St. James, with his shell and his staff, is located in the middle portal.

Crossing over the Petit Pont, we reach St. Julien -le Pauvre, another romanesque-to-gothic style church on the site of a 6th century building on the pilgrimage road. Old and poor pilgrims could stay in the tiny church hospital. In the garden behind the church is the oldest tree in Paris, planted in 1620. At one point it was the parish church for the university area nearby and for the likes of Dante, Rabelias and Thomas Aquinas. No scallop shells, but a lovely, peaceful ambiance.

Walking up the rue St. Jacques, be sure to look up at #27 to see Salvador Dali's sundial, hanging like a street sign. A face, cast in cement in the shape of a scallop shell is a reminder of the pilgrims who passed along the street. The eyebrows are flames representing the sun. *



Next stop is the Hotel Cluny, now the Musée national du Moyen Age, Thermes de Cluny, built on Roman ruins to receive visitors representing the Cluny Abbey in Burgundy. . Before going into the courtyard, notice the stone arch on rue de Cluny, the last remaining vestige of a shelter for pilgrims. Scallop shells and walker's staffs decorate the courtyard façade, the emblem of the many medieval pilgrims headed south for Santiago. There is an inaccurate sundial on the wall left of the museum entry, also decorated prolifically with scallop shells.



Once inside, have fun searching for the coquilles: I found several, both on the sculptures of our St. James and in a variety of pilgrimage art. These include pilgrim badges, motifs on the stained glass windows on the building courtyard, decorations on a leather belt, and on a unique iron lock made of many shells.

A partial inventory:

Sculptures: St. James the Major (in a straw hat, as pilgrim), 15th century

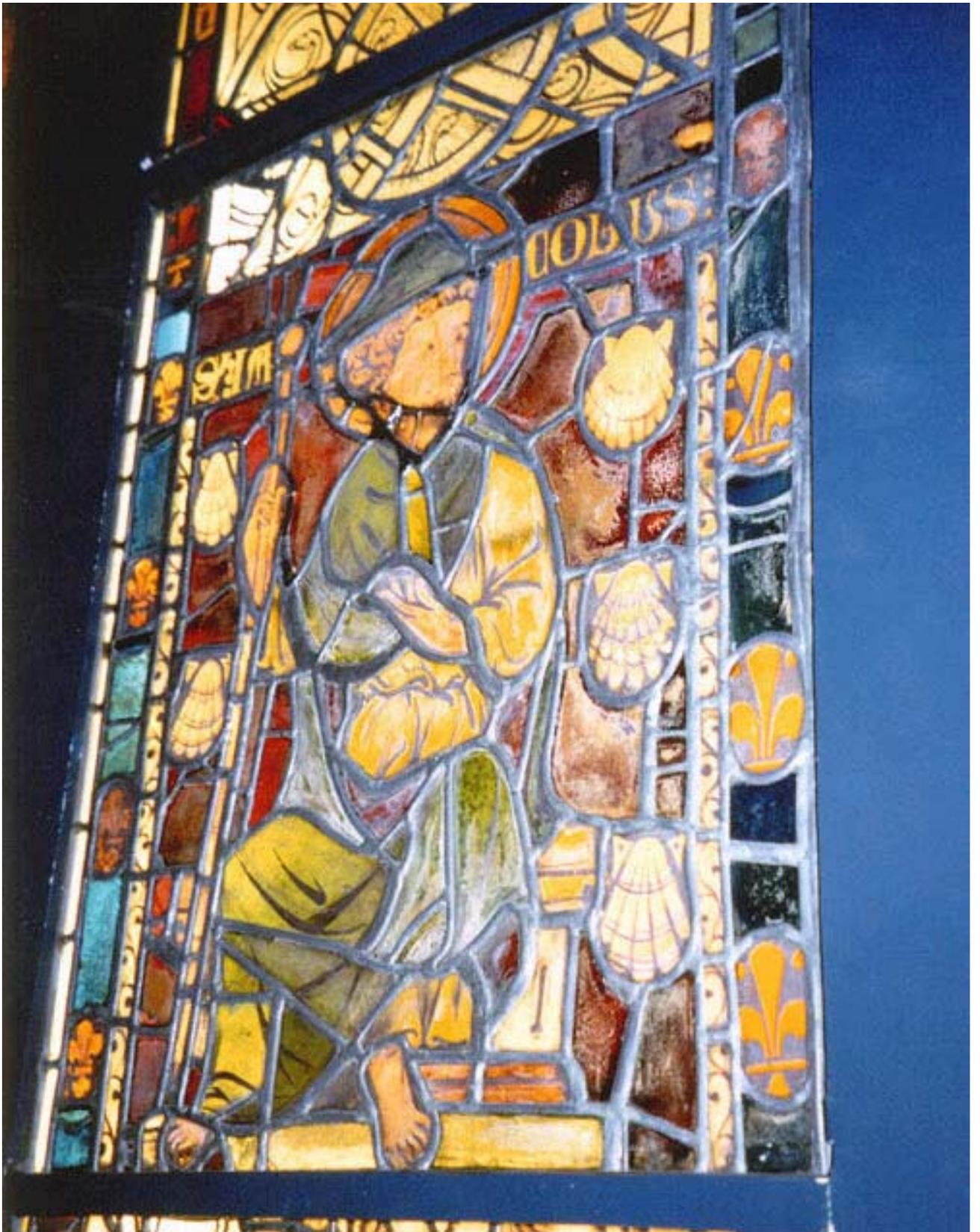
St. James, with scallop on purse, early 14th century

