Rediscovering the Jacobean cult in medieval England: the wall paintings of St James the Great in Stoke Orchard

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Redescubriendo el culto jacobeo en la Inglaterra medieval: las pinturas murales de Santiago el Mayor en Stoke Orchard

Resumen: El trabajo de restauración llevado a cabo en la década de 1950 por el equipo de Clive Rouse en la iglesia Normanda de Santiago el Mayor de Stoke Orchard, Gloucestershire, dejó al descubierto uno de los ciclos pictóricos más tempranos y extensos conservados en Europa sobre la vida y muerte del apóstol Santiago, fechado entre el ca. 1190 y 1220. Aunque el método decorativo adoptado aquí, a modo de friso continuo recorriendo todo el interior de la nave de la iglesia, puede también verse en otras iglesias inglesas como St Botolph en West Sussex, ejemplos conservados parecen indicar que esta fórmula pictórica era más bien inusual en el norte de Europa. A pesar de su rareza, estas pinturas fueron solamente publicadas en un artículo por su descubridor en el año 1966.

Además de exponer las pinturas murales, mi investigación girará en torno a tres cuestiones fundamentales: las fuentes medievales escritas que pudieron inspirar estos frescos; su funcionalidad en relación al puerto de Bristol, uno de los principales embarcaderos para los peregrinos británicos jacobeos; y por último, su posible patronazgo por parte de la familia Archer y del origen de su devoción Jacobea.


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1 This article constitutes a brief introduction to my current doctoral investigations at The University of Edinburgh, under the supervision of Prof. Dr Heather Pulliam and Prof. Dr Manuel Antonio Castiñeras González, into the origins and development of the Jacobean cult and pilgrimage to Compostela in medieval England focusing on the art associated with it. Many thanks to Rev. Chris J. Harrison and his wife Jane as well as to Rev. David Coulton and Daisy, the key holder of the church, who very kindly allowed me to access the church for my studies.
Rediscovering the Jacobean cult in medieval England: the wall paintings of St James the Great in Stoke Orchard

Abstract: The restoration work conducted throughout the 1950s under the supervision of Clive Rouse on the Norman church of St James the Great of Stoke Orchard, Gloucestershire, uncovered the earliest and largest mural cycle found in Europe depicting the life and martyrdom of the apostle St James, dated from between c.1190 and 1220. Although the method adopted here, as a continuous frieze running around the entire nave, can also be seen in other English churches like St Botolph’s Church in West Sussex, surviving examples would seem to indicate that this formula was rather unusual in the North of Europe. Despite this uniqueness, these frescos have only been published in one article by their discoverer in 1966.

Besides expounding the wall paintings, my investigations will consider three core issues: the medieval written sources which could have inspired these frescos; the possible functionality in relation to the port of Bristol, one of the main harbours for the Jacobean British pilgrims, and finally, the patronage of the Archer family as well as the origin of their Jacobean devotion.

Key words: Life and martyrdom of St James the Great. Passion-legends of Saints during the Middle Ages. Stoke Orchard. Wall painting. Medieval Literature. Patrons. Medieval English Roads. Port of Bristol.

Redescubriendo o culto xacobeo na Inglaterra medieval: as pinturas murais de Santiago o Maior en Stoke Orchard

Resumo: O traballo de restauración levado a cabo na década de 1950 polo equipo de Clive Rouse na igrexa normanda de Santiago o Maior de Stoke Orchard, Gloucestershire, deixou ao descuberto un dos ciclos pictóricos máis temperáns e extensos conservados en Europa sobre a vida e morte do apóstolo Santiago, datado entre o ca.1190 e 1220. A pesar de que o método decorativo adoptado aquí, a modo de friso continuo recorrendo todo o interior da nave da igrexa, pode tamén verse noutras igrexa inglesas como St Botolph en West Sussex, exemplos conservados parecen indicar que esta fórmula pictórica era máis ben pouco habitual no norte de Europa. Malia a súa rareza, estas pinturas foron soamente publicadas nun artigo polo seu descubridor no ano 1966.

Ademais de exponer as pinturas murais, a miña investigación xirará en torno a tres cuestións fundamentais: as fontes medievais escritas que puideron inspirar estes frescos; a súa funcionalidade en relación ao porto de Bristol, un dos principais embarcadoiros para os peregrinos británicos xacobeos; e por último, o seu posible padroado por parte da familia Archer e da orixe da súa devoción xacobea.

I. Notes on St James the Great Church in Stoke Orchard.

Originally intended as a chapel of ease attached to Bishop’s Cleeve, St James the Great at Stoke Orchard is a small parish church in the Tewkesbury district (fig. 1), Gloucestershire, located in the southwest of England. There are two principal dates of particular relevance to this building:

— ca.1160/70-80: the building of the chapel.
— 1269: the first written record found related to the chapel in which is mentioned first, the elevation of this building to a parish church explicitly

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3 MORRIS, John and MOORE, John S., Domesday Book: 15, Gloucestershire, Chichester, 1982. The first record found of the village of Stoke Orchard’s town is in Domesday Book folio 163d. ‘In STOCHES tenuer Hermer 7 Auin.III. hid. una V. min. / Modo ten Bernard de rege.7 ht. ibi.1 car in dno.7 IIII. acs / Pti. Valuit.LX. folid. Modo. IL.folid. / Qui TR.E. has tras teneban. 7 se ? tras suas sub Brictrici / Potestate sumiser’.

4 According to National Heritage and Verey the nave was built in ca.1160, while Clive Rouse brings this date forward, suggesting that it was probably built in ca.1160-80. National Heritage List of England, VEREY, David, Gloucestershire 2, the Vale and the Forest of Dean, 1980, p. 351. CLIVE ROUSE, E. and BAKER, A. “Wall paintings in Stoke Orchard Church [...]”, p. 79.
dedicated to St James the Great, ‘St James the Apostle’, and secondly its connection with Nicholas (le) Archer, the ancestor of the possible founders of the church.

Following the commonest architectural typology of a Norman parish church, Stoke Orchard consists of a small building based on two rectangular cells, corresponding to an aisless nave and chancel, and a characteristic Gloucestershire single bell-cot. The nave has six windows, five single small round-headed openings – two in the north and south and one in the west wall – and a sixth square-headed in the southeast end of the wall. It has no west entrance, but a plain square-headed one in the south, and a north entrance, the latter a little richer, opening under a blind tympanum devoid of decoration and embellished with its original 12th century hinges with animal head decoration of Scandinavian influence, according to David Verey, (fig. 2).

