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JERUSALEM JOURNEY

CONDUCTED "PACKAGE" TOURS with all expenses prepaid before departure are not a modern idea. People were taking them back in the early fifteenth century, about the time of Henry V and Agincourt. Instead of tours, however, they were called pilgrimages, of which the most important was the "Jerusalem Journey", which ranked as the "Number One Tourist Attraction" of the Middle Ages.

For the devout, a visit to the sacred shrines of Christendom was a guaranteed passport, when the time came, to Heaven. Other pilgrims, to be sure, simply had itchy feet and took the trip out of curiosity to see strange lands and strange peoples. But even these were not unaware that their prestige would be enhanced, not only as Christians, but as well-travelled persons, who could speak with authority of places they had visited and things they had seen. Fortunately for those who remained at home, these latter enthusiasts could not bring back reels of coloured movies or hundreds of coloured slides for the edification of their stay-at-home friends. Nevertheless, as typical tourists, they did return with souvenirs, valuable to people of their day and age—including such religious relics, for example, as bones of saints, parts of the true cross, or chips of stone from the Holy Sepulchre.

Guidebooks like those that the modern tourist thumbs through were available to medieval travellers. Besides supplying information about necessary equipment and rates of exchange, these books included the usual lists of helpful phrases in other languages; the writers, however, were certainly more forthright than ours, and perhaps even more honest. Included in the list were such items in Albanian, Arabic, Greek, and Turkish as "Woman, shall I sleep with you?" Or, more ardently, "Beautiful maiden, come and sleep with me." Or,

if impatient and the maid feigned coyness: "Woman, I am already in your bed."¹

Venice was the rallying point for this medieval traffic in tourists. As the world's greatest trading power, the Queen of the Adriatic had trading posts all along the Eastern Mediterranean, and as far east as the sea of Azov. Pilgrim traffic from all parts of Europe converged naturally enough on Venice, there to take passage on Venetian ships, sailing for Jaffa, the port from which pilgrims travelled overland to Jerusalem. Venetian ship captains, moreover, accepted the role of medieval travel agents and worked out contracts for conducted tours with the Moslem rulers of the Holy Land, who were in their turn quite agreeable — for a consideration — to co-operate in organizing "three-week package tours" of the sacred sites of Palestine. The Moslem Government organized this exploitation of its territory in a thoroughly modern and business-like way. During the pilgrims' three-week stay in Palestine, their board, lodging, outings, special trips, guides, even their devotions at the Holy Places were strictly regulated from the moment they disembarked at Jaffa until the time when they took ship again for the return journey to Venice.² The Venetian authorities were equally alive to the profits to be made from the tourist traffic, and Venice did everything possible to ensure the smooth passage of travellers to the Holy Land and back. On arrival in Venice, groups of pilgrims were met by touts, who loudly set forth the comforts and attractions of the various inns they represented.

Finding some type of accommodation in Venice was extremely important, since sailings for Palestine took place usually just twice a year, in spring and autumn. A pilgrim who missed one of these might be forced to wait for three or four months in Venice. Most of the pilgrims had already spent two or three months travelling afoot — or, if wealthy, on horse or muleback — from various parts of Europe. Since such overland journeys were difficult and often dangerous, pilgrims travelled in groups. Inns in most parts of Europe were rough and frequently disreputable, so that travellers put up, if possible, in religious houses such as hostels and monasteries.

In Venice, however, the authorities made every effort to ease the difficulties of pilgrims and to correct the abuses that were prevalent. Specially licensed guides were appointed and these could be found all day in the Piazza San Marco and at the Rialto. They spoke many languages and their business was to help pilgrims in difficulties. These guides assisted pilgrims in finding lodgings, changing money, advising on the purchase of stores and provisions for the sea voyage, and helping to bargain and make a fair contract with the

ship's captain. To prevent the exploitation of pilgrims, the guides received wages that were regulated by statute, and they were forbidden to take commissions from money-changers or shops. They were permitted, however, to accept "graciously" any tips the traveller might offer.

