

Compostela Saga by Francisco Narla

A pilgrim greeted

«Ultreia»,

and the answer was

«et Suseia, Santiago».



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The **Camino de Santiago**, St. James' way, stands as a powerful cultural icon spoken of by all, recognized across the globe, and embodying a true *high-concept* capable of captivating readers of every age and background.

For centuries, **millions** have undertaken the pilgrimage to the sanctuary of Santiago, and even those who have never walked it know its name. The Camino inspires historical, artistic, sociological, economic, and touristic fascination; Europe itself was shaped through pilgrimage.

Until now, however, the Camino de Santiago has served merely as a backdrop for stories, just a scenery, nothing more. For the first time, anchored to the major architectural milestones of the **cathedral of Compostela**, the Camino becomes a genuine protagonist, illuminated through the conflicts that have defined our past, present, and future.

Francisco Narla's *Compostela Saga* traces the architectural evolution of the cathedral of Santiago in the tradition of international bestsellers such as Ken Follett's *The Pillars of the Earth* and Ildefonso Falcones's *Cathedral of the Sea*, while revealing a unique narrative setting reminiscent of the Camino as portrayed in acclaimed films like Martin Sheen's *The Way* or Gennaro Nunziante's *Buen Camino*, produced by Netflix, the highest-grossing Italian film in history.

And all of this is delivered through the distinctive voice of one of Spain's most celebrated authors of historical fiction, **whose readership exceeds**

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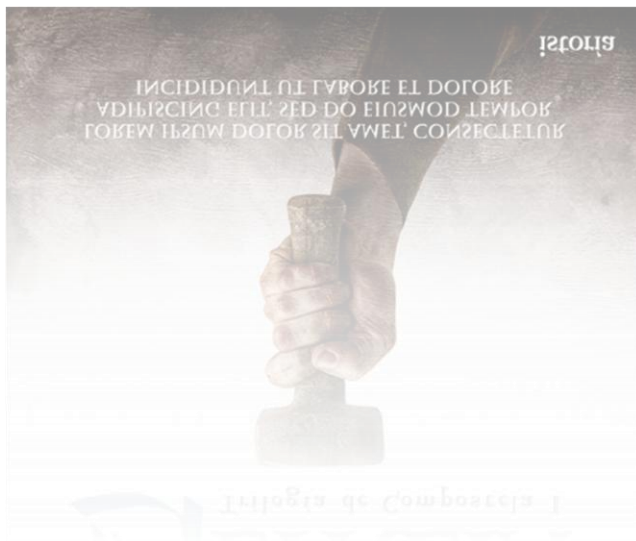
300,000 and whose novels—featuring Vikings, samurai, and Roman legions—have been translated into languages including Chinese and Japanese.

The *Compostela Saga* transcends the boundaries of the **historical novel**. It is a sweeping, character-driven narrative accessible to every type of reader, not only those drawn to history.

While grounded in a powerful historical framework, the trilogy is, above all, a collection of deeply human stories—betrayal, honor, jealousy, love, disgrace, guilt, redemption—brought to life through complex characters navigating both external and internal conflicts.

The *Compostela Saga* is a trilogy that is easy to read yet impossible to forget. A bold step beyond the traditional historical novel.

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In the Year of Our Lord 1117, the southern frontier trembles. The vast Tagus is no longer able to hold back the Almoravids. They have devastated the taifas and now look north with hunger. Meanwhile, the Camino de Santiago has turned Compostela into a plump, tempting capon. And five rabid dogs fight over its flesh: Bishop Diego Gelmírez; Queen and Empress Urraca; her son Alfonso; the City Council; and the Brotherhood of the rising Galician nobility. Intrigue, conspiracies, theft, murder—those in power are allies today and enemies tomorrow. And those who pay the price, once again, are the peasants, the farmers, the craftsmen... the weak,

Compostela reeks of revolution...

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Ultreia focuses on the thrilling and turbulent period of the civil uprisings of 1117, a revolution that shaped European history when, for the first time, ordinary citizens demanded their rights, a movement that would ultimately lead to the birth of European parliamentary tradition with the Cortes of León in 1188, recognized by UNESCO as the beginning of modern democracy.

Power against the people. The struggle for freedom. Dreams colliding with reality.

The driving force of Compostela is the construction of its new cathedral, financed by the Jacobean pilgrimage route. And the lower classes live crushed by taxes; there are even Moorish slaves forced to labor in the lime kilns.

Among these lost souls, the orphaned daughter of a goldsmith ruined by the abusive bishop of Compostela, Diego Gelmírez, has become a pickpocket who takes advantage of the construction works that choke the city, ever-growing in the shadow of the Camino de Santiago.

