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DIE MÄUSETHURMSAGE—THE SYMBOLISM OF ANNIHILATION OF AN EVIL RULER

More than a hundred years have now passed since Felix Liebrecht, in a small collection of his works entitled *Zur Volkskunde*, republished the article *Der Mäusethurm*, supplemented by W. Mannhardt's observations and the debate over Grohmann's objections.¹ Liebrecht discussed in the article legends appearing in different countries of Europe and in various versions, in which the main character dies the unusual death of being eaten by mice. Despite the dissertation's small dimensions, by gathering apposite and copious material evidence, he was able to show that the type of legend in which a ruler gets eaten by mice or becomes the victim of a plague of vermin, is reminiscent of the older rite of sacrificing the king. For, having lost "Heil", he brings long-lasting crop failure and famine to his country and subjects. In the legends, a symbolic representation of ritual killing of the ruler is seen in the sections of the narrative which speak about his fleeing before the mice to a tall tower, where the enemy in pursuit finally falls on him.²

The author of *Der Mäusethurm* associated the flight of the main character upwards and his death, mostly on the top of a tower, with numerous pieces of evidence of the rite of human sacrifice by hanging, well known in Germanic culture. Even Odin sacrificed himself by hanging himself from the Tree of Life, and,

¹ F. Liebrecht, *Der Mäusethurm*, in: *Zur Volkskunde*, Heilbronn 1879, pp. 1 - 16; article first published as *Die Sage vom Mäusethurm*, "Zeitschrift für Deutsche Mythologie und Sittenkunde", Bd II, 1855, pp. 405 - 412. W. Mannhardt's remarks, *Zur Sage vom Mäusethurm*, *ibidem*, Bd. III, 1856, pp. 307 ff. J. Grohmann, *Apollo Smintheus und die Bedeutung der Mäuse in der Mythologie der Indogermanen*, Prag 1862.

² F. Liebrecht, *Der Mäusethurm...*, p. 10.

as Liebrecht showed further, this kind of death formed part of conventional religious practices.³ Amongst the plethora of hastily formulated theses and interpretations by 19th-century folklore and mythology scholars, still revelling in the possibilities that comparative studies gave in this area, there was little to distinguish the above observation either in terms of boldness of scientific thought or in terms of novelty of method.⁴ However, today's perspective reveals a characteristic audacity and aptness in the dissertation's linking of the two elements examined by Liebrecht—legend and religious rite. The idea which lay at the base of his reasoning, that of the need to find a link between the situation arising in the legend of famine/crop failure in the kingdom and the unnatural death of the ruler on the one hand, and the phenomenon of ritual death and its form on the other—placed the entire problem more firmly amongst the realities of source accounts. Irrespective of the shape of the end-product, this created a proper research platform for the problem.

This can now be seen particularly clearly in the light of the findings achieved by D. J. Ward.⁵ The researches of this scholar allow a far fuller interpretation than was previously possible of the group of legends about mice devouring rulers. After all, they have far greater universal significance, representing as they do a successful attempt to expand G. Dumézil's trifunctional division in the sphere of ritual sacrifices offered to the gods within the Celtic-Germanic cultural area. Proceeding from Dumézil's suggestion, formulated in *La saga de Hadingus*,⁶ that sacrifices offered to the gods differed from each other and took on certain given forms, depending on whether they were destined for gods of the first, second or third function, Ward confirmed the accuracy of the above supposition on the basis of the material evidence which

³ *Ibidem*, pp. 8 ff.

⁴ Cf. e.g. the theses of J. Grohmann, *op. cit.*, or M. Behelm-Schwarzbach, *Die Mäusethurmsage von Popiel und Hatto*, Posen 1888, Sonderdruck aus einer Festschrift eines Vereins von Historikern und Archäologen in Posen 1888.

⁵ D. J. Ward, *The Threefold Death: An Indo-European Trifunctional Sacrifice?*, in: *Myth and Law among Indo-Europeans. Studies in Indo-European Comparative Mythology*, ed. J. Puhvel, Berkeley 1970 pp. 123 - 142.

⁶ G. Dumézil, *Du mythe au roman. La Saga de Hadingus (Saxo Grammaticus, I, V - VIII) et autres essais*, Paris 1970, Appendice I: *Le noyé et le pendu*, pp. 142 - 144, especially p. 143 n. 3.

he had gathered. For each of the three groups of the Celtic and Germanic pantheon, representing Dumézil's three functions, he isolated appropriate kinds of sacrifice.⁷ So that the rite involving the hanging of the sacrifice offered was reserved for the supreme gods of the first function, headed by Odin. People, animals and objects destined for Odin were hung on trees, whilst sacrifices to gods of the third function, who determined harvest yield, prosperity and the community's productive fortunes, were carried out by drowning.⁸

It is in this context that we should interpret the cases—frequent in Irish legends, and also present in the Greek (Piasos) and Germanic (Fjölfnir, Hundingus, Veraldur) tradition—of drowning of a ruler, usually one who is a personification of a hero of the harvest/agricultural prosperity, in a vat of honey or a beverage prepared for a feast. The association of water, assuming different forms, such as bath-water, immersion, spraying, drowning, with rites of the third function is particularly clear-cut and well documented.

The fact that specific sacrificial rites are connected with particular groups of gods also finds reverse confirmation as it were, as Ward observes, in the relations linking the type of offence with the kind of retribution inflicted for it. Those transgressions committed in areas which are the domain of the gods of the third function, which is to say for instance sexual offences (homosexualism, prostitution), or those which represent a breach of the warrior's rules of etiquette ensuing from the second function (lack of prowess—cowardice, loss of manliness) and which would count as such, but preserving a form of third-function character, were punished by drowning.⁹ On the other hand, treason, as a crime against the supremacy of the state, against the first function, ended in hanging, or the same death prepared for a sacrifice to Odin and gods of equal prominence.¹⁰

The relationship between the class of gods who presided over war (the second function) and the kind of sacrificial rites appro-

⁷ D. J. Ward, *op. cit.*, pp. 131 ff.

⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 124 ff.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 126.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 127.

pritate to them is the least clear. The sacrifice was put to death by means of a sword (decapitation) or was burnt on a specially prepared scaffold.¹¹ The hierarchy of human sacrificial rites isolated by Ward found an echo and convincing confirmation in the phenomenon of the so-called threefold death described in the narrative traditions of many peoples.¹²

In stories employing such a motif, the main character perishes by an unnatural death which is brought about by three causes, equally significant in their fatal consequences and taking effect simultaneously. As A. and B. Rees accurately observe, none of these factors can be regarded as the definitive cause of death of the main character. His death, being neither hanging, nor drowning, nor death from a wound inflicted by a weapon, lies somewhere in the "magic middle", between all possibilities. It should rather be treated as a fusion of antagonisms, of mutually exclusive means of imparting death.¹³

The well-known example of the death of King Diarmait shows the simultaneous roads by which he meets his destiny. With a spear in his breast, he staggers around a burning house, seeking refuge in a vat of beer. The same triad of sufferings leads to the death of Muirchertach mac Erca, though it is subject to certain modification in the case of the fate awaiting another ruler, also Irish, Aedh the Black. Wounded in the neck by a spear, he falls from a tree straight into some water.¹⁴ This variation of the threefold death is consistent with the Germanic tradition, which here employed the combination: hanging (in the Celtic area falling from a tree), a wound from a weapon (instead of fire), and drowning.¹⁵

Ward finds signs of the rite of the threefold death in Saxo

¹¹ Loc. cit.

¹² *Ibidem*, pp. 136 ff.

¹³ A. and B. Rees, *Celtic Heritage. Ancient Tradition in Ireland and Wales*, London 1961, p. 333.

¹⁴ Examples from K. Jackson, *The Motive of the Threefold Death in the Story of Suibhne Geilt*, in: *Essays and Studies Presented to Eoin Mac Neil*, Dublin 1940, pp. 535 - 550; C. Ramnoux, *La mort sacrificielle du roi, "Ogam"*, vol. XXXV, 1954, No. 5, pp. 215 ff.; R. W. Brednich, *Volkserzählungen und Volksglaube von dem Schicksalsfrauen (FFC 193)*, Helsinki 1964, pp. 138 - 145; J. D. Ward, *op. cit.*, pp. 136 ff.; F. J. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, London 1973, pp. 99 ff.; see also AT 934 A; Thompson M 341.2.4.

¹⁵ J. D. Ward, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

Grammaticus' tale of the unexpected departure of King Vikar.¹⁶ This ruler attempts to outwit the fate which has marked him out as a sacrifice to Odin. Unsuccessfully, however, since his apparently secure position changes miraculously into a lethal trap. The reed with which Starkadr, executing the will of Odin, strikes Vikar in the chest, turns out to be a spear. The stump on which he was standing falls away from under the ruler's feet. On Vikar's neck, a noose made from soft lamb entrails turns into a willow withe, whilst the small branch of a young pine nearby, to which it is tied, lifts up, pulling the king after it and strangling him. With the aid of folkloristic accounts, the author cited argues that Vikar's fall from the stump represents a residual, deformed drowning motif. In this way an important component part of the symbolism of the "threefold death" phenomenon is recovered. The restoration thus carried out also gives an appearance of verisimilitude to the internal conceptual cohesion of the whole. The ruler offered as a sacrifice who meets with a triple kind of death, combining through such ceremony sacrificial rites belonging to all classes of the gods, represents not only ritual redress for the entire pantheon, but at the same time a petition for the community's welfare in the most general sense. After all, the latter is limited to the sum of the prosperity gained within the purview of each of the three functions : to good harvests and comfort provided by the third function, to the military successes guaranteed by the second function, and to the order and internal peace associated with the first function.

Ward's findings prompt the question, whether certain types of sacrificial activity characteristic of particular functions (vertically directed action exemplified by instances of falls from trees, hanging on trees—function I, burning, imparting of wounds with a weapon, belonging to the repertoire of function II measures, drowning/contact with water indicating the presence of function III) do not have still further concretizations, whether they do not appear in accounts less distinctly affiliated to the sphere of the sacrum, and whether in such new surroundings they preserve their

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 139 - 141.

symbolic significance? Liebrecht's hypothesis mentioned at the outset encourages the subjecting of the mice legend to this kind of analysis. Its numerous variations are at our disposal. It is therefore worth examining them afresh. This time without restricting our consideration, as the author of *Der Mäusethurm* did, to substantiating the view that behind the ruler's unnatural death lay the ancient custom of sacrificing a king who did not manage to protect his country from crop failure and famine.

The legend of a human being devoured by mice must have been well ingrained in the German narrative tradition, since the oldest accounts of the theme come down to us in a very much distorted form, as an ancillary motif of a church exemplum. The *Annales Quedlinburgenses*, under the year 1012, make mention in general terms of the case of a certain individual devoured by invisible mice, which took place "in Francia, vero non longe a Colonia".¹⁷ In the chronicler's view this must have been a punishment for some deed committed by the individual, but it is only from Thietmar that we learn the details of the incident.¹⁸ A certain knight wanted by force to deplete the estate of the monastery of St. Clement, for which he was one day attacked by mice. Though he tried to defend himself, first with a stick and then with a sword, he could not free himself from the plague of animals. Finally he requested to be locked in a tower, inside which he suspended himself on a rope, but even this defence was of no avail. The new items which appear in Thietmar's account (the mice being real, and the stages and means of defence of the individual attacked) could not have been inferred from the text of the *Annales Quedlinburgenses*. It is doubtful, too, that he had sight of another source containing these items of information. The additional items which he provided belonged rather to the then well-known and widespread informational stereotype associated with the motif "death inflicted by mice".

Without comment, as if counting on the reader's knowledge, *Annalista Saxo* leaves behind the information that Henry of Laufen "*mures corrosissent usque ad mortem*".¹⁹ In the chronicle

¹⁷ *Annales Quedlinburgenses*, ad a. 1012, MGH SS vol. III, p. 81.

¹⁸ *Thietmari Merseburgensis episcopi Chronicon*, VI, 82 (49), ed. R. Holtzmann. MGH SS rer. Ger. n. s. vol. IX, Berolini 1935, p. 372.

