

# Aspects of Franconia

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## *May 2017 – Ship of Fools*

The direct route from Nuremberg's market square up to the Church of St. Lawrence passes a bronze sculpture entitled "Ship of Fools", or "Narrenschiff" in German. It is the work of Jürgen Weber, the Braunschweig artist who also created the "Ehekarussell" next to the Weisser Turm.

The title is a reference to a moralistic poem by the Humanist Sebastian Brant which was published in Nuremberg in 1494. "Stultifera Navis", to give it its original Latin name, featured many woodcuts by Albrecht Dürer, who might have carved them during a short stay in Basle.



In *Das Narrenschiff* Brant describes over a hundred assorted follies and vices, each undertaken by a different fool, devoting chapters to such offences as Arrogance toward God, Marrying for Money, and Noise in Church. Some of the chapters are united by the common theme of a ship which will bear the assembled fools to Narragonia, the island of fools. This extremely popular work enjoyed many reprints and was translated into Latin, French, English, Dutch and Low German.

Brant, a devout Catholic and supporter of the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I, believed Germany was divinely ordained to lead the temporal Christian world.

He felt, however, that to justify this position the German people would need to cast off decadence and live in the moral fashion appropriate to their role.

Weber's sculpture is equally dramatic and focuses on the destruction caused by the "sins" of violence, technology and resignation.

The mast, a dead tree, serves as an allegory of the damage dealt the environment; the ship itself can be read as the ark, the earth, from which Adam, Eve and their son Cain are being driven.

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