German Bodies in Foreign Climes: Felix Fabri, *Wanderings* (1486)

Abstract

Felix Fabri (1441–1502) was a late fifteenth-century Dominican friar who traveled twice from Ulm to the Holy Land in the 1480s. Afterwards he penned an account of his journey for the edification of his fellow friars. Entitled *Wanderings*, Fabri's travel account made clear his belief that bodies were deeply shaped by their native climes—so much so that those differences were perceptible to animals and had health consequences, especially in certain foreign places. His text testifies to the widespread adoption of medical ideas about the body and climate in the fifteenth century. Ultimately, on account of its popularity, *Wanderings* not only reflected those ideas but also helped reinforce and spread them throughout the Early Modern period.

Source

[…] The entire household, the landlord and landlady, and all the manservants and maidservants, were of the German nation and speech, and no word of Italian was to be heard in the house, which was a very great comfort to us; for it is very distressing to live with people without being able to converse with them. Last of all, as we entered, the dog who guards the house came to meet us, a big black dog, who showed how pleased he was by wagging his tail, and jumped upon us as dogs are wont to do upon those whom they know. This dog receives all Germans with the like joy, from whatever part of Germany they come; but when Italians or Lombards, Gauls, Frenchmen, Slavonians, Greeks, or men of any country except Germany, come into the house, he becomes so angry that you would think that he was gone mad, runs at them, barking loudly, leaps furiously upon them, and will not cease from troubling them till someone quiets him. He has not grown accustomed even to the Italians who dwell in the neighbouring houses, but rages against them as though they were strangers, and obstinately remains their implacable foe. Moreover, he will not on any terms allow their dogs to enter the house, but he does not meddle with German dogs. He does not attack German beggars who come asking for alms, but falls upon poor Italians who wish to come in to beg for charity, and drives them away. I have often rescued poor men from this dog's teeth. The Germans say that this dog, insofar as he is the implacable foe of the Italians, is a proof that German men can never agree with Italians from the bottom of their hearts, nor Italians with us, because each nation has hatred of the other rooted in its very nature. The animal being irrational, and governed only by its passions, quarrels with the Italians because its nature bids it do so; but human beings restrain their feelings by the aid of reason, and keep down the feeling of hatred which is engrained in their nature. We found in the inn many noblemen from various parts of Germany, and some from Hungary, all of whom were bound by the same vow as ourselves, and intended to cross the sea to the most Holy Sepulchre of our Lord Jesus at Jerusalem. In other inns were more Germans, and they had all formed themselves into companies, some large and some small. Now, in our company there were twelve pilgrims altogether, counting both nobles and servants, whose names are here set forth:

The Lord John Wernher, Baron von Cymbern, a man handsome and wise, remarkable for the grace of his manners, and learned in the Latin tongue.

The Lord Henry von Stoeffel, Baron of the Holy Empire, a strong and active man, of a manly character, as a true Swabian nobleman should be.

The Lord John Truchsess von Waldpurg, a nobleman of tall stature, a man of respectable and lofty character,

serious, and deeply concerned about the salvation of his soul.

The Lord Ber (Ursus) von Rechberg, a noble of the Hohenrechberg family, who was the youngest of them all, and the liveliest, bravest, tallest, most cheerful, kindest and most liberal of the party.

[…]

First Article.—That the captain shall take us pilgrims from Venice to Joppa, a port in the Holy Land, and shall bring us back again from thence to Venice, for which purpose he shall be ready in fourteen days at the outside, and shall not stay here more than fourteen days after this day.

Second.—That he shall well and properly provide a galley with experienced mariners who understand the art of sailing with whatever wind may blow, and shall have on board a sufficient armament for the defence of the galley from the attacks of pirates and enemies, if need be.

Third.—That the captain beware of putting into unusual or strange ports on his way, but that he shall touch only at those in which he is wont to obtain provision for his galley, and that as far as maybe he shall avoid putting into harbours, but shall go on his way. We especially desire him to avoid the kingdom of Cyprus, and not to touch there, or if he does so, not to remain in the harbour there for more than three days, because we have a traditional belief that the air of Cyprus is unwholesome for Germans. If, however, any of our company should desire to pay his respects to the Queen of Cyprus and wait on her at Nichosia and receive from her the ensigns of her Order, the captain shall be bound to wait for his return, seeing that this was an ancient custom among all noblemen as long as there was a king in that kingdom.

Fourth.—That the captain shall give the pilgrims two meals of food and drink every day without fail. If for any reason any one of us shall not wish to attend the captain's table, or to come to supper in the evening, or if all of us choose to stay in our own berths, nevertheless the captain shall be bound to send food and drink to us without making any dispute.

[…]

Source of English translation: Felix Fabri, *The Wanderings of Felix Fabri*, vol. I (part I). Translated (from the Latin) by Aubrey Stewart. The Library of the Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society, vol. VII. London: Committee of the Palestine Exploration Fund, 1897, pp. 80–81, 87. Available online at: https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.b4936446

Source of original Latin text: Fratris Felicis Fabri, *Evagatorium in Terrae Sanctae, Arabiae et Aegypti Peregrinationem* (1486), edited by Cunradus Dietericus Hassler. Stuttgardiae: Societas Litteraria Stuttgardiensis, 1843, pp. 84–85, 89. Available online at: https://mdz-nbn-resolving.de/details:bsb10737653

Recommended Citation: German Bodies in Foreign Climes: Felix Fabri, Wanderings (1486), published in: German History Intersections, <https://germanhistory-intersections.org/en/germanness/ghis:document-268> [October 12, 2024].