¹⁹ *Annalista Saxo*, ad a. 1026, MGH SS vol. VI, p. 667.

of the Ebersheim monastery, in that part of it written certainly between 1163 and 1167, we encounter the same motif of defence against mice as in Thietmar.⁸⁰ Bishop Alewich orders his bed to be suspended by four ropes, so as to gain some respite from the mice attacking him. This remedial measure also appears in later popular legends.⁸¹ One of the narrators of the experiences of Bishop Hatto even remarks that as a boy, prior to 1784, he himself saw inside the tower near Bingen four iron shafts holding such an iron bed.⁸²

Widespread currency of the motif of mice devouring a human, even at the time during which the sparse evidence known to us today arose, can be inferred from the chronicle of the above-quoted *Annalista Saxo*. The motif twice appears in the chronicle, once in the notification of Henry of Laufen's death, and a second time in connection with the same tale known to the author of the *Annales Quedlinburgenses* and to Thietmar.⁸³ In contrast to Thietmar's account, however, Saxo manages to give the geographical location of the monastery of St. Clement. This differs from the location which the *Annales Quedlinburgenses* give the event—not yet linking it with a monastery. In these circumstances of the gradual improvement of the exemplum's informational content, which also takes place between the *Annales Quedlinburgenses* version and the entry in Thietmar's chronicle, one can see evidence of the tale's lively contribution to story circulation. Its utilization for local needs in particular—expressed in the linking of the exemplum with a given place—is a result of its popularity.

The Oldest Polish account of the mice legend comes from the same era in which the existence of our legend is noted in the territory of Germany. The way and circumstances in which it was recorded give it prime importance within the large family of narratives of this kind. The story of mice devouring a human became merged with the dynastic legend explaining the assumption of royal power by the Piast house. However, it was already in circulation before this, before it assumed a literary form, being

⁸⁰ *Chronicon Ebersheimense*, MGH SS vol. XXIII, p. 442.

⁸¹ These are collected in B. Beckman, *Von Mäusen und Menschen. Die hoch- und spätmittelalterlichen Mäusesagen*, Zürich 1974, pp. 182 ff.

⁸² See *ibidem*, p. 195.

⁸³ *Annalista Saxo*, ad a. 1012, p. 664.

passed on by word of mouth. The so-called Gallus Anonymus, a chronicler recording, around the year 1116, the deeds of his employer Boleslaw the Wrymouth and, at the same time, the beginnings of the dynasty he came from, learned of the mice episode of Polish history from local informants. He writes :

"Narrant etiam seniores antiqui, quod iste Pampila a regno expulsus, tantam a muribus persecutionem paciebatur, quod ob hoc a suis consequentibus in insulam transportatus et ab illis feris pessimis illuc transnatantibus in turre lignea tam diu sit defensus, donec pro fetore pestifere multitudinis interempte ab omnibus derelictus, morte turpissima, monstris corrodentibus, expiravit".²⁴

The legend noted down by Gallus Anonymus must therefore have been harnessed to the explanation of the assumption of power by the new dynasty of the Piasts correspondingly earlier, whilst it was still part of the oral tradition.

The story recorded from the oral account *seniorum antiquum* was not treated with particular piety by the chronicler, who was probably a native of France. He cites it rather casually, and only because the earlier parts of his story do not explain how, "technically", it came about that Siemowit, son of a poor ploughman Piast, took over Popiel's throne. So that Gallus was not altogether interested in the reasons why the mice began persecuting Popiel. He summarized the matter as briefly as possible, concentrating his attention on the section describing the lamentable end of the ruler—predecessor of the Piasts. Here the account of the chronicler seems to follow the words of his informant, and despite the earlier brevity in relating the Popiel episode, Gallus describes the story of the ruler's flight from the mice in detail : first he is taken to an island, and there he flees to a wooden tower, where finally—after unsuccessful attempts at armed defence against his assailant—he perishes in isolation.

The same tempo of development of retribution as in the reports discussed above, is encountered in the oldest versions (from the

²⁴ *Galli Anonymi Cronicae et gesta ducum sive principum Polonorum*, I, 3, ed. K. Maleczyński, *Monumenta Poloniae Historica* (cited below as MPH), series nova vol. II. p. 12.

²⁵ *Chronica minor minoritae Erphordensis*, ad. a. 918, 969, ed. O. Holder-Egger, MGH SS rer. Ger. in us. schol., vol. XV, Hannoverae et Lipsiae 1899, pp. 619, 621.

1260s) of the Bishop Hatto legend.⁶⁶ Earlier, however, at the beginning of the 13th century, this had been brought into relief and developed by Master Wincenty Kadłubek in his story of Popiel's death and the attaining of power by the Piasts.⁶⁷ The account in Wincenty's chronicle is of particular significance. As it is an attempt at reconstructive development of the meagre information contained in Gallus' chronicle, it allows us better to distinguish the functional meaning ascribed to the story as a whole and the quality of its different elements. Above all Wincenty had to provide clear motivation for Popiel's being attacked by mice. As the matter is presented in Gallus, the ruler was guilty of driving two wanderers away from the palace gates. These visitors then found hospitality in the hut of the poor ploughman Piast, where they revealed their magical powers (beer and meat are then multiplied during a feast, and the ploughman's son is guaranteed a royal future). The evidence of Popiel's meanness outlined in Gallus' account was not taken up by Bishop of Cracow, Wincenty Kadłubek, writing some hundred years later. In the pages of his chronicle he creates an outline of an irresolute king with a weak character, who totally submits to the advice and suggestions of his basically evil wife.⁶⁸ The balance-sheet of transgressions drawn up for King Popiel by Master Wincenty, in its ideological import, and even in the concurrence of concrete offences, should be compared with the phenomenon of the "three sins of the warrior", studied by Dumézil.⁶⁹ The wretched Popiel, like Starkadr, commits a transgression against each of the three functions, and overall suffers the penalty for his "sin" against the entire triad. He betrays the first function by poisoning his uncles in the hope of removing his political opponents. The breach with the second function ensues from the fact that the king was, by nature, a great effeminate debauchee, who spent his time at banquets and parties. The chronicler reproaches him directly with being "the first to flee and the last to fight", and because he "practised feminine dances more than exercised masculine strength".⁷⁰ The character

⁶⁶ *Magistri Vincentii Chronica Polonorum*, I, 19, MPH vol. II, pp. 269 ff.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 267 ff.

⁶⁸ G. Dumézil, *Heur et malheur du guerrier. Aspects mythiques de la fonction guerrière chez les Indo-Européens*, Paris 1969, pp. 77, 88, *passim*.