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5 ‘Licence to Nicholas le Archer and commonalty of Stoke le Archer to hear divine services and offices, and receive the sacraments in the chapel of St James the Apostle, on account of Stoke being so distant from mother church, and the roads in Winter being unpassable’. Episcopal registers, diocese of Worcester: Register of Bishop Godfrey Gifford, September 23rd 1268 to August 15th 1301, Oxford, 1898, Part I, p. 23.


7 CLIVE ROUSE, E. and BAKER, A. ‘Wall paintings in Stoke Orchard Church […]’, p. 79.

8 These heads would resemble the figures that appear in the decorative borders of the cycle of St James in the interior of the nave. VEREY, David, Gloucestershire 2, the Vale and the Forest of Dean, 1980, p. 351.
This church is an interesting example of Romanesque architecture, as its structure has remained largely unchanged since that period⁹, in fact the nave has been preserved practically unaltered since its foundation. That is not to say that Stoke Orchard has not undergone modification or reconstruction during its history, but these have been relatively non-invasive to the original structure.

The major architectural alterations of the church undertaken in the late 13th and beginning of the 14th century consist primarily of a new double-chamfered chancel pointed arch followed by the addition of three buttresses, two as a means to support the new chancel arch and the third in the north wall, a new chancel which would echo the structure of the former and a bell-cot housing one bell over the chancel arch¹⁰. The nave has barely any structural alterations, its major and only modification being the opening of a new aperture in the southeast corner of the south wall in the 16th century (fig. 3)¹¹.

Built using limestone and limestone rubble and preserved from the original plan of the nave are five narrow and deep round-headed windows as well as its two entrance access points and also the lower part of the east wall and baptismal font¹². Its interior is entirely plastered and decorated with superimposed paintings from at least five different periods¹³, among which the most important, and the principal subject of this article, are the earliest, which narrate the life and martyrdom of St James the Great¹⁴.

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¹¹ CLIVE ROUSE, E. and BAKER, A. “Wall paintings in Stoke Orchard Church [...]”, p. 80. The purpose of this new opening was to provide more natural light to the interior of the church. Other structural changes registered by the National Heritage are a series of reconstructions on the east area during the 19th century. National Heritage List of England.
Fig. 3. Stoke Orchard, Church of St James the Great, plan and elevation of the church from Clive Rouse, "Wall Paintings in Stoke Orchard [...]".
II. Stoke Orchard’s wall paintings.

Although initially covered by different layers of stucco, the wall paintings belonging to the cycle of St James were already visible from at least 1889 in some areas of the nave possibly due to the progressive deterioration and erosion of the upper extracts. The first reference to these frescos reported up until now was found in The Bristol & Gloucester Archaeological Society of 1889-90: ‘[…] drawing attention to the pieces of mural decorations on the west wall which had recently been discovered. They were inspected with much curiosity, and the suggestion was thrown out that it might be well to take tracings of them. One of the three figures brought to light is evidently that of Our Lord, but as to who the others are intended to represent there is nothing to aid conjecture’ 15. But it was not until 1956 the Jacobean cycle was completely revealed and uncovered due to the restoration work conducted by the archaeologist Edward Clive Rouse16.

During the restoration twenty-eight scenes of the cycle of St James were discovered of which there initially must have been around forty17. Its current state of preservation is extremely fragile and fragmentary, primarily as a consequence of the damage that must have been caused by the addition of various upper layers where in some cases the new painting was directly applied over the previous wall paintings18 but especially due to the deterioration and loss of plaster in the southeast corner and most of the part of the northwest wall destroying the scenes located in these areas19; the construction of the chancel arch in the 13th century causing a series of cracks in the frescos of the east wall; the opening of a new window in the 16th century completely destroying the frescos in this area; and finally, the mutilation suffered by the scenes which surround the original openings of the walls by the Victorians who, following the aesthetic criteria of their time, stripped the plaster of the corner of the windows and doors in order to leave the stone masonry20.

15 “Transactions at Cheltenham”, The Bristol & Gloucester Archaeological Society, vol. 14, 1889-90, p. 202. Also, in the publication of the year 1905 of the same journal can be read: ‘the dignified figure of our Lord seated sideways with one hand raised in benediction, suggests the coronation of the Blessed Virgin Mary; if so, the rest of the subject is on the other side of the window. Another figure is partly uncovered, and the background is powdered with stars’. “Proceeding at the Annual Summer Meetings at Cheltenham and Worcester”, The Bristol & Gloucester Archaeological Society, vol. 14, 1905, p. 32.

16 Clive Rouse’s restoration work lasted for four years, from 1952 until 1956. During this time the scenes of the cycle were analysed, photographed and drawn by his team generating the publication: Wall paintings in Stoke Orchard Church, Gloucestershire, with particular reference to the cycle of the life of St James the Great.

17 Contrary to what might be assumed, this is positive data if we take into account that these frescos were covered by several layers of plaster and painting stratum as well as the reconstruction of the chancel arch in the 13th century which had severely altered the scenes of the nave east wall.

18 CLIVE ROUSE, E. and BAKER, A. “Wall paintings in Stoke Orchard Church […]”, p. 115. In the east wall and the north side of the chancel arch.

19 Ibid., p. 88.

20 Ibid., p. 82.
With reference to the dates of the cycle, Clive Rouse suggested that this must have been painted between ca.1190 and the 13th century, while the National Heritage List of England shortened this latter date to the 1220’s. According to the archaeologist the frescos were created at some point after the construction of the church’s nave but before the restoration of the chancel arch in the late 13th century. As mentioned above, the addition of the new arch critically damaged the frescos of the east wall of the nave, so it has been supposed that these frescos must have been complete at the time the new arch was built.

