Alman Dili ve Edebiyatı Dergisi
Studien zur deutschen Sprache und Literatur
SDSL 2024, 52 : 1–16
DOI: 10.26650/sdsl2024-1487982

Research Article

Mobility in the Sixteenth Century: Narrative Evidence about Travel and the Discovery of the World in Early Modern German Literature

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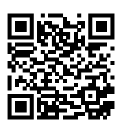
ABSTRACT

The topic of mobility contributes in multiple ways to a deeper understanding of cultural history. The degree of mobility has much to say about the development of any society, both in the past and in the present. This paper examines the situation in sixteenth-century Europe through the lens of literary documents in which we can find comments on travel, mobility, and world perspectives. While it might not be possible to identify explicit documents from that period reflecting on mobility itself (technologies, modes of transportation, hospitality, healthcare, finances, etc.), many authors actually included valuable references to this phenomenon, if we only look more closely. The literary narrative thus emerges as an important source of information about social, emotional, economic, religious, and also travel aspects, such as shipping, use of a coach, a horse, or mule, staying in early-modern 'hotels,' roads, and bridges. As the analysis will demonstrate, early modern society was highly mobile, with representatives of many different social classes on the move for a wide range of reasons. Whereas the authors consulted here did not specifically signal their interest in reflecting on mobility as such, they commonly reveal that the narrative framework mirrors events on the road, on a ship, or at meetings where many people attended, such as a Church council, an imperial diet, and the like. The need to travel grew tremendously in the sixteenth century, and this for many different reasons. One of the consequences was that poets increasingly engaged with a highly mobile society.

Keywords: Mobility in the sixteenth century, *Fortunatus*, Johannes Pauli, Jörg Wickram, popular literature

Submitted : 22.05.2024
Accepted : 06.10.2024



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Introduction

Once Europeans had discovered the New World and found the passage around the Cape of Good Hope toward India, the age of new explorations began, as countless examples confirm. Columbus and Vasco da Gama were the harbingers in that process, and many other voyagers followed them, which quickly brought about a paradigm shift in the history of European mentality. The traditional barriers between Europe and the continent appeared to have fallen, and from then on it only depended on the courage and resources of individuals to embark on huge travels far beyond the usual borders preventing the exploration of foreign worlds (Gruber, 2022).

This enthusiastic perspective might be overly optimistic at first, but in the long run, the intensity of travels also to distant lands increased, especially as the lure of the New World and of India was irresistible. But what was the concrete situation like on the ground, within Europe, and where did the majority of people travel once we find them on the road as mentioned by the various literary authors? What could we tell about the infrastructure for travelers (roads, bridges, mountain passes, inns, provisions, shoes, clothing, food, protection, taxes, etc.)? Where did travelers stay, what was their mode of transportation, what dangers did they face, with whom did they travel, and how fast did they move per day? These are straightforward questions mostly directed at historians, and only relevant, so it seems, for micro-historians such as Carlo Ginzburg (Ginzburg, 1977; cf. also the contributions to Ghobrial, ed., 2019). As much as research on pre-modern history and culture has already covered many different aspects of the history of travel writing, travel by itself in daily life, or mobility in more general terms, still represents a desideratum (see, e.g., the contributions to Hsia, ed., 2004/2006; cf. also the contributions to Carey & Jowitt, ed. 2012).

However, the larger picture of our past consists of many small pieces, and the better we analyze local events, figures, or organizations, the more we will be in a solid position to comprehend the global perspectives. In this sense, travel proves to be a most productive topic, as scholars have realized already for a long time, especially focusing on the Middle Ages (Classen forthcoming; see also the contributions to Classen, ed., 2018). Growing networks spanning all of Europe and other parts of the world characterized the early modern world, such as the Hanseatic League in the North, Southern German city alliances, the Flemish and Northern French cities, the Mediterranean cities, etc., and this irrespective of their internal competitions (the research on this topic is large; see, for instance, the contributions to Holý & Hrubá & Sterneck, ed. 2018; Goodson, 2021; Gruber, 2022).