⁶⁹ *Vincentii Chronica Polonorum*, p. 269 b.

of a sybarite was a foundation from which the king's other offences could spring more easily. Master Wincenty closes his enumeration of King Popiel's transgressions, committed at each of the levels of the three-tier hierarchy, with the following conclusion: "*Igitur ob huiusmodi meritorum insignia peste inaudita elanguit.*"⁸⁰

Worthy of particular emphasis is the cause-effect linking of the king's triple type of offence and the appearance *pestis inaudita*. In other words the chronicler clearly states that as a consequence of the king's offences, a plague of mice arrives as punishment. C. Ramnoux, reconstructing *les scénarios de la fin du roi* on the basis of material from Irish chronicles and accounts, has isolated the frequently recurring schema which she has called "death by pestilence".⁸¹ This presents a situation similar to that which we encounter in the Polish example of Popiel. As the aforesaid author observes, this is the type of death envisaged for the usurper/tyrant ruler. As a result of his government and sins he brings crop failure, cattle disease and pestilence on the country. He disappears from the political scene in an atmosphere of disaster. Similar scenarios for a king's departure have come down from the Greek tradition. The old king is or becomes a tyrant/usurper, writes Ramnoux, since a pretender to the throne appears, with due rights or higher backing.⁸² In confrontation with such an opponent, the ruler loses his prestige and *magie de la fécondité*. The declining period of his rule is a time of famine, military reverses, internal anarchy. Associated with the person of the newly arrived competitor is the trifunctional prosperity of the community: state—military—economic.

Wincenty Kadłubek, too, wanted to adduce evidence as to the unserviceableness of the old king and to explain the end of Popiel and his house in terms of a higher imperative. So as not to encumber the Piast dynasty newly ascended to the throne, with suspicions of usurpation. The "pestilence" which breaks out in consequence of Popiel's lack of integrity is of a particular kind. From the bodies of his poisoned uncles, left unburied, an extra-

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, loc. cit., v. 23 - 24.

⁸¹ C. Ramnoux, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

⁸² C. Ramnoux, *La nuit et les enfants de la nuit dans la tradition grecque*, Paris 1959, pp. 158 ff.

ordinary number of mice hatch. They commence a hunt for the king and his family : 1) *trans stagna, trans paludes, trans flumina*, 2) *trans etiam igneos rogos*, until finally they devour the fugitives 3) *turri eminentissimae inclusos*.⁴³ The theme of Popiel's defence is developed for rhetorical effect, as compared with Gallus' version : a new remedial measure is introduced—fire, but despite the fact that water is used three times, the tower's island location is not mentioned.

Later historiographical works—the *Polish Chronicle*, and the *Chronicle of Polish Princes*, which follows it closely—adopt Kadlubek's *dénouement* (*trans ignem, trans flumina*), but also follow Gallus in recalling that Popiel is taken to an island.⁴⁴ Both these chronicles give the name of the latter, *Cruswiciensi insula*, but only the later *Chronicle of Polish Princes* speaks of a wooden tower situated on the island.

Summing up, Popiel's defence as presented in the oldest accounts takes the following forms: 1) armed combat with the mice/the use of fire, 2) flight through water (rivers, ponds, bogs)/crossing to an island, 3) flight to a tower/tower situated on an island.

From the evidence so far available, it emerges that towards the close of the 15th century, which is to say around two-hundred years after the linking of the person of Popiel with the Kruszwica tower, Bishop Hatto, Archbishop of Mainz, who shared the same fate, became connected with a tower standing on an island in the Rhine not far from Bingen.⁴⁵ The legend of this evil church

⁴³ *Vincentii Chronica Polonorum*, p. 270 a.

⁴⁴ *Chronica Polonorum* (13th/14th centuries), MPH vol. III, p. 615; *Chronica principum Poloniae* (2nd half 14th century), *ibidem*, p. 435.

⁴⁵ In *The Chronicle of Hirsau's Monastery* (ad a. 923, 967), J. Tritheimius indicates a tower near Bingen (*Turris autem, in qua devoratus a muribus Hatto dicitur iuxta Bingen oppidum [...], medio Rheni [...]; [...] iuxta oppidum Bingiorum turrim in medio Rheni [...] ascendit.*). This location was established at the turn of the century, since another one—the Rattenburg castle built in Rheno by Hatton—is put forward in about 1494 by Nicolaus of Siegen (*Chronicon ecclesiasticum*, ed. F. X. Wegele, *Thüringische Geschichtsquellen*, vol. II, Jena 1855, p. 197). See B. Beckman, *op. cit.*, pp. 106 ff.; S. Feist, *Die Sage vom Binger Mäuseturm*, "Zeitschrift für den deutschen Unterricht", vol. IX, 1895, p. 515; C. Will, *Der Mäuseturm bei Bingen*, "Monatsschrift für rheinisch-westfälische Geschichtsforschung und Alterthumskunde", vol. I, 1875, p. 209; R. Engelhardt, *Der Binger Mäuseturm*, Bingen 1970. For the later history of the legend see F. Otten, *Die Sage von Bischof Hatto von Mainz und dem Mäuseturm bei Bingen*. (Anmerkungen zur russischen Rezeption im 17 Jahrhundert), "Zeitschrift für slawische Philologie", Bd. XXXIX, 1977, pp. 233 - 250.

dignitary, eaten by mice in retribution, was known much earlier, being, after all, only one of several legends which grew round the figure of Hatto, in his lifetime a ruthless and energetic politician.³⁶ In the Roll of Mainz Archbishops, no doubt recorded around the mid 13th century, it is noted that he ordered the poor to be burnt during a famine.³⁷ The motif of mice, which administer justice to the Archbishop for this achievement, is only contained in the *Chronica minor minorite Erphordensis*, or more precisely its second edition, which, as the publisher of the work, O. Holder-Egger, states, appeared during the years 1261 - 1266.³⁸ In the first version of the chronicle, too (1261), there was a short entry on the legend which interests us. Under the year 918 a note is entered stating that "*Hatto Moguntinus archiepiscopus devoratus est a muribus nec in castris sive in insulis unquam potuit a muribus se defendere*".³⁹ The version imparted by the first variant of the Erfurt chronicle does not mention the reason why the Mainz archbishop died such an unnatural death. The next part of the report, which talks of Hatto's defensive measures, also differs from the information entered in the second edition of the chronicle. In general terms it is stated: the archbishop "*devoratus est a muribus in Reno*".⁴⁰ The account contained in the *Chronica Reinhardsbrunn-*

³⁶ See M. Beheim-Schwarzbach, *op. cit.*, pp. 14 ff., 39 ff.; S. Feist, *op. cit.*, pp. 505 - 549.