Ilduara darts across the scaffolding that lines its streets and neighborhoods, astonishingly immune to vertigo thirty cubits above the ground, slipping purses from unsuspecting hands.

This girl, scarred by her past, burdened with caring for a sick brother, and accompanied by a loyal shepherd dog, survives by stealing—even in the pilgrims' cemetery. Then she receives a mysterious commission from one of the city's most powerful merchants, a goldsmith of Jewish origin.

Ilduara must obtain a valuable document exposing the bishop's fraud. At the same time, a stonemason—hunchbacked, twisted, broken inside and out—

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named Triboulet has fled France to hide among the cathedral works and at the bottom of a cider jug. He is the man responsible for the death of his daughter, the only good thing he ever had.

A daughter without a father, Ilduara, and a father without a daughter, Triboulet, will cross paths under the worst possible circumstances: in the midst of a catastrophic collapse at the cathedral works—a collapse that was deliberately caused and has claimed the lives of hundreds of innocents.

A collapse to which Bishop Gelmírez responds with the chilling words: “The Lord knows how to separate the wheat from the chaff.”

Thus, a daughter without a father and a father without a daughter become entangled in a conspiracy to overthrow the bishop of Compostela. A plot woven by Europe’s first queen, Doña Urraca, one of the great yet insufficiently recognized women of history, together with the nobles and merchants of the city.

Their only hope is a *meiga*, an extraordinary woman who loves the hunchback though he cannot bring himself to love her back: the witch Elo, who maintains contact with the rebels.

But the leader of the rebellion is imprisoned in the greatest fortress of the old Kingdom of Galicia, on the banks of the river Ulla, where Bishop Gelmírez commands even two newly built galleys filled with soldiers, and among them is his personal bodyguard, the Viking Harald, a renegade from the Norwegian Crusaders.

Ilduara and Triboulet will escape the hornet’s nest that is Compostela, paying a terrible price— Ilduara will lose her brother along the way—and they

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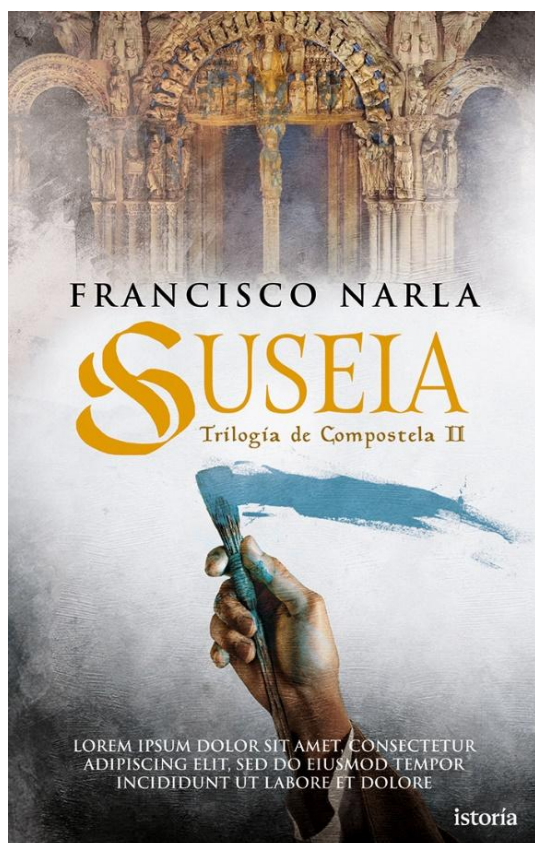
will discover that there is no turning back: five armies are about to encircle the city to fight for the riches brought by the Camino de Santiago.

They will lose much on the road, but they will find each other.

As Compostela burns on all four sides, Ilduara and Triboulet will try to ignite a revolution, and in doing so, they will begin to heal one another.

Both will have to sacrifice what they desire most in order to understand what they already had.

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In the Year of Our Lord 1168, the kingdom of Galicia and León stands as a wedge between the ambition of Portugal and the greed of Castile.

The three crowns distrust one another. They circle each other with daggers drawn. The old treaties that once divided the reconquered south are now ashes scattered to the wind. And while the Christians fight among themselves, beyond Gibraltar's Strait a new threat has risen: the Unitarians, the true believers, the Almohads.

Al-Andalus drowns in blood. In Compostela, the cathedral of the Son of Zebedee, beacon of Christendom, Jerusalem of the West, remains under construction...

And it won't be completed.

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Suseia portrays a man and his masterpiece. Suseia reveals to us Master Mateo and his immortal legacy: the Portico of Glory.