The Venetian government also set up strict regulations governing the ships that would carry the travellers to Palestine. Only registered captains could carry pilgrims, and ships must be seaworthy and not just newly painted. The exact amount of merchandise that could be carried was specified, as well as the number of sailors and their equipment and pay. To prevent overloading, the boats had a cross painted on the hulls at the waterline. The agreed date of departure had to be strictly adhered to, copies of contracts made with pilgrims had to be registered with Venetian magistrates, and the route was clearly set forth to prevent captains from putting into extra ports for purposes of trade.

While all these regulations provided fair insurance that the traveller would be able to make sensible and economical arrangements, still, by medieval standards, the expense of such pilgrimages to Jerusalem was great. The all-inclusive contract, signed with a ship's captain, covered such charges as meals, inns, entrance fees, guides, and protection, from Venice back to Venice. This "ticket" cost 20 to 22 ducats (Venetian "zecchini d'ora"), equivalent to about \$45 to \$50 today. But much more again would be needed for incidental expenses. Then, as now, the tourist had to realize that the cost of the "package tour" represented just the beginning of his spending.

For example, the tour price covered just two meals per day while on ship. So the handbooks advised: "Ye schal oft tyme have nede to yowre vytelys [victuals]", and suggested that it was advisable to carry such extras as biscuits, bread, wine, water, cheese, eggs, fruit, sausages, sugar, and sweetmeats. "Also by yow a cage for half a dozen hennys", and a bag of millet for them.³

Provision of such additional food of the pilgrim's choice was very important, since even in those days there were those who could not stomach a steady diet of Italian food — and especially the continual salad dressed with oil.

Accordingly, for the traveller who wished to prepare food for himself, the ship's contract provided that he should have access to the cramped ship's galley. But he had to supply his own utensils. The guidebook suggested therefore that he purchase saucepans, dishes, cutlery, along with "a grater for brede and such nessaryes". All this additional equipment had to be shopped for in Venice. The contract allotted each passenger sleeping quarters in the hold under the ship's rowing deck, but actually this was only a sleeping space

on the floor, big enough to lie down in. The law stipulated, however, that it be "at least 18 inches wide and long enough to accommodate the feet", and the space was chalked on the boards. Each passenger supplied his own mattress and bedding. "Go to a shop near St. Mark's", William Wey advised in his guidebook, "where you can buy a fedyr bedde, a matres, two pylwys, too peyre schetis and a qwylt, and sell them again for half-price on your return."

The pilgrim was also advised to purchase a covered pail for the night, in case of seasickness, which one could almost expect, since the ships were two- or three-masted sailing vessels for which oars were used when in harbours. The hold, where ordinary passengers slept, had no portholes, and only those who were lucky enough to have obtained sleeping space near the hatches got light and air.

Such overcrowding — also such shipboard vermin as rats, fleas, and lice — often caused sickness, and pilgrims were advised to carry their own laxatives and restoratives. William Wey suggested spices, such as syrup of ginger to settle the stomach, "whyche schal do you gret ese by the wey". However, the contract with the ship's captain also conceded passengers the right to come up on deck for air at any hour and to remain there until revived.

The guidebooks also advised on money exchange. "Change your money into newly-minted Venetian coins", they exhorted. "The Moors will accept nothing else." In those days there were no such substitutes for coin as diners' cards, letters of credit, and travellers' cheques, and most pilgrims knew enough to carry their money concealed about their persons. Suitable clothing was another subject for special advice. The books recommended the purchase of a few pairs of linen drawers for coolness in Palestine's much hotter climate and a long heavy overcoat for warmth during chilly days at sea.

Making all these purchases and arrangements called for the expenditure of much time and money. But time was one thing of which the pilgrim awaiting a ship in Venice had plenty. It was never wasted, for Venice offered the opportunity for a tremendous round of sightseeing — especially for the devout. Oddly enough, except for the motor traffic on the canals, the city looked much as it does today. Churches were everywhere and were easily reached, simply by hiring a boat, and there the pious could view marvellous relics, including the hands and even the heads of various saints. One well-travelled but puzzled pilgrim, Felix Fabri, commented on the fact that he had seen the head of the same saint in Spain.⁴ In the Middle Ages, as Chaucer's Pardoner reminds us, there was a brisk trade in such holy relics, which were esteemed to be miracle-

working and which at least worked economic miracles for shrines which possessed prime objects.

Murano and its glass-blowing were equally famous in that earlier day, and then as now the splendour of St. Mark's and the Doge's Palace attracted tourists. One experiences a twinge of sympathy for aching feet in reading the remark of Von Harff: "We reflected that we had spent four full hours in this place, going about without ever standing still."