³⁷ *Series archiepisc. Moguntinorum*, MGH SS vol. XIII, p. 315. This motif was also contained in *Johannis Vitodurani Chronica*, ed. Fr. Baethgen, MGH SS rer. Ger. in us. schol., n. s. vol. III, Berolini 1924, p. 84 ([...] *dominus de Wirtenberg potens in Swevia [...], quia mirabilis et homo severus erat, multos pauperes [...]* et cet.). It is characteristic that when this is combined with the "mice administering justice" theme, the motivation and circumstances of the crime alter: the story's links with the third function are then brought out strongly.

³⁸ *Chronica minor*, pp. 519, 621.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 619.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 621. For the development of the Hatton "mice saga", 1) *Series archiepisc. Mogunt.*, p. 315; 2) *Chronica minor*, p. 619—ed. A, p. 621—ed. B; 3) *Flores temporum auct. fratre Ord. Minorum*, MGH SS vol. XXIV, p. 245 (end of the 13th century); 4) *Chronicon Siffridi Presb. de Balnhusin Epitomes*, I, ad a. 923, *Rer. Ger. SS*, ed. B. G. Struvio, Ratisbonae 1726, p. 1032 (before 1307); 5) *Chronica Reinhardsbrunnensis*, ad a. 969, MGH SS vol. XXX, I, p. 516 (around mid-14th century); 6) *Compilatio chronologica a temp. Caroli Magni* ad a. 1410, ad a. 914, *Scriptorum Brunsvicensia illustrantium*, vol. II, ed. G. Leibnizii, Hannoverae 1710, p. 63; 7) *Chronicon mproi T. Engelhusi*, *ibidem*, pp. 1070 ff. (before 1434). Filiation: 2A = 4, 1 and 2A influence 3, which does not contain the element of Hatton's defence against his assailant, 5 ← 2B → 6 → 7.

sis (mid 14th century), which comes from this current of the tradition, explains the above information. It adds that Hatto "*procuravi fecit habitationem in navibus*".⁴¹ Despite the differences in summarizing Hatto's fate, it is easy to see—particularly in the context of comparative material relating to this legend—that the accounts of the *Erfurt Chronicle* represent two incomplete, or rather modified reconstructions of one and the same story concerning the sorry end of the evil archbishop. Hatto's death "in Reno" corresponds after all with the enigmatic statement that he could defend himself from the mice neither in the castles nor on the islands. We recall Popiel's being taken to the Kruszwica island and the *Chronica Reinhardsbrunnensis'* explanation that the archbishop, beset by mice, sought refuge on a boat.

It would appear that in the German legend, too, there were three phases to the main character's flight from the mice pursuing him. Apart from the island and the associated element of passage, or escape onto a boat, our source material shows a further fixed point in the hunt after the malefactor—the tower. It is difficult to equate *turris* with *castrum*—in the first edition of the *Erfurt Chronicle* it is mentioned that Hatto did not find refuge from the mice in the castles—but the supposition that it was precisely a tower which was involved is confirmed by the legend's subsequent history. Popular legends from considerably later periods concerning mice dispensing justice also confirm the presence of a tower in the story, or its semantic equivalent in the shape of a mountain or castle. The person fleeing before their wrath builds a house on a mountain situated on an island.⁴² Castles with high towers rise up on islands, with the aim of defending the owners from the attacks of these animals.⁴³ Hatto himself, it was thought towards the close of the 15th century, was supposed to have erected "*castrum in Rheno dictum Rattenburg*", so as to free himself from persecution by the mice.⁴⁴ Sometimes, as in the case of a legend circulating amongst the Transylvanian gypsies towards the end of the last century, the victim saves himself simply by

⁴¹ As above, item 5.

⁴² L. Petzoldt, *Historische Sagen*, vol. I, München 1976, pp. 25 ff.

⁴³ See Beckman's collection, *op. cit.*, pp. 182 ff.

⁴⁴ *Nicolaï de Siegen Chronicon...*, *loc. cit.*

escaping to a mountain.⁴⁵ The geographical setting of stories involving death inflicted by mice faithfully preserves the memory of the basic elements making up the content of such legends. A lake (river, sea)—an island—a mountain (a mountain above the lake or on the island), a tower or castle on the island—this is the landscape in which the legends of interest to us are usually inscribed.⁴⁶

Relatively speaking, the most variable element, and that which receives the least unambiguously fixed form, in the three stages of defence of the mice's quarry, is the element of offering resistance through combat (armed or otherwise). On the one hand the story itself naturally prompts this kind of *dénouement* at the point when it relates the appearance of the mice and the attack on their victim. The first impulse is to attempt to repel the strange adversary by force, with the aid of a stick or sword.⁴⁷ Sometimes we learn that the individual being attacked is defended by his servants or acquaintances.⁴⁸ The *Greater Poland Chronicle* (first half of 14th century) states that at first attempts were made to overcome the mice pursuing Popiel "*igne, ferro, fustibus*".⁴⁹ So that the element of direct combat with the quadrupedal assailants does have its place in the structure of the legend, and is noticeable in the oldest accounts. On the other hand, however, in view of the incomparably greater allure of the main character's successive attempts to save himself from the danger threatening him, the theme itself of an armed encounter with the mice is reduced to a mention of the fact

⁴⁵ H. von Wlislöcki, *Die Mäuseturmsage in Siebenbürgen*, "Germania", Bd. XXXII, 1887, p. 436, in other legends; to a church tower (*ibidem*, p. 440); onto the roof of a house (*ibidem*, p. 438); into a tree (*ibidem*, p. 442).

⁴⁶ Attention has already been drawn to the topography characteristic of the legend, in K. Potkański, *Podanie o Popielu i Piaście* [*The Legend of Popiel and Piast*], in: *Lechici, Polanie, Polska*, ed. G. Labuda, Warszawa 1965, pp. 427 ff., and *idem*, *Jeszcze o Piaście* [*More about Piast*], *ibidem*, pp. 453 ff. The sea often appears in the accounts descended from William of Malmesbury's tale, *Gesta regum Anglorum*, MGH SS vol. X, p. 476—in its original form, and for instance in the *Chronicles of Alberic, Trium Fontium*, MGH SS vol. XXIII, p. 800, Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum hist.*, L. XXV, cap. 117, Martin of Opava, MGH SS vol. XXII, p. 468.