The tangled political situation is on the verge of bringing down the works of the cathedral of Compostela. The Christian kingdoms are at each other's throats under the looming Muslim threat. And the master builder is found brutally murdered – as if one of the demons carved into the cathedral's stones had come to life to tear him apart. Young Mateo, a mere journeyman, little more than an apprentice, is unexpectedly entrusted with completing the work, with taking command. He alone has conceived a unique solution, a way to overcome the uneven terrain that has halted construction for years. And the bishop – despite Mateo's past, marked by a terrible accident that cost innocent lives – decides to make him the new master builder. Mateo stands before the dream of a lifetime, yet the captain of the bishop's armies is convinced Mateo is guilty of the horrific murder and will not cease to hound him. And Mateo will descend into madness... or strike a bargain with the devil. He will pay a terrible price to complete his work, to breathe life into granite. He will pay the price the stone demands. To fulfill his vision, Mateo will break his marriage, lose his son, and fall into an unimaginable spiral that tears him away from everything except his work. The stones of the Portico of Glory will bewitch him. He will labor more than any other mason, more than any other *arxina* – a closed guild with its own language and ancient customs. And one freezing night, as blocks of granite crack open under wedges turned to ice, Mateo will encounter two mysterious figures. Two old men approach, wrapped in a melody that borders on madness. An impossibility. Mateo will fight to raise the greatest work of

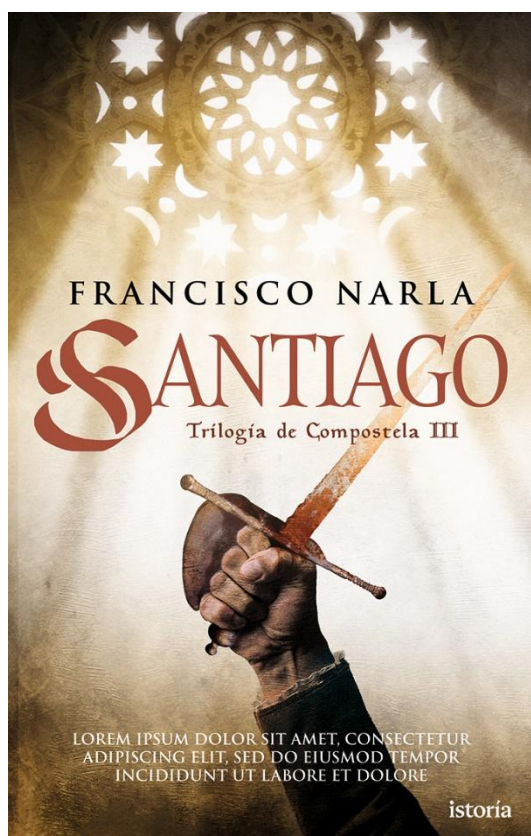
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Christendom. He will battle his past, politics, money, and the suspicions that brand him a murderer. It is an impossible undertaking. And Mateo will surrender either his soul or his sanity. One morning, the men appointed by the king to guard the works are found dead – more deaths – and Mateo is discovered destroying his own creation, biting into the stones he himself carved with his chisel. And his son, whom he has driven away – now on the verge of becoming a father himself – abandons his own dreams to help him. The son had left without looking back, turning his back on masonry, on the *arxinas*, wanting nothing to do with hammer and chisel. He has become a craftsman of musical instruments and has just received the most important commission of his life: a hurdy-gurdy for the bishopric of Toledo, the very instrument his father once heard on that freezing night in the hands of two mysterious old men. Even though he believes his father guilty of the murders, Mateo's son decides to help him and take up his burden. And the curse of the works passes from one to the other. The boy who once drew sparrows taking flight will discover that perhaps his father has not gone mad. That perhaps he is not the one responsible for the terrible killings. But more deaths will follow. The corpse of the man who envied Mateo all his life – the one who coveted his position as master builder – is found shattered by a mason's hammer. And there is no excuse, no alibi. One of the two – father or son – must be the killer. Kings and bishops will gamble with the fate of Compostela. Meanwhile, impossible stones are torn from forgotten quarries, the pieces that will astonish Christendom are carved, and a father and son battle the legacy of a ghost who ended his life hanging from the cranes of the works. In those years, the Portico of