As can be seen in the plan of the sections of the nave, the cycle of St James commences on the east wall, in the south side of the chancel arch (fig. 3). From there the sequences of the cycle go over the three remaining interior walls of the nave at the height of the windows as a continuous frieze over a background decorated with crude stars and encircled by a lower and upper border embellished with foliage and interlaced ornamentation as well as fantastic figures, to finish at the north side of the arch. The succession of the scenes follow an uninterrupted system, with no vertical frames among them, thus forming a unique and large pictorial strip where one scene concludes as the other begins, the only way to distinguish between the different scenes being through observing the scenes themselves. All of them have a similar arrangement of form, in which a minimum of two figures appear facing each other and taking part in the scene’s event. The moment of the sequence swap is usually indicated by two figures with their backs against each other, in which one of those figures belongs to the previous scene and the other to the following, consequently opening up in an exceptionally fluent language a new chapter of the life of St James within the cycle.

Although the formal and stylistic characteristics of the cycle are marked by the crudeness of their drawings, Clive Rouse highlights its great importance as it is one of the only examples of this thematic preserved in Europe. In fact, if we take the dates offered by the archaeologist, we could also claim that the cycle of St James in Stoke Orchard is the earliest found up until now. In contrast to the chosen method for the representation of the saints, in which despite the examples of St Katherine of Alexandria cycle in Great Brustead, Essex; Sporle, Norfolk; and St Margaret of Antioch in Battle, East Sussex; the pictorial depiction of lengthy decorative cycles illustrating the life of saints and occupying most of the part of the church interior is rather unusual; it is also interesting to note that all the central ornamentation

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21 Ibid., pp. 106-07. National Heritage List of England. Verey would also accept these dates while Rosewell stated that the wall paintings were done in the first half of the 13th century. ROSEWELL, Roger, Medieval wall paintings in English & Welsh churches, Woodbridge, 2008, p. 179.
22 National Heritage List of England. The height of the frieze is of 1,97 metres.
24 Ibid., p. 82.
25 ROSEWELL, Roger, Medieval wall paintings […]. pp. 65-66.
of the nave in Stoke Orchard is devoted to the celebration of the miracles and martyrdom of one single saint.

The episode from St James’ life depicted in the twenty-eight scenes of Stoke Orchard is the story of his encounter with the magician Hermogenes and his later martyrdom. This account relates how after preaching the Gospel in Judea and having an unsuccessful mission in the Iberian Peninsula, the Apostle came back to Jerusalem to propagate the Doctrine among the Jews. For this reason, the High Priest Abiathar, worried by the threat that St James may pose and in order to smear the reputation of the Saint, asked the magician Hermogenes for help. Following this, the magician decided to send his disciple Philetus to discredit the faith of the Apostle but instead, after listening to him, he decided to be converted to Christianity. Hermogenes, full of anger incarcerated his disciple with magic bonds as a punishment and Philetus seeking help, sent his servant (or son) to meet the Apostle and ask for his help to free him. After this the magician decided to send his familiar spirits against St James, but they too fell under the Saint’s power who then requested that they bring Hermogenes to him bound but unharmed and once he was chained, St James ordered Philetus to unbind his former master. After this experience the magician decided also to convert as well as to destroy his books, and the Apostle offered him his own staff as protection from the demons. The enraged Abiathar turned Herod Agrippa against the Saint and the monarch ordered the soldier Josias to arrest St James for later incarceration. Once captured and on the way to execution, they ran into a crippled mendicant who stopped them begging St James to cure his suffering. The Apostle then performed a miracle of healing and, completely enchanted with this marvel, both Josias and the beggar decided to be baptised. As Josias refused to renounce his new faith, it was ordered he be struck in his mouth and suffer martyrdom with the Apostle. Finally, just before their executions and after his unsuccessful attempt to get water to be able to baptise the ex-soldier, St James gave Josias the kiss of peace to signify being baptised before their decapitation.

Starting its interpretation in the south of the east wall, I will proceed to enumerate each of the scenes of the cycle as well as to find their correlation with the Jacobean martyrdom described in the Codex Calixtinus, the Gemma Ecclesiastica and the Legenda Aurea.