Dynastic interests, especially marriage plans, connected all parts of the Continent, which required extensive traveling by diplomats, councilors, members of the various noble families, scribes, and knights. Once agreements had been reached, normally the bride traveled a long distance to her future husband, accompanied by her extensive court (Hörman-Thurn & Taxis, 2023). Church synods and councils brought together thousands of people of high ranks and their entire staff (Küble & Gerlach, trans., 2014; Lazzarini, ed., 2021). And throughout the entire Middle Ages, increasingly then in the early modern age, diplomats operated on a global scale and so had to travel constantly to distant lands (Stabel & Baatsen, 2018; Dobek, 2023).

The purpose of this paper is not to offer yet another social-historical analysis of specific travels or

of some the many existing travelogues, examining chronicles, correspondences, business records, or the like, for which we have available by now a large number of pertinent studies (see, e.g., the contributions to Bork & Kann, ed., 2008; Dobek, 2023). Instead, following the lead of numerous cultural historians and those focused on the history of everyday life (Dinzelbacher, ed., 1993/2008; van Dülmen, 1990, 1992, 1994), I want to draw from early modern popular literature and consult it regarding relevant data pertaining to mobility in the context of people's ordinary life. Although the sixteenth century was, at least seemingly, primarily determined by the bitter and intensive theological debates between Catholics, Lutherans, Calvinists, and Spiritualists, people continued to lead their common lives, both in the countryside and in the cities, at court and on the market.

Travel was an essential aspect in the lives of many people, both for craftsmen and masons, medical doctors and students, professors and friars, merchants and diplomats, pilgrims and architects, and increasingly also mercenaries In fact, early modern roads were crowded and crisscrossed the entire continent, probably even more so than in the Middle Ages (Treue, 2014). How then did pre-modern authors integrate the element of mobility into their narratives?

Travel in Pre-Modern Literature

Naturally, many poets drew from the basic travel experience for their narratives, plays, and poems. Famously, Geoffrey Chaucer had predicated his *Canterbury Tales* (ca. 1400) on the narrators' pilgrimage, but travel itself did not matter centrally. Similar observations apply to other collections of entertaining narratives by Franco Sacchetti, Poggio Bracciolini, or the anonymous author of the *Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles*. This changed considerably after 1500, which this paper intends to highlight, although it might not be possible to draw on statistical data. I will limit myself to examples from the history of German literature where we observe a remarkable emphasis on travel since the early modern age. Two literary genres in particular demonstrate the new interest in mobility; first, the early modern prose novel, such as the anonymous *Fortunatus* (1509), then, the *Schwankliteratur* (literature of jest narratives).

Previously, I have investigated the topic of 'America' in sixteenth-century German literature (Classen, 1994), but here I want to examine more closely what entertaining and didactic authors had to say about the practical travel experience their protagonists often went through. These vernacular texts dominated the early modern book market and obviously appealed to ever-growing circles of readers (Gotzkowsky, 1991). Many times, the various authors drew from everyday situations and reflected on ordinary situations on the road, on a ship, in a tavern, or elsewhere, and thus can serve us as valuable mirrors of the cultural conditions at that time.

As already indicated above, I do not intend to project a macrohistorical perspective; instead, by means of a focus on a selection of representative literary works, we can dive into the microhistorical framework so relevant for social-historical studies. While numerous scholars have already examined the issue of world exploration in the late Middle Ages and the early modern period (see the contributions to Bleuler & Klingbeil, ed., 2016), we are still missing a close reading of the practical and concrete information about travel at large since the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Fortunatus

In one of the most popular early modern novels, the anonymous German *Fortunatus*, first printed in Augsburg in 1509, travel assumes central importance for the protagonist, who at one point gains the necessary means to do so free of any worries and uses them to the best of his abilities. Fortunatus is able to travel all across Europe, and later, he even ventures to Egypt, and from there to the Middle East and India (Müller, ed. and commentary, 1990; for the most insightful study addressing also the context and biographical background of the poet, see Kästner, 1990). Significantly, the poet, who might have composed his work before 1453 because he identifies Constantinople as not yet conquered by the Ottomans, takes the island of Cyprus as the protagonist's point of origin and final return, whereas one of his sons, Andolosia, departs from home, undergoes all kinds of adventures far away, and dies a miserable death under torture applied by jealous courtiers under the King of Cyprus.