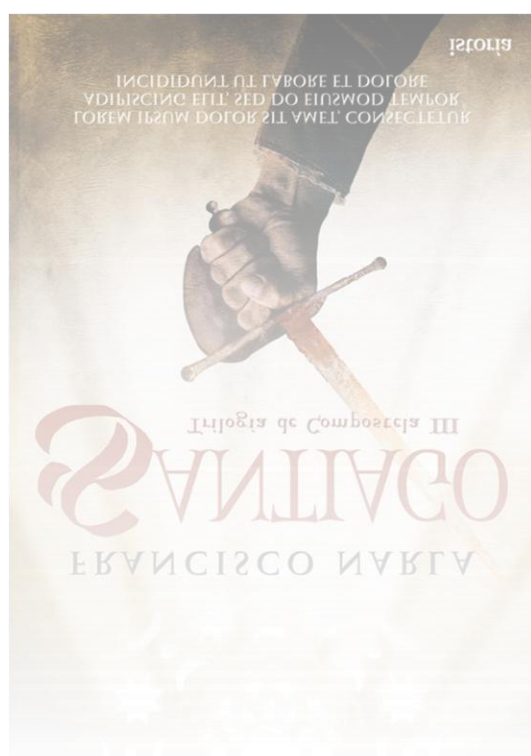
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Glory was known as the Portico of the Trinity – and it will indeed be a trinity (father, son, and the ghost of their past) who attempt to build the impossible, to resolve the unsolvable. The cathedral façade must rise over a chasm that no master builder has been able to conquer for centuries. Father and son, under the shadow of their past, will have to sacrifice themselves for one another to raise the dream they share: a cathedral open to all, a home for pilgrims.

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In the Year of Our Lord 1589, the pilgrimage to Compostela is a stranded ship. The Protestant Reformation, the plague, the war against the Turk, against France, against England, the lawsuits challenging the Vow of Santiago... Compostela is sinking. But King Philip, in El Escorial—having unified the crowns of Spain and Portugal under an empire on which the sun never sets—has other concerns. After the disastrous defeat of the Spanish Armada in the English Channel, Elizabeth of England has allied herself with the embittered Portuguese heir, the Flemish rebels, the French, even Morocco, and she prepares her vengeance. Santander, Cádiz, and A Coruña raise fortresses, repair ships, gather men.



And Compostela trembles...

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Santiago portrays the decline of the Camino de Santiago, a time when scarcely any pilgrims reach the city and the cathedral is closed for the first time in its history.

The dreams awakened in the previous novel shatter into pieces. England prepares the Counter-Armada: two hundred ships, three thousand cannons, thirty thousand men ready to devastate the dominions of Philip II, the king whose empire spanned the entire globe.

And a thief, disillusioned, lost, Barrabás Balboa, a man who has spent thirty years fleeing the horrific death of his grandfather on the Camino de Santiago, has finally found a reason to stop running. He has become the best in the *caponeras*, the mines dug three cubits underground used in sieges or to steal relics from old cemeteries. But now a woman has appeared. *The* woman. Alessandra Visconti, daughter of a Parmesan cheesemaker who does business in Flanders. And she has made him consider, for the first time, that stopping might be worth it. Yet the man — soldier, tormented by his memories — has ruined everything. Balboa has lost her.

Unable to restrain himself, he involved himself in a theft that will ruin Alessandra's father.

And he ends up in prison. He will try to escape, he will try to win her back. But he receives unexpected orders: he must travel from Antwerp, engulfed in the Eighty Years' War, to A Coruña, to warn that English troops intend to seize the city in order to reach Compostela and destroy it in a frenzy of iconoclastic fury.

England wants Compostela in flames and the relics of the Apostle Santiago plundered.

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Barrabás Balboa will have to do what he swore he would never do again: make the pilgrimage to Compostela, stirring up the terrible memories of a childhood spent in scams and theft along the road, always in the company of his grandfather.

Disguised as a pilgrim, in secret, he will try to arrive in time to prevent the deaths of thousands of innocents while being hunted by an English angel – an angel with three pistols and a vengeance. At the same time, he must win back the woman he loves, now entangled in a conspiracy to save the Apostle's relics, which – out of fear of the English – have been moved in total secrecy to torment the bishop's conscience.

England will attack Coruña; the warning arrives too late, but Balboa will have a chance at redemption amid the cannon fire, and at the same time he will uncover a terrible double betrayal: the dean of the Compostela cathedral chapter has sold himself to the English, and the king's cipher secretary – the very man who entrusted him with the mission – has sold himself to his own greed.

Coruña, with the intervention of widows and orphans and thanks to one of Balboa's impossible plans, will manage to repel the English assault – three cubits underground.

Yet the Apostle's relics will vanish. For nearly three centuries, the remains of the Son of Thunder will be lost, dragging the Camino de Compostela further and further into decline. But the end of the novel will reveal how and why, uncovering the true enduring power of the Camino.

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And from thirty cubits above the ground to three below it – like the three tiers of a cathedral opening itself to the Trinity – the three novels of the saga portray more than a thousand years of history and the lives of those who found themselves ensnared by the magic of the Camino de Santiago.