The pilgrims were astounded by the wealth of Venice in spices, silks, precious stones, and rare fabrics. They strolled on the Rialto, where merchants assembled daily for business, and where money-changers handled the merchants' cash. They watched spectacular ceremonies in which the Doge took part, wearing magnificent vestments. Chief of these ceremonies was the wedding of the city of Venice to the sea. The Patriarch, the Senate, and the Doge—wearing his cap "valued at 100,000 ducats"—embarked on the Grand Canal aboard the great state barge, "Bucentaur", which is still preserved in Venice. An immense fleet of boats accompanied them. At the appointed spot the Patriarch blessed the waters and the Doge removed a gold ring from his finger and threw it overboard, "thereby espousing the sea to Venice" (Fabri). Immediately, a host of Venetians performed a medieval "Steve Brody", tearing off their clothes and diving for the ring. The finder kept it and lived tax-free for the rest of the year, probably a more profitable exercise, in medieval terms, than most modern Marathon Swims.

During their three-months stay in Venice the pilgrims obviously saw everything worth seeing, and no doubt spent much money as well. Certainly, they were always glad to catch sight of the special banners which were set up in the Piazza San Marco when a sufficient number of pilgrims had gathered in the city. The banners announced that the ships' captains were ready to talk business, and since there was always a certain amount of competition among the various captains for the pilgrim trade, the traveller was free to shop around in order to obtain the most favourable contract. To this end, he could obtain advice from the official guides in Piazza San Marco. More considerately than some modern guides, they were likely to suggest that it should be stipulated in the contract that, when in the Holy Land, the pilgrims should be conducted around the various sights at a reasonable pace, so that they would not be utterly exhausted by heat and continuous travel.

Although there were no travel insurance policies in those days, every effort was made to protect the passenger. The captains' contracts stipulated that sufficient protection in the way of crossbowmen should be on board for

defence against pirates and Turkish war galleys. The captain also guaranteed that pilgrims would be protected against possible violence from the crew, especially the oarsmen, who were often brutal conscripts. If the worst happened, and a pilgrim died aboard ship, the contract stipulated that a proportion of his passage money, as well as his pilgrim's belongings, would be returned to his heirs. Nor were small details neglected in these contracts: one such item provided that space would be allowed on deck for coops for any chickens that a pilgrim might carry. Once the various provisions were agreed upon and signed, the passenger took the contract and registered it with the proper authorities in the city. After doing this, and completing any last-minute shopping, the pilgrim hired a boat and was rowed to the galley of his choice, together with his bedding, pots and pans, food, medicine, and hens. Then the oarsmen sang their rowing song and the ship moved out of the harbour to catch the wind in its sails. Apparently the travellers then were charged no head tax on leaving the country.

The ships sailed southward along the Dalmatian Coast, through the Grecian Islands, Crete, Rhodes, Cyprus, following much the same route as our modern pleasure cruises, with their frequent stopovers in the various islands. Such stopovers were actual necessities for the pilgrim ships: they had to replenish food and fresh water, or seek shelter from a violent storm, or perhaps put in for ship's repairs.⁵ Consequently, it took close to one month to make this short sea voyage to Jaffa, the port for Jerusalem. It must have been monotonous. In good weather, the pilgrims could stay on deck. Here some of their numbers gambled with dice and cards, drank wine (which could be purchased from the oarsmen), indulged in games or exercise, or played instruments they had brought aboard. Three times daily there were short prayer services—morning, noon, and night. When trumpets sounded to announce the two meals that the contract called for, there was a mad rush to the poop-deck, where the table was set. Each meal consisted of wine, a salad, mutton (or fish on fast days), pudding, cheese, and bread or biscuit. As one can imagine, much of the food was stale and adulterated, and the meat was often high.

Boring as the days were, they were preferable to the nights. At sunset, the passengers were sent to their sleeping quarters in the hold. It was hot, dark, and stuffy, and needless to say, the heavy drinkers did not make the best cabin companions. There were frequent quarrels and shouting matches about the possession of sheets and other bedding. Snoring, the smell, the heat, the vermin, the rats gnawing on any available cheese or biscuits—all these made