In many ways, the novel's development is specifically predicated on travel experiences, some out of economic necessities, others out of touristic interests. In fact, the latter dominates once Fortunatus has luckily gained a magical purse from a fairy when he was lost in a forest and near dying. First, however, he had arrived, after some challenges, in London where he enters into the service of a Florentine merchant. It is most unusual to find specific references to the harbor of Calais from where the protagonist takes a ship to London. England itself hardly ever appears in the history of medieval and early modern German literature, except in Der Stricker's *Pfaffe Amîs* (ca. 1220–1240; Der Stricker, 1994). However, Fortunatus's experience in London proves to be a catalyst for a complete change of thinking in him because he would have almost suffered the death penalty along with his master, an Italian merchant, along with all the servants because they are accused of having stolen the king's jewels. They are completely innocent in that matter, and yet all of them are put to death at the gallows or buried alive (the two maids), except for Fortunatus since he had been away during the critical time period doing business for his lord in the harbor of Sandwich (p. 416; located north of Dover) and is pronounced innocent by the English cook.

The jewels are later found, but at that point, Fortunatus has already been taken to the next harbor and sent back to Flanders, where he gets lost in a forest and would have almost died from hunger and a dangerous bear, when a fairy suddenly appears and makes him a magical offer because she is the virgin of fortune and driven by the constellations of the stars to grant him one wish. He can choose between wisdom, wealth, strength, health, beauty, and long life (p. 430), and Fortunatus decides on wealth, receiving a purse that will never be empty.

Although this new-found wealth immediately endangers his life because he evokes the jealousy of a count who is the master of that forest, the protagonist learns how to utilize his money carefully, and he uses it to travel far and wide across Europe. But both in Ireland and in Constantinople he would have almost met his death once again because of dangerous circumstances. However, Fortunatus operates increasingly in a careful manner and thus manages at the end to return to Cyprus, to settle there, to purchase a count's estate, marry, and enjoy his life. After some years, he embarks on a second journey, that one taking him first to Egypt, where he meets the Sultan, and from there to the

eastern world, which the narrator comments on in rough terms. We hear of Persia, China, and India, where he meets the mysterious Prester John (pp. 489-90) before he returns to Alexandria.

In the meantime, he has sent his merchant ship back to Europe with the charge of doing good business with all of his wares, and then to return to Egypt to pick him up there again. As vague as the narrator's comments might be, he clearly mentions the most important trading places: Catalonia, Portugal, Spain, England, and Flanders (p. 488). We can assume that the audience was sufficiently familiar with those countries and understood easily where the most important markets in western Europe could be found. It is hence imaginable that the author addressed an audience closely associated with international trade so that there was no further need to explain details of the travel routes, the major cities, and markets in the various countries. Even England is mentioned here despite Fortunatus's traumatic experience there. However, Constantinople is missing in this context, although all the East-West trade went through that city, at least until 1453 when it was conquered by Sultan Mehmed II (Khvalkov, 2018).

The narrator pauses at that moment to reflect upon the reasons why not more people from India travel to the West and those in the West to India, certainly a critical question regarding the history of travel. He raises that question because India would offer so many riches and pleasant objects (p. 491) – certainly an expression of early modern Orientalism as Edward Said had outlined it (Said, 1978; for critical comments of his theory, however, see the contributions to Elmarsafy, ed., 2013; and Hallaq, 2018). The answers provided are striking: 1. The distance between both parts of the world would be too long to make travel easy or even possible. 2. The geo-physical barriers would make travel very difficult, from whatever side one would come. 3. The dangers for the body and one's life would be too high (accidents, robbers, murderers). 4. The cost for this travel would be prohibitive for most people, apart from Fortunatus who has an infinite amount of money available. 5. For the Indians, the experience of brutal, impolite, and harsh Western culture would be too unpleasant. 6. Food in Europe would not be palatable or healthy. In sum, considering the Indians, the narrator emphasizes:

> machen och die rechnung / sy wurden für toren geschaetzt / das sy auß guoten landen in boese zugen / vnd guott mb boeß gaebenn (p. 491)
>
> [they also calculated that they would be regarded as fools to travel from good countries to bad counts and would exchange good things for bad things.]

Upon his return to Alexandria, Fortunatus is invited by the Sultan to visit his treasury, where he shows him his most valuable object, a seemingly simple hat. As he then learns, anyone wearing that hat could wish himself to any place in the world within seconds. With a rhetorical trick, he makes the Sultan place the hat on his own head and wishes himself to be on his ship, which also happens, and Fortunatus then never returns this valuable object; after all, he stole it without any qualms and filled with desire to possess such a miraculous tool to improve his travel opportunities.