⁴⁷ Thus Thietmar, *loc. cit.*

⁴⁸ E.g. *Galli Anonymi Chronica*, *loc. cit.*; William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum*, *loc. cit.*

⁴⁹ *Chronica Poloniae Maioris*, MPH s.n. vol. VIII, p. 12.

that the individual under attack was unable to protect himself, or is dropped from the legend altogether. We do not find it, for example, in the older accounts of the Hatto legend, whilst it is well represented in the series of interrelated legends of death inflicted by mice which derive from the exemplum provided by William of Malmesbury in the *Gesta regum Anglorum*.

The group headed by the story recorded by William of Malmesbury forms an independent numerous family of accounts of the legend which interests us.⁵⁰ Through the mediation of popular historical compendiums, the legends making up this family spread throughout medieval Europe. They bear distinct traces of artistic modifications aimed at adapting them to the shape which a literary *exemplum* ought to have. Such is the significance which William of Malmesbury confers on his story, and thus do the successive authors who spread the account evaluate its character.

Under attack from the mice, the main character first of all attempts to beat off the adversary with the help of those surrounding him; but after some time, in view of the futility of combat, saves himself by escaping onto a boat. The mice also attack in the water, however, gnawing through the sides of the boat. They force the fugitive to return to shore, where they definitively dispose of him. This is the scenario employed by all the narratives subordinate to the *exemplum* from the *Gesta regum Anglorum*. Jarl Asbjörn, a certain Swedish prince—not known by name, and Widerolf, Bishop of Strassburg, all chose escape onto a boat as the only means of rescue. These cases require further explanation. Jarl Asbjörn, having taken shelter on a boat, is hunted down at sea and eaten by rats.⁵¹ The same thing happens to the nameless Swedish prince.⁵² On the other hand the mice in William of Malmesbury's exemplum and the accounts related to it devoured their victims on the shore, directly after leaving a sinking boat. The case of Widerolf also introduces certain variations. The animals also

⁵⁰ The accounts are collected in B. Beckman, *op. cit.*, pp. 45 - 52.

⁵¹ *Knyttlingasaga*, cap. 61, in: *Die Geschichten von Orkaden, Dänmark und der Jomsburg*, ed. W. Baetke (Thule vol. 19), Jena 1924, pp. 298 ff.; A. A. Afzelius, *Svenska Folkets Sago-Häfder*, vol. II, Stockholm 1840, pp. 119 ff.; see F. Liebrecht, *Der Mäuseturm*, p. 5; B. Beckman, *op. cit.*, pp. 61 ff.

⁵² Account of the Swedish *Fürstenspiegel* (around 1330) quoted in B. Beckman, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

catch up with him in the water, on a boat, but they bite him whilst swimming underwater, when he is submerged whilst making for the shore.⁵³

In all the above-cited examples water is meant to be a remedy against the mice in pursuit, in addition to which, escape onto a boat replaces the motif encountered in other accounts of conveyance of the persecuted to an island. Despite the literary reworkings which the mice legend squeezed within the framework of the courtly exemplum went through, and the reduction of its fixed component elements associated with this process, the text of the new narrative preserved the action's strong link with water, characteristic of all the legend's variants. This "wet character" of our legend only takes on significance and allows interpretation to be carried out in conjunction with another circumstance, appearing in various guises, but constantly finding voice in the content of these legends. This points us in the direction of the issues accounting for the main character's guilt and thereby explaining the cause and circumstances of the appearance of justice-dispensing mice.

Liebrecht pointed to a link between employment of the mice motif and the occurrence of ritual death of a ruler, during whose reign there were persistent crop failures and famine. But in establishing this link he made use of a legend which is merely related to our group of legends. The burden of his argumentation fell on other data, directly related to the phenomenon of sacrifice of the king with the aim of restoring good harvests. The scholar quotes a tale preserved in the Danish chronicles concerning the end of King Snio's reign.⁵⁴ The latter ruled the country like a tyrant, so that one of his subjects, on receiving a prophecy of the king's annihilation from the giant Lae, informed the ruler at once. The words of the prophecy took immediate effect and Snio "*mortuus [est] morsu pediculorum*". It is known that the years of Snio's cruel and unjust reign were also a time of great and prolonged famine. However, the reports assembled by Liebrecht do not include one account which clearly places the ruler's death in

⁵³ Legend of St. Attala (around 1280), in: M. Barth, *Die Legende und Verehrung der hl. Attala der ersten Aebtissin von St. Stephan in Strassburg*, "Archiv für Elsässische Kirchengeschichte", Bd. II, 1927, p. 180.

⁵⁴ *Chronicon Lethrense* (2nd half of 13th century), *Script. hist. danicae minores*, ed. M. Cl. Gertz, vol. I, København 1917, p. 51.

the context of the calamity of crop failure and famine. It speaks of a taproom ban, issued by Snio and aimed at saving corn.⁵⁵ One refractory subject contravened this order three times, and, thanks to effective explanations, saved himself from punishment each time. When he was caught the third time, for organizing a feast with libation, he said that he was thereby honouring Snio's death—*"nec dubitare, regem ex defectu panis in proximo moriturum"*.⁵⁶

Death *morsu pediculorum* belongs to the same category of violent annihilation of the unlucky main character, whose repertoire of means, along with being devoured by mice, is completed only by the penalty of being eaten by worms, toads and sometimes snakes.⁵⁷ It is characteristic that in the medieval accounts and in folklore existing until quite recently, the term "vermin" embraced mice, rats, worms, lice and other creatures regarded as repulsive.⁵⁸ Erasure in social perception of the differences which existed between them took place on the basis of classifying all of them within the group *vermes*, causing abhorrence and also bringing death and famine.⁵⁹ Each of these creatures could serve interchangeably as an instrument of punishment for a certain type of particularly grave transgression.⁶⁰ The solutions it was possible to

⁵⁵ *Compendium Saxonis* (1st half of 14th century), *ibidem*, p. 328.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, loc. cit.