Pilgrim Badges (several)

Painting with apostles, 15th century

scallop shells on window edges - 15th century





Stained glass, late 12th century



Locks : one with shells, 16th century

There is also a chest lock with St. James & St. John, end of 15th century...

Plus many scallop shells on the mantel of the fireplace near the entrance....but keep looking



Walk back a block or two to rue St Jacques, pass through the Portal Ste. Jacques, just past the Pantheon and the Universite of Paris, where the original gates of the city of Paris were once marked. Before continuing on past the Sorbonne, the Institut de Géographie and the Observatoire de Paris, turn left on to rue des Fosses St. Jacques ...what would have been the moat or sewers outside the walls of 12-14th century Paris. On the wooden doors of No. 169 are carved scallop shells. On the right side of the street is a lovely sign for St. Jacques Brûlerie with a scallop shell in iron hanging beneath the busy coffee roaster.



Back on rue St. Jacques, continue on just a bit to the NW corner of rue de l'Abbe de l'Epee to see the one remaining remnant of a scallop shell on the church of St. Jacques Haut Pas. (one block north of the Luxembourg Gardens). The building next door housed a hospital founded in the 12th century and gardens where the friars grew grapes and made wine. Jacques de Voragine translated the Golden Legend : The Lives of Saints, from Latin into French here. Today the 17th century building also houses a branch of the Societe des Amis de St. Jacques de Compostelle.

Inside you'll find scallops on the carved capitals and a beautifully carved 17th century wooden votive panel of the apparition of the Virgin of the Pillar (from the Zaragoza legend) with St. Jacques pèlerin dressed in scallop shells.

A good ending point for the traditional walk out from central Paris is the Place Saint Jacques, on the Boulevard St. Jacques. Returning back, stop at any of the many lively little restaurants for an order of Coquilles St. Jacques or at least a St. Jacques coffee. You've deserved it. ☺

Notes and bibliography

Most of the "Coquilles" were discovered while walking in Paris. I owe a debt of gratitude to my Parisian walking partner, Michel Besson who is a wealth of knowledge about the Chemin de St. Jacques.

In the Cluny I found a boxed set of maps of Paris through the Ages, published by Media Cartes, Paris which gave a great deal of information on Paris historical sites and has easy to follow guides. The most useful for these purposes were captioned by Arthur Gillette.

**Sundials in Paris*, (1995), *Notes from Cadrans Solaires De Paris*, A. Gotteland and George Camus, translated by Jane Walker and Walter Wells, British Sundial Society. Unfortunately, this sundial was removed after this article was submitted. Only the holes where it was hung remain.

After this article was written, I came across a Confraternity of St. James (UK) booklet, *Paris Pilgrim*, by Hilary Hugh-Jones and Mark Hassall, published in 1998 which confirmed some of what I found.

I am most grateful to Les Amis de St Jacques de Compostelle who sent a wonderful assortment of information from their archives, including:

La Documentation Photographique No 6043, 1979: Sur les chemins de Saint-Jacques: Vers Compostelle au Moyen Age.

Paris: Carrefour des Routes de Compostelle: Exposition réalisée par la Délégation à l'action artistique de la ville de Paris, Béatrice de Andia, du Centre Européen d'Etudes Compostellanes, Paris 1982.

Also included in this packet was a fascimile of a page from *Les Heures de Marguerite d'Orléans* (1430) which is in the Bibiotecheque National in Paris. It can be seen at <http://www.bnf.fr/loc/bnf035.jpeg> or in their Manuscript Collection. A group of pilgrims approaching St. James can be seen in the borders of the illuminated manuscript.