Oddly, he himself later never seems to use it, once he has transported himself rapidly to his ship; only his son Andolosia does so after the father's death. Tragically, he abuses it against the original purpose and without taking into account what Fortunatus had strongly advised his two sons before he passed away. This ultimately leads to Andolosia being captured, tortures, and murdered and

Ampedo's inconsolable grief and subsequent death. Andolosia's numerous travels take him to many different kingdoms, as he later reports to the king of Cyprus (p. 558), but the outcome of this novel altogether does not lend itself well to the positive evaluation of travel. If Fortunatus had chosen wisdom, as the narrator underscores at the end, he would have been much better off (p. 580). But such fairies who would offer such choices would no longer exist.

Nevertheless, Andolosia's travel experiences that take him to France (p. 509) and England (p. 516) simply underscore that the author imagined a world in which travel was done easily, whether originating in Cyprus (eastern Mediterranean) or anywhere else. There are also brief references to Spain (p. 533), but the young man travels around with the help of his magical cap, so the Iberian Peninsula itself does not gain any profile at any rate. Money is the key component in this novel, both for Fortunatus and his two sons, and it makes everything possible, although it is noteworthy that Andolosia does not demonstrate the same interest as his father in exotic countries, such as Egypt, Persia, or India. He is only focused on gaining public esteem and rising on the social ladder, again, with the help of his money (Van Cleve, 1991, p. 85–110). Nevertheless, what matters for us is the realization that the entire novel is determined by travel across Europe and even to Persia and India.

The anonymous author adds some magic to his account to make it more fanciful, but in essence, with the help of money it is possible both for Fortunatus and his son Andolosia to go wherever their imagination takes them. We are not informed about most of the specifics concerning travel, but that would not matter so much for an author who has his protagonists move quickly from Cyprus to western Europe and back, for instance. Altogether, this highly popular novel which appealed to audiences throughout the sixteenth and also seventeenth centuries (also in England, France, Bohemia, Sweden, Hungary, Poland, and the Netherlands in the form of translations and adaptations; [Jungmayer, 1981, p. 323–43]; Classen 1991/1999, p. 163–83) serves as evidence for the increased interest in and need of mobility across the European landscape during the sixteenth century, and this now perceived through the literary lens.

Johannes Pauli: Travel Through a Preacher's Lens

We might not expect to discover relevant information about the actual situation on the road in early modern Europe when we turn to the didactic sermon tales by a Franciscan preacher. However, Johannes Pauli's stories, addressing a wide range of topics and offering didactic instructions and literary entertainment (*Schimpf und Ernst*, first printed in 1522, re-printed and translated many times over the next two hundred years and more), included, after all, a number of comments relating to people's travel experiences (Bolte, ed., 1924/1972; now available digitally; for an English translation, see Classen, trans., 2024). Normally, Pauli simply presents specific situations in human life and illustrates human shortcomings, failures, vices, foolishness, and also humorous words and deeds. *Schimpf und Ernst* was also highly popular and exerted a deep influence on subsequent authors of *Schwänke* (jest narratives), which invites us to consider the various comments on human mobility contained in those texts (for a major interpretive study, see Pearsall, 1994). Less than in *Fortunatus*, but still noticeable, Pauli presents a large variety of ordinary situations in people's lives whom we encounter in one way or the other on the road.

In the tenth *Schimpff* – the term (with double 'ff') implies a funny account, whereas the label *Ernst* implies a serious matter, but Pauli was not very rigid in his use of either term – we learn of a young nobleman who attended a university, "a famous school" (p. 5). We do not know the name of the university, but it became a rather popular topic since the late Middle Ages to reflect on the lives of students or professors, as illustrated by Heinrich Kaufringer's story "The Mayor and the Prince" (ca. 1400, no. 4; Classen, trans., 2014/2019). He wastes all his money on a prostitute and eventually has to leave town because of his poverty. He offers her a last dinner and then says good-bye to her, which seemingly makes her cry out of sadness. But in reality, as she then explains to her mother, she only regretted that he did not let her have his splendid coat with silver buttons. There are plenty of other students from far away, as the mother comforts her, to whom she could attach herself for new income in return for sexual pleasures. Both then as well as today, centers of advanced learning attracted students and professors from many parts of the world.