26 CLIVE ROUSE, E. and BAKER, A. “Wall paintings in Stoke Orchard Church […]”, p. 82.
27 The titles employed in this article were given by Clive Rouse. For a further description of the scenes see Clive Rouse’s publication.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Mentioned in texts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>East wall – south side</td>
<td>Christ offering the staff to St James</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Southeast window – east side</td>
<td>Philetus in dispute with Hermogenes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Southeast window – west side</td>
<td>Philetus is bound by spells cast by Hermogenes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>South wall – centre</td>
<td>The chief Pharisee begs Hermogenes to use his magic to prevent St James from converting the Jews to belief in Christ (fig. 4)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>South wall – centre</td>
<td>Hermogenes sends devils to bring St James, Philetus and his son bound before him (fig. 4)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>South wall – centre</td>
<td>Hermogenes seized and bound by devils at the command of St James (fig. 4)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>South wall – east side of the south door</td>
<td>St James instructs Philetus to release Hermogenes (fig. 4 and 5)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>South door – upper area</td>
<td>Philetus looses Hermogenes’ hands (fig. 5)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>South door – upper area</td>
<td>Hermogenes asks St James for a token to protect him from evil spirits (fig. 5)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>South door – upper area</td>
<td>St James instructs Philetus’ son to ask his father to fetch St James staff (fig. 5)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>South wall – west side of the south door</td>
<td>Philetus gives St James’ staff to Hermogenes (fig. 5)</td>
<td>St James gives the stick to Hermogenes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Southwest window – east side</td>
<td>Hermogenes brings his magic books to St James for destruction</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Southwest window – west side</td>
<td>The reliquary or “Zaberna” in which the books were kept in Hermogenes’ castle</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>South wall – west side</td>
<td>Uncertain (fig. 6)</td>
<td>No. According to Clive Rouse, a familiar spirit.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>South wall – west side</td>
<td>St James, Hermogenes and a sailor throwing the books into the sea from a boat (fig. 6)</td>
<td>No. Hermogenes on his own threw them into the sea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>South wall – west side</td>
<td>Uncertain (fig. 6)</td>
<td>No. According to Clive Rouse, a familiar spirit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>West wall – south side</td>
<td>St James overcoming the familiar and Hermogenes’ idol</td>
<td>According to the Codex Calixtinus, St James orders Hermogenes to break his idol (not in Legenda Aurea)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>West wall – south wall</td>
<td>Christ blessing</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>West window – south side</td>
<td>St James baptising Hermogenes and his disciples</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>West window – north side</td>
<td>Unidentified</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>West wall – north side</td>
<td>St James preaching outside his prison cell</td>
<td>Yes (but not in Gemma Ecclesiastica or Legenda Aurea)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>North wall and west side of the northeast window</td>
<td>The scouring of St James before the High Priest or Herod Agrippa (fig. 7)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Norwest window – east side</td>
<td>The healing of the paralytic by St James (fig. 7)</td>
<td>Yes (not in Gemma Ecclesiastica)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>North wall – east side</td>
<td>The conversion of Josias and the paralytic (fig. 7)</td>
<td>Yes (not in Gemma Ecclesiastica)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>North wall – east side</td>
<td>Josias being struck or having his ear cut off in the presence of the High Priest</td>
<td>Yes (not in Gemma Ecclesiastica)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>East wall – north of chancel arch</td>
<td>Probably the Baptism of Josias (fig. 8)</td>
<td>Yes (not in Gemma Ecclesiastica)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>East wall – north of chancel arch</td>
<td>St James embraces Josias (fig. 8)</td>
<td>Yes (not in Gemma Ecclesiastica or Legenda Aurea)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>East wall – north of chancel arch</td>
<td>The execution of St James and Josias; their souls taken to Heaven in a napkin (fig. 8)</td>
<td>Yes (not in Gemma Ecclesiastica)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fig. 4. Stoke Orchard, Church of St James the Great, nave, south wall, wall painting, detail of scene 4, The chief Pharisee begs Hermogenes to use his magic to prevent St James from converting the Jews to belief in Christ (left); scene 5, Hermogenes sends devils to bring St James, Philetus and his son bound before him (centre-left); scene 6, Hermogenes seized and bound by devils at the command of St James (centre-right); and detail of scene 7, St James instructs Philetus to release Hermogenes (right, east side of south door). Photograph and drawing by the author.
Fig. 5. Stoke Orchard, Church of St James the Great, nave, south wall, wall painting, detail of scene 7, St James instructs Philetus to release Hermogenes (left, east side of south door); scene 8, Philetus looses Hermogenes’s hands (left over doorway); Scene 9, Hermogenes asks St James for a token to protect him from evil spirits (centre over doorway); scene 10, St James instructs Philetus’ son to ask his father to fetch St James’ staff (right over doorway); and scene 11, Philetus gives St James’ staff to Hermogenes (right, west side of south door). Photograph and drawing by the author.
Fig. 6. Stoke Orchard, Church of St James the Great, nave, south wall - west end, wall painting, scene 14, Uncertain; scene 15, St James, Hermogenes and sailor throwing the books into the sea from a boat; and scene 16, Uncertain. Photograph and drawing by the author.
Fig. 7. Stoke Orchard, Church of St James the Great, nave, north wall, wall painting, scene 22, The scouring of St James before the High Priest or Herod Agrippa (left and centre west side of northeast window); scene 23, The healing of the paralytic by St James (centre east side of northeast window); and detail of scene 24, The conversion of Josias and the paralytic (right). Photograph and drawing by the author.
Fig. 8. Stoke Orchard, Church of St James the Great, nave, north of chancel arch, wall painting, scene 26, probably the Baptism of Josias (left); scene 27, St James embraces Josias (centre); and scene 28, The execution of St James and Josias; their souls taken to Heaven in a napkin (right). Photograph and drawing by the author.
III. Medieval sources for the Jacobean cycle of Stoke Orchard.

Although the New Testament is an undeniable source of information for the biographies of the apostles, and therefore of St James the Great, any mention here about his achievements after the death of Christ are scant. In fact his death appears only succinctly cited in the Acts of the Apostles, but here there is neither allusion to Hermogenes nor Philetus. In fact this story does not belong to any of the Christian biblical canons, but is part of one of the commonest literary genres during the Middle Ages, the passion-legends of the saints.

The *passiones* are detailed descriptions of the trials and deaths of the martyrs, imbued with fantastic elements and miraculous interventions by the saints. This literary genre appeared in the 2nd century as a response to a growing Christian population who demanded more information about the sanctified figures they worshipped, quickly becoming one of the more influential typologies in the hagiography of the saints during the Middle Ages. This is the religious climate that gave rise to the *Passio Iacobi* or the Passion of St James the Great.

The first account of the *Passio Iacobi* was collected in the 5th century together with other martyrs’ *passiones* in what is known as the pseudo-Abdias and in this report the conflict between St James with Abiathar and Hermogenes and the conversion of the latter together with the Apostle and Josias’ martyrdoms appears already. In the prologue of the work, the author identifies himself as Abdias, first bishop of Babylon, and explains how he wrote the story in Hebrew, subsequently translated to Greek by his disciple Eutropius and later to Latin by Julius Africanus under the title of *Certamen Apostolicum* or *Passiones Apostolorum*.

The main issue of concern to us is when and how these texts arrived in the British Isles in order to leave their mark on the interior of a small church in Tewkesbury.
According to O’Leary the apostles’ passiones were already well known in this area ca.700, finding the first written evidence in England of the knowledge of this literary genre in Bede’s (672/735) Retractatio in Actus Apostolorum written in ca. 725:

‘[…] cum ille qui praefatas apostolorum passiones scripsit ipse se certissime incerta et falsa scripsisse prodiderit’.

With this quotation Bede, besides showing his personal familiarity with these texts, also attributes the composition of the work to a single author.

Notwithstanding that the production and circulation of the passiones enjoyed a significant increase after the 8th century, the first preserved English example of the Passio Iacobi found up until now belongs to the first quarter of the 9th century, the BN Lat 10861 kept at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. In comparison with later accounts the passiones of the French library is relatively short, in fact, this work only collects a total of eighteen martyrdoms, of which the one of St James the Great is the second death described, in a certain way occupying a privileged position.

The next Jacobean written example of this time related to England is the Cotton-Corpus Legendary, dated at the end of the 11th century. This manuscript is a long, multivolume legendary formatted as one hundred and sixty-five accounts of the lives of saints ordered following the sanctoral. As pointed out by Jackson and Lapidge, although this manuscript was not compiled in England, its later impact and influence are entirely linked with the English world.

The production of the passiones experienced a golden age in the 12th century. To this time the Great Passion of Book I chapter IX of the Codex Calixtinus from the...


35 Bede probably had access to these texts in the library of Acca, Bishop of Hexham. O’Leary also saw in Acca the first Anglo-Saxon figure with special interest in the apostles’ passiones. O’LEARY, Aideen M., “Apostolic Passiones”, pp. 104-07.