⁵⁷ L. Landois, *Untersuchungen über die auf dem Menschen schmarotzenden Pediculen*, "Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Zoologie", Bd. XIV, 1864, pp. 27-30. Usurers, misers eaten by toads, snakes, vermin: J. W. Wolf, *Deutsche Märchen und Sagen*, Leipzig 1845, Nos. 110, 111; B. Baader, *Volkssagen aus dem Lande Baden*, Karlsruhe 1851, No. 64. The main character of a Welsh exemplum is eaten by toads, despite being guarded and defended by friends and escaping up a tree, see *Giraldus Cambriensis, Itinerarium Cambriae*, XI, 2, ed. J. F. Dimock, *Rer. Brit. medii aevi script.*, vol. XXI, vol. 6, London 1868, pp. 110 ff.

⁵⁸ A. H. Krappe, *The Science of Folklore*, London 1930 (repr. 1962), p. 253. Snakes, toads, mice and vermin have been merged into a single group of harmful animals; they gnawed the roots of the cosmic tree (*Weltbaum*), for instance, see F. von der Leyden, *Das Märchen in den Göttersagen der Edda*, Berlin 1899, pp. 16 ff.

⁵⁹ A. H. Krappe, *Apollon Smintheus and the Teutonic Musing*, "Archiv für Religionswissenschaft", Bd. XXXIII, 1936, pp. 40-56.

⁶⁰ In the Polish version of the exemplum of William of Malmesbury we read: "[...] *totus a vermicibus seu muribus dilaceratus est et comestus*" (*Rocznik matopolski* [Little Poland Year Book] [beginning of 14th century], MPH vol. III, p. 146). Emperor Arnulf's death is described once in the words "*a vermicibus consumptus*" (*Adami Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, scholia 9 (10), ed. B. Schmeidler, MGH SS rer. Ger. in us. schol., vol. XI b, Hannoverae 1917, p. 49), and on other occasions in the words "*a pediculis devoratus*" (*Flores temporum*, p. 235), and "*minutis ver-*

adopt here were regarded as being equivalent to each other significantly and symbolically. Convincing evidence of this is provided by the fact that different forms of putting the main character/culprit to death were employed for identically or similarly defined circumstances of the crime. The most striking feature—one can speak here of regularity—is the closeness of descriptions of main characters eaten by mice or worms. They are chiefly rulers (kings, princes), and where they do not wear a crown, they possess power over a group of people by reason of their social position (bishop, military commander, knight, employer).⁶¹ Their offences always ensue from misusing and exceeding the authority vested in them. In a word the punishment of annihilation by *vermes* is a measure reserved for individuals elevated by way of office or social position above a given group, for people who are supposed to lead and serve the latter. As in the case of Popiel's sin, the offences of individuals killed by worms turn against the order of the three functions, being acts against God (the gods—sacrilege), soldierly ethics, and people's goods and the principles upon which the community bases interpersonal relations. The curriculum vitae of Emperor Arnulf written by Liutprand provides good documentation. The blind greed of the rule of this emperor, writes the author, brought suffering to the whole of Europe.⁶² He murdered his political opponents, and treated captured cities with unusual brutality, as in the case of Bergamo, where he ordered the prince and guardian of the castle to be hung before the city gate in full knight's and prince's regalia.⁶³ Arnulf did not respect the sanctity of the church, persecuted priests and harassed nuns. Strongly emphasized in this portrait of the ruler is his penchant, after the capture of a city, for organizing sexual excesses: public acts of rape and licentious, sacrilegious amusements.⁶⁴ The death *morsu pedicularum* assigned to Arnulf was also to be the lot of Frederick the Fair, in consequence of similar crimes—among other things

mibus, quos pedunculos aiunt [...] afflictus" (Liutprandi Antapodosis, I, 36, ed. J. Becker, MGH SS rer. Ger, in us. schol., vol. Va, Hannoverae 1915, p. 27).

⁶¹ L. Landois, *op. cit.*, loc. cit.

⁶² *Antapodosis*, I, 13, p. 15.

⁶³ *Ibidem*, I, 23, 28, p. 20.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, I, 33, p. 25.

he abducted a beautiful nun from her convent and raped her, committing—as John of Winterthur writes—“*incestum simul et adulterium*”.⁶⁵

In both currents of the legend sacrilege often represents sufficient cause for the appearance of mice or worms to administer justice to the culprit. Usually, however, coupled with this transgression is a group of crimes committed in the area of the third function, which in turn themselves not infrequently justify the appearance of the above-mentioned punishment. We might recall here some other rapacious rulers—King Antioch and the Roman legate Q. Pleminius, responsible for looting shrines and perpetrating acts of violence on the populations of cities subordinated to them,⁶⁶ the profligate Sulla,⁶⁷ and the Swiss bishop Lambert, punished for stealing from the diocese entrusted to him.⁶⁸ This tendency to place the offences committed by the main characters within the compass of the third function is seen much more clearly in the texts of the mice legends. Popiel’s profligacy and degenerate effeminacy are replaced in Hatto by hard-heartedness and imperviousness to the famine suffered by the poor. At a time when there is a great rise in the cost of living and a lack of food, he does not intend to help the starving, as the legends have it, but solves the problem of the poor—in his view an unnecessary burden to the community—by their mass burning.

This thread, connected with the sphere of food production and consumption, and thus with issues of prime importance in the domain of the third function, is also to be found, though in a rudimentary and at first glance indistinct form, in the group of legends headed by the exemplum provided by William of Malmesbury. The mice attack their victim when he is seated at a banquet table.⁶⁹ The Polish version of this account reveals the

⁶⁵ *Johannis Vitodurani Chronica*, p. 85.

⁶⁶ II Machab., IX, 9; Liv., XXIX, 8, 16-22, XXXIV, 44; Val. Max. Fact. memorab., I, 1, 20.

⁶⁷ Plutarch, *Vitae*, cap. 35, 11, cap. 36, 1-4.