Of course, we would not need to belabor this point any further because it pertains to the entire institution of the university in medieval and early modern Europe. Consequently, we often hear of wandering students or of public debates at universities in many different literary texts. For us, however, the entire complex touched upon simply indicates the extent to which intellectuals were constantly on the road, and this in the sixteenth century as well (see also the five hundred ninety-second *Schimpf* and the sixth hundred forty-third *Schimpff*).

The ninety-sixth *Schimpff* talks about a learned doctor who travels from Paris to another city. We are not informed about any modalities pertaining to the roads or other aspects of mobility. Instead, the narrator emphasizes that the doctor is apparently well known, greatly appreciated, and immediately welcomed by the local prince. The latter tries to utilize the scholar to assist him in fighting against the local clergy. He asks him the rather ambivalent question how many priests would be necessary to serve the religious needs in the city and in the surrounding villages. The doctor realizes immediately that the prince is trying to abuse him with this question, so he counters with an equally ambivalent question about how many fox tails would be needed, all tied together, to reach heaven. Of course, the prince cannot answer that, which thus helps the doctor to avoid giving him any suggestion as to the minimum of priests needed in the district. As innocuous as this story might be at first sight, it mirrors the considerable anti-clerical sentiment in the late Middle Ages and early modern age; it also sheds light on the mobility of scholars and on the supreme fame of the university of Paris; and it indicates how easily representatives of the various social classes could get together and collaborate.

In the hundred-fifteenth *Schimpff*, a narrator mentions a merchant who rides to Frankfurt a. M. to attend the local fair, and this in 1506. Hence, the author refers to an actual account about a legal case, as it develops in the course of the story. The merchant carries, attached to his saddle, a money purse that contains the large amount of 800 ducats. By accident, that purse falls off, which he does not notice until later. A carpenter, who walks the same road, finds the purse and takes it home, putting it away safely so that he can return it later to its proper owner. The merchant has it announced publicly that he lost his purse and would pay the finder a reward of hundred ducats. But when the carpenter wants to turn over the money, the merchant suddenly claims that the purse had contained 900 ducats

and that the finder had obviously already taken his reward. Both go to court over this conflict and swear an oath about what they actually lost and found. The judges declare both oaths as valid and tell the merchant to search for the man who had found a purse with the 900 ducats, whereas the carpenter can keep his money until someone else would claim it.

The focus of this story rests, of course, on ethical issues, with the merchant suddenly begrudging the high reward and the carpenter insisting on his honesty. Yet, for our purposes, we can recognize several significant factors: 1. The merchant travels on horseback and has his money attached to the saddle. 2. The same road is frequented by other people who have to walk on foot. 3. Mercantile fairs attracted people from many directions. 4. Conflicts could easily erupt at such meetings, so courts are available to handle them. 5. Craftsmen such as the carpenter find employment at various sites and are regularly called to various cities.

In the hundred forty-ninth story, here identified as *Ernst*, a really brief account of just a few lines, the narrator talks about a man who travels to England and is taken prisoner there. We do not know the charge against him, but it is clear that he is to be executed as a punishment for some major wrongdoing. Just before he is hanged (?), he utters the foolish statement: "'I have not deserved this death for no other fault than that I have not loved my wife'" (p. 45). We are reminded again of the destiny which Fortunatus would almost had to suffer, so here is yet another example of travel to England which is normally not mentioned in contemporary literature.

Pauli was obviously well familiar with news from many different sources, which would explain his reference to England. Similarly, in the hundred sixty-eighth *Schimpff*, the narrator introduces the story of a nobleman from Florence who visits Milan and enters a barber's shop. There he discovers that another nobleman uses exactly the same coat of arms as he does, which enrages him so badly that he tries to force the other one to a duel. He arrives heavily armored at the arranged place, whereas the other nobleman carries no armor or weapons. In response to the Florentine's irritated question what that would mean, he only retorts that there would not be any cause for conflict between them. The image in the coat of arms shows the head of an oxen, as the former explains, so the Milanese retorts that his head in the image would be the head of a cow. He would have explained it the other way around according to the answer, which makes the entire debate look rather ridiculous, reminding us that the only real struggle in life should be to strive to enter heaven in the afterlife.