40 According to O’Leary this is the first preserved written evidence of extensive legendaries in England. O’LEARY, Aideen M., “Apostolic Passiones in Early Anglo-Saxon England”, p. 106. This collection was probably compiled in the north of France or Flanders, and at the end of the 10th century, one of its versions arrived in England, having a great impact on the arrangement of Ælfric of Eynsham’s (†1010) Lives of Saints. JACKSON, Peter and LAPIDGE, Michael, “The contents of the Cotton-Corpus Legendary”, p. 133.

41 JACKSON, Peter and LAPIDGE, Michael, “The contents of the Cotton-Corpus Legendary”, p. 132
Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, which is principally based on the pseudo-Abdias, belongs. The repercussions and dissemination of this *passiones* was great, besides being used in the liturgical services of the cathedral, extracts from this text were found in later martyrdoms and lectionaries all across Europe. In fact, in the 13th century a shortened version can be found of the *Great Passion* in England in the Giraldus Cambrensis’ (1145/46-1223) *Gemma Ecclesiastica*.

Finally, although not English, the enormous influence exerted on the medieval hagiography of the saints and apostles, including St James the Great, of Jacobo di Voragine’s *Golden Legend* must be highlighted. Written ca.1260, this *passiones* became hugely popular in Europe evidence of which can be found in the ca.1,000 copies of these accounts still in existence today. In fact, as William Granger Ryan mentioned, it was the lasting popularity of the work that caused it to be called *Golden Legend*.

The comparison of the cycle of Stoke Orchard with the different *Passio Iacobi* examples extracted from the accounts of *Codex Calixtinus*, *Gemma Ecclesiastica* and *Golden Legend*, has demonstrated that many of these scenes have little to do with the latter two manuscripts, having a closer correspondence with the Jacobean account from the *Codex*, which is the chronologically earlier of the three. As can be seen in the table *Stoke Orchard Scenes*, Giraldus Cambresis’ account, much shorter than that of di Voragine, finishes with the conversion of Hermogenes without dealing with the imprisonment and death of the Saint. In contrast the description given in the *Golden Legend*, larger and more complete than the *Gemma*, narrates the story of the Apostle up until the moment of his decapitation, however unlike the *Codex* various scenes from the cycle of Stoke Orchard are not detailed in di Voragine’s account:

- Scene 17: St James overcoming the familiar and Hermogenes’ idol.
- Scene 21: St James preaching outside his prison cell.
- Scene 27: St James embraces Josias.

Thus among the literary sources studied, the one with the highest possibility of serving as inspiration for this cycle would be the account of the earliest *Passio*, preserved in the *Codex Calixtinus*. This brings us back to the issue of the dates of the wall paintings. As has been mentioned, Clive Rouse stated this mural must have been created at some point between the construction of the building ca. 1190 and the 13th century also, as specified by the *National Heritage List of England*, they must have been

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43 Ibid. Here Clive Rouse highlights the possibility that these extracts could also be derived from the pseudo-Abdias instead.
44 Ibid. For the *Gemma Ecclesiastica* account see CAMBRENSIS, Giradus, *The Jewel of the Church*, Brill, 1979, pp. 51-54.
46 Ibid.
47 See table: *Stoke Orchard Scenes*. 

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finished by 1220. Another date that has to be considered is the date of consecration of the building as a parish church dedicated to St James the Great in 1269, a date that also coincides with one of the most popular *Passiones* accounts of the Middle Ages, *The Golden Legend*. This may lead to the belief that the paintings were part of a commemoration of this historical change at Stoke Orchard. However Clive Rouse is clear, due to the structural damage to the scenes located on the wall of the chancel arch the wall paintings must have been in place before its reconstruction in the 13th century, and if the dates given by the *National Heritage List of England* are taken into account, the date 1269 should be dismissed as the possible date of inception.

*National Heritage’s* assertion would appear to be supported by the written Jacobean accounts studied. If the cycle was done in 1269, it makes sense that the author would be inspired by di Voragine’s work due to its immense popularity or perhaps by the English account of Cambrensis owing to its geographical proximity. Nonetheless, the scenes of the cycle more closely resemble the Compostelanean *Passio*, dated earlier than the others in the 12th century. The murals of Stoke Orchard must have been created at some moment between the church’s foundation and before the erection of the new chancel arch, Cambresis and di Voragine’s accounts and its promotion as a parish church; effectively dating the mural between ca.1190 and 1220.

**IV. Patrons and function of St James the Great in Stoke Orchard.**

Mural paintings dedicated to saints were already common during this time in England; however, the majority of these images tended to represent individual portraits where the subject was depicted with his/her identifying attributes, such as the tools of their martyrdom 48. As mentioned earlier, decorations in which the whole of the central area of the church’s interior, or at least, most of its walls, were solely devoted to the life, miracles, death and legends of a single saint during this time in the British Isles were limited 49. The church of Stoke Orchard belongs to this unique group and discovering the motives behind the choice of this unusual decorative pattern could also provide further information about its original functionality.

One of the possible causes for this decoration at Stoke Orchard, and perhaps the most obvious, lies in its Jacobean dedication. As Frances E. Arnold-Forster suggested, the figure of St James the Great had an enormous significance in the architectural landscape of England, especially during the Middle Ages. Research of an earlier unpublished catalogue shows that building consecrations to the Apostle were extremely

popular during this time, particularly in the 12th century, coincidentally the period in which the city of Compostela was raised as an Apostolic See, transforming the Jacobean city into one of the principal European pilgrimage centres as well as one of the most desirable spiritual destinations for medieval English people.

As it is during this time of Jacobean splendour that the church of St James the Great at Stoke Orchard emerges, Clive Rouse and Rosewell had suggested a possible connection between the church and the existing pilgrimage network to Compostela, which seems a logical suggestion if its geographical location, is taken into account.

Situated in the county of Gloucestershire, just over sixty kilometres to the north of the harbour city of Bristol, the scholars have seen in Stoke Orchard a possible halting place for those pilgrims on the way to the Bristolian port to later sail on to Galicia, which according to Clive Rouse could explain the small incised crosses of votive character in one of the jambs of the south doorway (fig. 9). Their conjecture was also reinforced by evidence found of medieval routes or roads of communication around Stoke Orchard that could facilitate the travel of pilgrims towards the port city of Bristol.

