

PURCHAS'S PILGRIM ITINERARY AND <KEER>, SPAIN

SAMUEL PURCHAS'S *PILGRIMES OF 1625* CONTAINS A LONG MEDIEVAL English poem on pilgrimages to Compostela, Rome, and Palestine.¹ Although its author is unknown, he mentions a Walter Medford who accompanied him in Italy. Records allow us to identify Medford as the Dean of Wells from 1413 to 1423 (when he died), and all but prove that the pilgrimage began in 1422. Unfortunately, between the 1420s when it was written and 1625 when it was printed, the poem's text gained corruptions. This note concerns one of them, on the Spanish town of 'Keer'.

After mentioning Roncesvalles and relics there of Roland and Oliver, the poet reaches Pamplona.

From thennez even to Pampylyon,
The chef cite of the Reme of Naveron;
A faire cite and a large,
Thereto commeth bothe bote and barge.
And from thennez to the toune of Keer
Is thirty miles long, and hongery heer.
Then to the Gruon in Spayne,
That is the last toune, certaine,
Of the realme of Naveron...²

These workaday verses have difficulties. Pamplona is still the capital of Navarre, yet its river (the Arga) is useless for navigation. 'Keer' is unlocated; 'thirty miles' may not be accurate; 'heer' has been thought obscure; and 'the Gruon' or Logroño was not in Navarre but just west of its then frontier. Yet a little thought will supply order to these lines.

A clue is provided by the editors. They note that lines following the above are doubly misplaced, with 'Pount Roie' or Puente la Reina appearing before 'Pount Paradise' or Zubiri (= 'by a bridge' in Basque). The correct geographical order is Roncesvalles, Zubiri, Pamplona, Puente la Reina,

¹ It is 1557-5 in R. H. Robbins and J. L. Cutler, *Supplement to the Index of Middle English Verse* (Lexington, 1965).

² R. B. Tate and Thorlac Turville-Petre, *Two Pilgrim Itineraries of the Later Middle Ages* (Santiago de Compostela, 1995), 36.

Logroño: not Roncesvalles, Pamplona, Logroño, Puente la Reina, Zubiri (as if the pilgrim had turned back home). This allows a solution for 'Keer'.

Twenty miles west of Logroño is Nájera. It had hospices for wayfarers and pilgrims, and was the seat of a bishop until the twelfth century.³ But English history knows Nájera better as where, on 3 April 1367, the Black Prince wiped out a Castilian army, with the Chandos Herald claiming that 2,000 Spaniards alone were drowned in the river as they fled.⁴ The fifteenth-century cleric John Capgrave mentions this victory 'by be town and be watir of Nazar', which tolerably represents the name.⁵ Others had more difficulty, as shown by an English version of a Roland romance. Where the standard Latin original had *Nageram* 'Nájera', it tells how an enemy sent 'a gyaunte of the kynrade of Golias' (=Goliath) to 'Vageris', Lombardic *N-* having been read as *V-*. Variants in related texts include *Nageras*, *Nazeris*, *Nadres*, *Ager*, and *Nager*.⁶

Such corrupt readings as *Vageris*, *Nadres*, and *Ager* suggest that 'the toune of Keer' was Nájera. Despite the blunders of copyists, the letters *-er-* survive consistently; and if *N* could become *V*, it might become *K*. Since the Arga is unnavigable, when the Ebro is a broad river, the passage must therefore come after that on Logroño (not Pamplona). We may read them as follows.

A faire cite and a large,
Thereto commeth bothe bote and barge.
And from thennez to the toune of Keer
Is thirty miles long, and hongery heer.

Here 'Keer' may be read as *Naer* or *Nayer*, an approximate English rendering of *Nájera* in Old Spanish pronunciation. If 'thirty' were emended to 'twenty', the description would be exact. Finally, the allegedly meaningless 'heer'. It may just be 'here'. Yet, since the poet often uses

³ Constance Storrs, *Jacobean Pilgrims from England to St James of Compostella* (Santiago de Compostela, 1994), 96.

⁴ Edith Rickert, *Chaucer's World* (New York, 1948), 329.

⁵ P. J. Lucas (ed.), *John Capgrave's Abbreviacion of Cronicles*, EETS OS 285 (Oxford, 1983), 176.

⁶ S. H. A. Shepherd (ed.), *Turpines Story: A Middle English Translation of the 'Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle'*, EETS OS 322 (Oxford, 2004), 23, 69-70.

'there' in rhymes, it may have been that or (since his dialect was Northern) even *thair*, which goes better with *Nayer*. After Logroño, he went many miles to 'the toune of Keer' or (it seems) Nájera, there finding little to eat and so warning others that it was *hongery thair*.⁷

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