In the two hundred-eight *Schimpff*, which can be traced back to a Middle High German, Old French, and Medieval Latin source, we hear of a merchant from Venice who goes on very long business trips somewhere in the Middle East. One day, having returned home, he encounters a pretty boy in the house whose existence is said by the mother to be due to her imagination because once in winter she had gone to the garden and thought intensively of her husband. She broke off an icicle and sucked it up completely, which made her pregnant. Of course, she had committed adultery, which the metaphor of the icicle (fellatio) clearly indicates. For our purposes, we only need to pay attention to the facts that Pauli refers to a Venetian merchant and his custom of going on very extensive mercantile travels in the "heathen lands" (p. 62).

Of course, many previous authors had also played with that motif, such as Rudolf von Ems in

his *Der guote Gêrhart* (ca. 1220) (Asher, ed., 1962; for the English translation, see Classen, trans., 2016), that is, the merchant doing business in countries somewhere in the Middle East, an aspect that continued for centuries to come. The story concludes with the husband taking the boy with him on one of the trips and selling him into slavery. He explains to his wife, once he has returned home, that the poor boy had melted in the sun one day because he had disregarded the father's warning to stay out of the heat.

The two hundred-thirteenth *Schimpff* relates of a man who had pledged a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela (in the northwestern corner of the Iberian Peninsula) for an unspecified reason, but probably to ask the saint for his help in some case. But time passes; the man is constantly busy with one thing after the other, until he finally decides to undertake the journey. However, he has hardly left his village when he stops, stretches out his arms and invites 'Meggie' and 'John' to pull. Since the former is stronger, he simply returns home. With 'Meggie' he meant either his wife or a girlfriend, and with 'John' St. Jacob, and the narrator even specifies that "People prefer the whores over the wives" (p. 63), which adds a deeply moral warning to this simple story. At any rate, as we observe here, pilgrimages to Compostela were – and are until today – arduous, time consuming, and costly, and the protagonist simply does not want to live up to his own oath, especially since we have to assume that he originates from South Germany or the Alsace where Pauli himself had come from.

In the two hundred twenty-third *Ernst*, we are taken to northwestern Spain in the region of León where a merchant travels through a forest and encounters a knight whom he praises highly for his appearance and demeanor. The latter then invites him into his castle where he treats him very well, but during dinner and at night the merchant is exposed to horrible scenes that frighten him mightily. He himself, however, is not harmed and receives the knight's full explanation the next morning. Although he seems to be a most fortunate man in public, he suffers from the fact that his wife had committed adultery – he killed her lover and has the decapitated head presented at every dinner – and the murder of his two nephews – they were killed in revenge since the dead man's relatives could not get to the knight.

The moral teaching of this story is quite obvious, whereas we gain additional confirmation about how much the world had opened up in the sixteenth century since the German author presented his audience numerous tales about events and people in various parts of Europe. Moreover, the account again introduces the figure of a merchant, who certainly gained a much stronger profile in early modern narratives, such as confirmed by a play from Shakespeare's pen, *The Merchant from Venice* (1596–1598).

Just as throughout the entire Middle Ages, the early modern age witnessed numerous meetings or congregations of the members of a specific monastic order. In the two hundred and forty-fifth story – *Ernst* – we are entertained with some mockery about three monks on their journey to a chapter meeting who spend time in an inn and are given in to too much drinking of wine and insist on getting the best kind whenever they stop at that specific location. In the two hundred and sixty-third *Schimpff*, a nobleman travels to Rome to confess his sins and to get papal absolution. They do not get very far, however, because they oversleep in the morning, then cannot keep going because of the heat, and so

forth. All this is, of course, meant in metaphorical terms, with the knight representing human reason, the servant, who holds the knight back, standing in for the body, and the dark bedroom symbolizing one's false sense of spiritual security.

In the three hundred and fourth *Schimpff*, a group of people travel by ship when they run into a major tempest. Afraid of a shipwreck and drowning, they all pray to God and the saints. One of them shouts out to Saint Nicholas and promises him a candle of an enormous size. Since that does not help, he increases his promises two more times, but the others then ridicule him, pointing out that he would not be able to find all that wax or to pay for it. He retorts, however, "'Once I will have my feet on dry land, I will not give him even a little church candle good enough to find the way to the bedroom'" (p. 85). The narrator uses that as an illustration of people's hypocrisy, and this even in such a life-threatening situation.