As specified by Christopher Taylor in Roads & Tracks of Britain, the medieval road infrastructure throughout England originated either in Prehistoric time, during Roman occupation or in the Early Middle Ages. Besides the prehistoric roads based on existing natural tracks mentioned by Clive Rouse, for a further study of the roads associated with the village of Stoke Orchard it is necessary to also consider

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50 ARNOLD-FORSTER, Frances E., Studies in Church Dedications, London, 1899, vol. 1, p. 86. As mentioned by Arnold-Forster in her publication Studies in Church Dedications: ‘[…] though not one of the commonest of our ancient dedications, S. James is to be found in every county of England, unless with the single exception of Rutland. Altogether he has over 550 churches, of which about 330 are ancient’. It is necessary to indicate here that the concept ‘ancient church’ offered by the author can be somewhat imprecise. Arnold-Forster includes in this group all the English parish dedications dated in a temporal interval which spans from the origins of the Christianity to the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. To find the exact dates of the British dedications of St James, I had compared the parish information given by author and the religious houses accounts included in THOMAS TANNER’s catalogue Notitia Monastica, with the databases of the National Heritage List for England.

51 ROSEWELL, Roger, Medieval wall paintings in English & Welsh churches, Woodbridge, 2008, p. 195. In fact, the popularity of the pilgrimage to Compostela was that great that since the beginning of the 13th century, there was not a decade in which there were not registers of English pilgrims across the Jacobean routes. STORRS, Constance Mary, Jacobean pilgrims from England to St James of Compostella: from the early twelfth century to the fifteenth century, London, 1994, p. 44.


54 TAYLOR, C., Roads and tracks of Britain, London, 1979, p. 110.

55 CLIVE ROUSE, E. and BAKER, A. “Wall paintings in Stoke Orchard Church [...]”, p. 108. The author takes this information from G. B. Grundy’s investigations.
various Roman roads which were perhaps still being used in the 12th century as well as other information regarding medieval routes. From the Roman occupation two routes ran near to the village connecting it with the northern and central England: the first passed through what today is Worcester and Gloucester arriving to Bristol; and the second linked Leicester, Cirencester and Bath56. Among the prevalent medieval communication routes, a possible road connecting Oxford, Gloucester and Hereford with Wales has been found57 along with a further passage that connected Bristol and Gloucester, as well as Worcester, Prestbury and Abbots Morton with the north and centre of England58 (fig. 10).

So it can be asserted that the village of Stoke Orchard was well connected during the Middle Ages. But, did its church act as a stop for those pilgrims on their way

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56 British Ordnance Survey Map of Roman Britain: [http://www.bibliographics.com/MAPS/BRITAIN/BRIT-MAP-FRAME-LOOK.htm]

57 This route appears registered in the Gough Map, 1360s, as one of the numerous red lines crossing the all survey surface. In spite of the fact that, as indicated by Nick Millea: ‘these roads are uniformly straight, in a way that the majority of roads are not’. MILLEA, Nick, The Gough Map, the earliest road map of Great Britain?, Oxford, 2007, p. 32. The possibility that these lines represent roads, in the explicit meaning of the word, is very remote. However, these could depict indications or hints of the existence of tracks of communication. For a further study of the Gough Map see its recent digitalising: [http://www.goughmap.org/]

58 These two routes were extracted from a previous study of King Edward I’s itineraries during the first ten years of reign. GOUGH, Henry, Itinerary of King Edward the First throughout his reign, A.D. 1272-1307, Paisley, 1900.
to Bristol? Although Stoke Orchard is located near these routes, and thus could have received visits from pilgrims, no solid evidence has been found to conclude the church was devised for pilgrims or even if pilgrims may have visited it.

It is known for certain that St James the Great in Stoke Orchard was commissioned as a chapel of ease for Bishop’s Cleeve and due to the explicit connection of the building with the Archer family registered in the Episcopal registers, diocese of Worcester of 1269, this lineage has traditionally been seen as the founders of the building.

There is little information about the origins of this family. The Archers were the lords and administrators of the manor from the end of the 12th century. The first reference to them does not appear until the year 1182, when in the Red Book of Worcester they were listed as tenants of Stoke Orchard. In the Domesday Book the tenants

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59 See footnote 2.
were listed as Bernard and Raynald, as such the Archers could only have assumed the tenancy between both registration dates. From 1182 and continually linked with Stoke Orchard, part of the Archer’s genealogical tree was traced until 1351, the year of Geoffrey le Archer’s death, after whom, dying with only one legitimate daughter and heir, Joan, the male bloodline disappeared and all his belongings were transferred to Sir Thomas Berkeley of Coberley, Joan’s husband.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active 1182</td>
<td>William Archer⁶⁴</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>†1234 (active 1208)</td>
<td>John le Archer⁶⁵</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>†1309 (active in 1269)</td>
<td>Nicholas le Archer⁶⁶</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active 1314</td>
<td>William Archer⁶⁷</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>†1314</td>
<td>Edmund le Archer⁶⁸</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1293[?]–1351</td>
<td>Geoffrey le Archer⁶⁹</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Traditionally private commissions were largely the result of two factors:
— The product of personal devotion to a particular saint.
— The aim for consolidation of family lineage within society.

In relation to the Archer family, it is plausible that the dedication to St James the Great could be the result not only of their own worship to the Apostle, but also the product of pilgrimage by one of their members to Compostela. Constance Mary Storrs shows that later in 1314, William Archer had travelled to Galicia, thus although proof of pilgrimage by one of his ancestors at the end of the 12th or 13th century has not been found, it would not be unreasonable to think that one of the Archers may have visited the Jacobean capital.