Undoubtedly, seafaring, shipwreck, and fear of drowning belong to some of the archetypal experiences poets have regularly dealt with, and this especially in the late Middle Ages and early modern age, if we think, for instance, of William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1610–1611) (Classen, 2014). Pauli drew from that as well and provided us thus with further information about the common modes of transportation. Apparently, the situation on the ship was common enough for a priestly author to include it in his collection to illustrate the preposterousness of many people who only pretend to pray to a saint but do not really mean it. The audience must have fully understood the concrete framework presented here, especially because the motif was already well known from chronicles and fictional narratives (Classen, 2020). Not by accident did the famous Humanist Sebastian Brant refer to the ship in his allegorical *Narrenschiff* from 1494 (Ship of Fools) (Brant, 1986). Everyday experiences blended into literary figures, and they in turn mirrored the material conditions, which characterized, to remind ourselves of the central theme of this study, the increased level of mobility affecting all of society during the sixteenth century.

Of course, the difference to medieval mobility often does not seem to be dramatic, but these sermon narratives confirm and amplify the general observation that pre-modern society at large was much more mobile than we might have assumed. In the four hundred and ninty-ninth *Schimpff*, for instance, the narrator briefly mentions an imperial diet "at which five or six princes came together, shared a meal and had a fun time with each other" (p. 135). The story itself aims at mocking the various monastic orders by exposing their pretentiousness and the contrast between their religious ideals and the reality on the ground. Pauli simply draws from the rather common experience of major imperial meetings at which the various dukes meet, join meals together, and entertain themselves with jokes, so we face here the intriguing case of a narrative that mirrors the external narrative. In the five hundred-thirteenth *Schimpff*, the Bishop of Trier travels to Frankfurt to attend another imperial diet and has a hilarious encounter with a poor man who walks next to his train and does not seem to feel the cold. The bishop gives him a ducat so that he would explain this phenomenon, and he gets a witty explanation for this.

In other words, the rich and powerful traveled as much as the poor and wretched ones, and this even during the winter, the former in a coach, the latter on foot. In the following narrative, the same

bishop then asks this man what craft he practices. He learns that he is a maker of glasses but that his craft would no longer be needed anywhere, especially by ecclesiastics. As he states, which is an excellent confirmation of our argument that early modern society was on the move, maybe more than ever before: “I have traversed almost all countries, such as Brabant [Belgium], Selant [Holland], Saxony, and Hessen, but I cannot find work with any master” (p. 141). No one seems to be in need of glasses any longer, especially those among the clergy best known for their traditional focus on the written text for their religious rituals. The old priests and monks would know their texts by heart or have abandoned the practice of praying while reading the text in their books. The great lords in the Church, however, would “look through the fingers, so, our craft no longer matters much among them” (p. 142). The metaphorical expression means that the bishops would overlook shortcomings, failures, or even vices and crimes among the common clergy, maybe because they are being bribed, but the image is predicated on the concept of looking carefully, or rather the very opposite. The bishop laughs about this brilliant explanation and allows the fellow to come with him to Frankfurt and eat for free among his servants.

Traveling alone or in groups had obviously become such a common experience that it was a matter of routine for writers such as Pauli to include references to merchants, students, clerics, diplomats, and others on the road. So we hear, for instance, of “a group of people [ ] traveling by coach” (six hundred-twelfth *Schimpff*, p. 173) who tend to give alms to the poor, except for one among them who offers a hilarious explanation for his inaction in that regard. Travel was, as we can conclude our discussion of Pauli’s narratives, one of many common activities in people’s lives which made it possible to reflect upon it and to draw some lessons in many different contexts.