⁶² See footnote 3.
⁶⁷ STORRS, Constance Mary, Jacobean pilgrims from England to St James of Compostella: from the early twelfth century to the late fifteenth century, London, 1994, p. 162.
⁷⁰ ROSEWELL, Roger, Medieval wall paintings in English Welsh churches, p. 179.
⁷¹ STORRS, Constance Mary, Jacobean pilgrims from England to St James of Compostella […] p. 162.
It is interesting to note\textsuperscript{72}, especially associated with the pilgrimage to Compostela, the appearance of two scenes that do not have any correspondence in the texts:

\begin{itemize}
  \item Scene 1: Christ offering the staff to St James.
  \item Scene 11 (fig. 5): Philetus gives St James’ staff to Hermogenes.
\end{itemize}

Due to the fragmentary condition of Scene 1, it is impossible to discern what type of staff Christ holds; however fortunately this is clear in Scene 11. In what is one of the most elaborate remaining scenes of the cycle regarding the design and decoration of the clothing of the ex-magician, here two figures are represented who are identified by their clothing: Philetus and Hermogenes. In the east side of the scene Philetus offers the staff to Hermogenes with his right hand and is pointing at it with the left in a communicative manner, while in the west side Hermogenes collects the aforementioned staff with his right hand. This staff is the characteristic T-shaped pilgrim \textit{baculus} which formed a fundamental part of the \textit{signa peregrinationis} and was thus one of the main attributes from the \textit{habitus peregrinationis}\textsuperscript{73}. Its importance was such that, at least from the 11\textsuperscript{th} century, these baculi were blessed and offered by the priest or bishop to the pilgrim before their departure through a celebration accompanied by all their fellow parishioners, the \textit{benediction perarum et baculum}\textsuperscript{74}. The symbolism behind this \textit{signa peregrinationis} goes further. According to tradition the T-shaped staff was the staff that the apostles used during their missions and was also the staff of St James with which his own disciples buried him in Compostela\textsuperscript{75}, further adding to the significance of this motif within the mural, the connection with St James and pilgrimage to Compostela. Perhaps a member of the Archer family incorporated this as a commemoration of an early pilgrimage.

Research has demonstrated that religious dedications to St James were very much in vogue at this time in England. With this consecration the Archers would

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
  \item Thank you very much to Prof. Dr Manuel Antonio Castiñeiras González for this observation. This is an initial examination of the significance behind the \textit{baculus} representation in the mural cycle of St James the Great at Stoke Orchard, which I intend to investigate in depth in my doctoral thesis.
  \item At first pilgrims did not have a characteristic attire, but this soon developed until it became a proper custom, the \textit{habitus peregrinorum}, which offered the pilgrim a special judicial status. VÁZQUEZ DE PARCA, Luis; LACARRA, José Mª y URÍA RIU, Juan, \textit{Las Peregrinaciones a Santiago de Compostela}, Madrid, 1948, p. 124. GREBE, Anja, ‘Pilgrims and fashion: the functions of pilgrims’ garments’ in \textit{Art and Architecture of Late Medieval Pilgrimage in Northern Europe and the British Isles}, 2005, p. 18.
  \item The earliest account preserved from this liturgy is in the Missal of Vich from 1038, which is later repeated in the Ceremonial of Roda and Lérida from the 11\textsuperscript{th} century. Once the celebration was finished, the pilgrim belonged to the \textit{ordo sancta} or \textit{ordo peregrinorum} or \textit{confratorum}. When the pilgrim returned to his town, the congregation commemorated this through the \textit{benediction pro fratribus redeuntibus}. GREBE, Anja, ‘Pilgrims and fashion: the functions of pilgrims’ garments’ in \textit{Art and Architecture of Late Medieval Pilgrimage in Northern Europe and the British Isles}, 2005, p. 19. PLOTZ, Robert, ‘El peregrino y su entorno. Historia, infraestructura y espacio’ in \textit{Ad Limina, revista de investigación del Camino de Santiago y las peregrinaciones}, Santiago de Compostela, 2012, pp. 169-70, 174. VÁZQUEZ DE PARCA, Luis; LACARRA, José Mª y URÍA RIU, Juan, \textit{Las Peregrinaciones a Santiago de Compostela}, Madrid, 1948, p. 137-39.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
probably find an ideal medium to demonstrate leadership within the manor as well as, by choosing a popular saint, encouraging social favouritism.

The issue of concern here is how a Jacobean dedication of a small church in the interior of England could have also worked as propaganda in favour of the Archer lineage. A clue, which could help to offer an answer to this question can be found in the passage of *The Red Book of Worcester*, were the Archer patronymic, is mentioned for the first time:

‘Rex in Scoc [probably misreading of Stoca, Stoke] v hidas geldabiles et i virgatam quas tenet Willelmus Archer ibidem’76.

Thus in 1182, of the seven hides corresponding to Stoke Orchard belonging to the Bishop of Worcester, five hides and one virgate were in hands of the king, at that time Henry II (1133-1189), whom in turn subleased them to William Archer by serjeancy77, while the remaining one hide and three virgates were the property of the Earl of Gloucester, William Fitz Robert (†1183). Although theoretically William Archer was a tenant of the Bishop of Worcester, in practice his landlord was the king himself whom offered the land of Stoke Orchard due to the services that William had offered in the army.

In 1154 Henry II was crowned with the acceptance of his uncle, King Stephen of Blois (ca.1092-1154), thus ending the civil war of the Anarchy (1135-1154) caused by the succession crisis between the Holy Roman Empress Matilda (ca.1102-1167), mother of Henry II and daughter of Henry I (ca.1068-1135), and Stephen78. Henry had grown up listening to the exploits and victories of his grandfather from his mother so, as mentioned by Amanda M. Martinson, once on the throne of England, the new young king inspired by Matilda’s stories endeavoured to restore Henry I’s state, now destroyed after near twenty years of civil war79. Not stimulated by his own religious motivations80, but by the reestablishment of the prestige of the religious houses related to his ancestors81, one of the principal projects during his reign was focused on the patronage of certain monasteries, among which Reading Abbey was highlighted82. The Cluniac abbey, which among other saints was devoted to the apostle James the Great, had been one of the chief monastic foundations of his grandfather

80 ‘Henry II has never been know was a particularly pious king’. *Ibid.*, 7.
and also where he was buried. Reading furthermore had an important Jacobean relic, the Hand of St James, donated by Henry I on its foundation, and due to its numerous relics, the abbey had became in one of the principal centres of pilgrimage in medieval England.

William Fitz Robert, the second landlord of Stoke, was also Henry II’s cousin, first-born of Robert, 1st Earl of Gloucester (b. before 1100-1147), illegitimate son of Henry I. William and Henry knew each other since childhood, as in 1143, the future king was instructed in Bristol ‘in first elements of learning and good behaviour’ with William and his other cousins, under the protection of his uncle Robert. It has to be highlighted here that this was the time of the Anarchy and Robert was one of the principal supporters of his stepsister the Empress Matilda. Curiously, like his father with Reading, Robert would found a monastery, in this case in Bristol, which was devoted to St James the Great and also served as his own burial place.

Returning now to the question of the possible existence of political propaganda in the dedication of the Apostle in Stoke Orchard to favour the Archer family. It has been seen that one of the principal religious programmes of Henry II was the restoration of the status of Reading Abbey, also of Jacobean dedication and guardian of one of the principal relics of James the Great outside Compostela. The second landlord of Stoke Orchard, the Earl of Gloucester, was also strongly related with Jacobean foundations, as his own father was the patron of the Priory of St James in Bristol and was buried there. Thus, it can be said that the purpose of the Jacobean foundation of Stoke Orchard could have gone beyond that of a personal worship of a possible pilgrimage by the Archer family, but in a certain way been a public demonstration of their vassalage with both the Earl of Gloucester and the King, their landlords.

V. Conclusions

The discovery, or in this case the rediscovery, of the mural cycle of the life of St James in the small parish church of Stoke Orchard located in the southwest of England has been a great revelation for the advance in studies of medieval Jacobean pilgrimage in the British Isles.

Although the next step will be a detailed analysis of the formal and stylistic characteristics of the wall paintings, it seemed opportune to focus this initial article on the field of British literary sources that could have inspired the cycle as well as trying to establish the fundamental basis of this dedication.

83 National Heritage List.
The rarity of the iconographical cycle could have transformed the interior of St James the Great in Stoke Orchard into a symbolic place for those parishioners of the community for whom the scenes could serve as ceremonial reminders, but also for those pilgrims who might have visited the church on their way to Bristol. The travelers could find in these paintings the eagerness, inspiration and fortitude needed to complete their long journey to Compostela.

Research has demonstrated that the subject of Stoke Orchard’s murals does not correspond with any of the stories in the New Testament, but to the apocryphal accounts of the passions and martyrdoms of St James the Great. Bede, the BN Lat 10861, the Cotton-Corpus Legendary, Giraldis Cambrensis and later the European dissemination of Jacobus de Voragine’s Golden Legend have demonstrated that the Passio Iacobi was a well-known and familiar theme in medieval England. Passages extracted from the Passio Iacobi were used as hymns, antiphons and responsories in the liturgical services of the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela during the days of celebration and commemoration of St James. So I wonder if Stoke Orchard also followed the Compostelanean formula for worship using these texts during the mass and thus the wall paintings would have played an active part during the ceremony inspiring spirituality and solemnity.

In spite of the fact that in most of the scenes the cycle is very accurately in concordance with the texts, the paintings do not follow the story ad verbum, but there is a certain freedom in their creativity which translates to a new fascinating reading of some of the passages with the appearance of new figures and the creation of original new chapters in the story of the Passio. Thus in scene 11 Philetus can be seen offering St James’ staff to Hermogenes, while the tradition indicates that it was the Apostle himself who performed this delivery; or in scene 15 the artist represents the magician in the boat together with the Saint and a third figure throwing the books into the sea, while the texts seem to specify that Hermogenes was on his own when he discarded his books. Other examples with no equivalent comparison in the texts can be found in the semi-destroyed scenes 14 and 16, the representations of Christ in scenes 1 and 18, scene 19 in which St James is baptising Hermogenes or in scene 22 depicting the Saint’s flagellation.

At the time of inception and by medieval standards the Archer family would have been considered as ‘designers’ of both the church and the wall paintings of St James. So were they the real creative force behind these scenes? Probably not, although to find out whom the true creators of the cycle’s design were is rather difficult. Rosewell

85 Although Giraldis and de Voragine’s examples are relatively later than the date given by Clive Rouse for the execution of the mural cycle, I thought appropriate to include them here to highlight the great propagation of the Passio Iacobi in England.

86 For the complete canticles see Codex Calixtinus, Book I.

87 As by medieval standards, the authorship of the works was not conferred on the artists but on the people who commissioned them. ROSEWELL, Roger, Medieval wall paintings in English & Welsh churches, p. 99.
suggested that possibly a clergyman well versed in the Passio Iacobi could be behind this work\textsuperscript{88}. Although there is no conclusive evidence that this is the case it is certainly true that the designer of the cycle knew of the apocryphal tradition of the martyrdom of St James.

The mastermind behind the cycle must have been very aware of the final audience of the mural. The formula used is a very visual and recognisable one. As in a narrative all the figures are depicted using the same pattern and can be identified through the consistency of their clothing and hats. This cycle was not created for a specific sector of society but to appeal to the general public devoted to the Apostle and who as such would have been familiar with the tradition of St James the Great.

As mentioned, this church could be the product of a personal piety or the result of the pilgrimage of one of the Archers to Compostela in the 12\textsuperscript{th} or 13\textsuperscript{th} century. Even if this last possibility cannot be corroborated, it is possible that one member of the family travelled to Galicia, probably as a companion either of the Earl of Gloucester or with the Bishop of Worcester\textsuperscript{89}, who went on pilgrimage in 1223 and 1271 respectively\textsuperscript{90}. But also St James in Stoke Orchard could have served as a medium of political propaganda in favour of the Archer bloodline, as evidence has shown a clear predilection by the English royal family towards the Apostle either due to their own worship or to restore the memory of their ancestors.

In conclusion, it has to be taken into account that the cult of St James the Great, together with its associated pilgrimage, was experiencing its peak in the 12\textsuperscript{th} century, not only in continental Europe with the raising of the city of Compostela as Apostolic See, but also in England, as can be glimpsed in the expansion of ecclesiastical devotions. Thus besides representing the personal religious fervour of the Archer family towards the Saint or / and the leadership of their lineage, St James the Great of Stoke Orchard was also very much a part of this ‘Golden Age’ of the apostle to whom it was devoted, as well as resulting in one of the earliest and largest mural cycles depicting the life and martyrdom of St James the Great preserved in Europe today.

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\textsuperscript{88} ROSEWELL, Roger, *Medieval wall paintings* […] p. 179.
\textsuperscript{89} CLIVE ROUSE, E. and BAKER, A. “Wall paintings in Stoke Orchard Church […]”, pp. 108-09.
\textsuperscript{90} STORRS, Constance Mary, *Jacobean pilgrims from England to St James of Compostella* […], pp. 158, 160.