Georg/Jörg Wickram

Johannes Pauli basically set the tone for the entire genre of *Schwänke* (jest narratives), and the first major continuator was the Alsatian writer Georg or Jörg Wickram. When he published his collection of tales, the *Rollwagenbüchlein* (1555), he might have drawn from Boccaccio and especially Chaucer, though we do not have direct evidence for that. But the anthology was predicated on the same notion that a group of people spend time together during travel in a coach and entertain each other with storytelling (Roloff, ed., 1973; for a biographical study, see Kleinschmidt, 1993). As in the case of Pauli, however, Wickram does not engage with travel in particular and only touches upon that experience from time to time as part of everyday experiences. However, once again we can thus observe specific confirmation for the observation that the degree of mobility had grown considerably and that travel itself was a rather common activity in the lives of many different people (Solbach, 2007).

Wickram pursued less religious teachings but still aimed for moral and ethical instructions hidden behind the mask of entertaining narratives. The first story begins with a reference to the travel company in the travel coach and the need for some diversion from their boredom. Here we are informed about a simple but well-meaning peasant in the vicinity of Strasbourg who had fallen badly ill and hence had pledged a pilgrimage to a saint’s grave (Saint Velten). However, after having

recovered, he became overly busy with all the work in the fields and on the farm and did not find any time to live up to his promise. Finally, he hires a proxy pilgrim to bring his donation to the saint's church, but that man is too ignorant of the world of saints, too lazy to climb up a hill where he would find the right church, and hence returns without the desired pilgrimage certificate. The peasant is disappointed but still satisfied and pays him, which concludes the story. The narrator laments that there is too much ignorance in the world, that Christians have caused an inflation of saints and have forgotten God Himself, and that people have gotten used to the idea of proxy pilgrimage, a purely commercial form of religious ritual (p. 11; cf. also Fort, 2018).

Very similar to Pauli, if not drawing directly from him, Wickram also includes a story about a near shipwreck where one of the passengers loudly appeals to Saint Christopher to rescue him; he would pledge him an enormous candle out of wax. Another person criticizes him, pointing out that he would never have enough money to pay for such a candle, but the protagonist whispers into his ear that once he would have been saved, he would find a way to accommodate the saint and provide him with a cheap substitute candle (pp. 13-14).

As to be expected, there are also narratives focusing on innkeepers and their guests (nos. 11 and 12), and we encounter stories dealing with lansquenets (nos. 14 and 15). Story no. 19 highlights the words and deeds of a haberdasher who travels around and sells small wares. In no. 24, we hear of a impoverished lansquenet who returns from the war with no gains in his pockets and who has to rely on begging for food. As is often case in this literary genre, horse swindlers appear at a market and try to trick their customers (no. 31). No. 33 presents a story about a group of merchants who are robbed of their goods by thieves who ambush them at a convenient location. Finally, story no. 40 presents the experiences of a lansquenet who fails in his wooing for a young maid. The story itself sheds important light on the new institution of those mercenaries who roam the country for food that they forcefully take from the peasants. The young protagonist tries to gain access to a maid, but the latter and her mother trick him and lock him out of the house for the night. We are invited to laugh about this fool, but the story itself confirms the strong presence of lansquenets since the sixteenth century. They formed yet another group of travelers, always in search of military employment, food, and shelter (see, e.g., Cristini & Durand, 2013; Xenakis, 2015).

Conclusion

All the examples examined above fall into the category of literary narratives about individuals and their destinies. Travel and hence mobility matter much in many different ways, although the actual travel finds relatively little attention because these texts are definitely not travelogues and only use the daily situation of traveling to focus on specific scenes, exchanges, struggles, etc. In the sixteenth century, as we may conclude, it had become a rather normal experience to move around for political, mercantile, religious, or military reasons. Hence, authors commonly drew on such situations because during travels many accidents can happen, which then reveal people's true character and abilities, or lack thereof. Altogether, this means that we can firmly identify early modern (German) literature as an important narrative medium to reflect on mobility since that had become a firm and widespread

aspect in society at large in most European countries, and probably in other parts of the world as well. The literary evidence thus reveals its considerable potential for the exploration of micro-history during the early modern age.

Peer Review: Externally peer-reviewed.

Conflict of Interest: The author has no conflict of interest to declare.

Grant Support: The author declared that this study has received no financial support.

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How to cite this article

Classen, A. (2024). Mobility in the Sixteenth Century: Narrative Evidence about Travel and the Discovery of the World in Early Modern German Literature. *Alman Dili ve Edebiyatı Dergisi- Studien zur deutschen Sprache und Literatur, 52*, 1-16. https://doi.org/10.26650/sdsl2024-1487982