⁶⁸ See L. Landois, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

⁶⁹ The non-fortuitous nature of the place and circumstances of the attack—and at the same time the story’s structural links with the ideology of the third function—are confirmed by the legend recorded by A. Kuhn and W. Schwartz, *Norddeutsche Sagen, Märchen und Gebräuche*, Leipzig 1848, No. 141. The cruel Herr von Bartensleben (also war crimes)

symbolic significance of the fact that the mice's assault takes place during a feast.⁷⁰ It emerges from the content of the narrative that its main character, Prince Mieszko, has plundered widows and orphans and from the cows taken from them has arranged a great feast for other princes and their knights. When he is seated at the table retribution befalls him and he has to save himself by escaping to a boat. It often happens that not only is the causal relationship linking the place and circumstances of the appearance of the mice punishing the offender and the kind of offence committed destroyed, but also the significative elements locating the entire affair within the area of matters regulated by the third function become blurred. The burning of the poor by Bishop Hatto, or the tormentors who supercede him in other narratives, represents murder in cold blood, the act of a person with no heart. This act can be evaluated in a whole range of different ways, but essentially it results from a betrayal of "ideal" norms postulated in the social and production area of social life. For this reason it is a transgression falling within the jurisdiction of the third function. Something similar applies in the case of the legend told by the Transylvanian gypsies.⁷¹ The king does not give assistance to a hungry beggar-woman and orders her to be cut with a saw. During a period of crop failure and famine the king, wallowing in riches, does not want to share his provisions with his subjects, and again, kills in the aforesaid manner an old woman asking for a piece of bread, but without going unpunished this time. Again sins infringing the ethics of the third function are primary, and these lead to further crimes. In the sense of the nature of the fault, the act of not offering assistance to someone starving is as serious as the inhuman treatment of one's subordinates. One of the main characters of a mice story behaves in this way with his workers,

is killed by vermin, but, remorseful, sets up a charitable foundation for the poor. Shortly, an official seizes the money—"[...] *kaum sass er am Mittag bei Tisch*", and the spirit of the founder attacks him. According to Długosz (*Annales seu cronicae incliti Regni Poloniae*, vol. I, Varsaviae 1964, p. 155), the mice attacked Popiel "*in convivio et voluptati dantem*". Similarly, a "threefold death" overtook the cow thief, Grác, when he "was taking the cow's flesh out of the caldron". See W. Stokes, *The Birth and Life of St. Moling*, "Revue Celtique", vol. XXVII, 1906, p. 287.

⁷⁰ The so-called *Rocznik Świętokrzyski nowy* [*The New Świętokrzyski Year Book*], ad a. 1238, MPH vol. III, p. 71 (2nd half of 14th century).

⁷¹ H. Wlislöcki, *op. cit.*, pp. 437 ff.

until finally he burns them in a barn for some petty neglect of their duties.⁷² As we have already seen, the misuse of power and authority with the aim of seizing someone's property also belongs to the same class of offence.

The special connection of the tale of the avenging mice with the issues of alimony and the material circumstances of the community is also shown by other arguments, not directly drawn from the texts of the legends under consideration. From the life of Comgall we learn that the community of monks led by him was forced to give up a silver vase for the purchase of some grain.⁷³ The saint turned to a certain rich individual with an offer to exchange the precious vessel for corn, but the latter scornfully replied that the proposition did not interest him. He added that he preferred his mother, by the name of Luch—"quod sonat latine Mus" the hagiographer explains—eat all the grain than any hungry monks. Comgall prophesied that as the rich man had said, thus it would be, and mice ate, not the owner of the corn, true, but all his grain stores. This parable is a bloodless and toned-down travesty of the legends of mice administering punishment to malefactors. However, it reproduces the complex of elements fundamental to this kind of tale, and points to the persistence of the associations elaborated by them: famine/tyrant; failure to offer assistance to those in need/being eaten by mice in retribution. Interesting in this context, too, is the description of the disobliging corn owner as *homo crudelis et tyrannus*, putting us in mind of the rulers who bring down crop failures and calamities on their subjects by reason of their lack of integrity.

A ruler does not have to be a cruel tyrant to earn such an appellation in consequence of years of crop failure making up his period of rule⁷⁴ or as a result of his military reverses. Famine and

⁷² L. Petzoldt, *op. cit.*, pp. 25 ff., 347 ff.

⁷³ *Vita Comgalli*, cap. 20, *Acta Sanctorum*, Maii vol. II (15), p. 583; for a related story see H. Wlislöcki, *op. cit.*, pp. 441 ff. (*Die böse Stiefmutter*); B. Beckman, *op. cit.*, Anhang II, p. 195.

⁷⁴ As likely as not, it was on the strength of such beliefs that Archbishop Adolf of Köln was said to have been killed by mice. The tradition consolidated his image as traitor and corrupt politician, see C. Wolfschläger, *Erzbischof Adolf I von Köln als Fürst und Politiker (Münsterische Beiträge zur Geschichtsforschung NF 6)*, Münster 1905. Cesarius of Heisterbach, (*Historiarum memorabiliorum*, II, 31) links a three-year period

crop failure as much as military defeats are the king's sins, and as such must be punished.⁷⁶ "Regis bonitas," as Alcuin repeats after an Irish authority, "est gentis prosperitas".⁷⁶ The king's Heil must ensure military successes, good weather and an abundance of crops, population growth and law and order.⁷⁷ Lack of these achievements distorts the ruler's image, makes a tyrant of him, furnishing him with a series of more or less concretized reproaches and offences, and with the aid of the avenging mice or worms, removes him from the political scene.

In their essence, then, the mice legends are stories explaining the fall of a ruler and a change in the sovereign. However, they are not tales of political intrigue and power struggles ending in the ushering-in of a new king. The throne does not become vacant as a result of the efforts of the opposition, but in consequence of a higher necessity, whose activity, which is to say a successfully concluded attack on the life of the sovereign, in no way violates the sanctity of power. The three stages noted in the persecuted king's defence against the mice suggest an analogy with the phenomenon of the threefold death. Elements recur, in the one case "not wanting" to defend the fugitive from the plague of mice, and in the other "acting" against the king and bringing about his death—water, the tower (tree, fire), arms. In both types of legend they

of famine and poor harvests and decline of the diocese with a "bad master". Engelhus' *Chronicle* (the only one) states, on p. 1112: "Tunc Adolphus [...] muneribus corruptus, relicto Ottone adhaesit Philippo, propter quod a civibus suis eiectus a muribus devoratus".

⁷⁶ See for instance P. W. Joyce, *A Social History of Ancient Ireland*, Dublin 1920, p. 57.

⁷⁷ Alcuini *Epistolae* (No. 18) MGH Epp. vol. IV, p. 51. See W. Chaney, *The Cult of Kingship in Anglo-Saxon England. The Transition from Paganism to Christianity*, Manchester 1970, pp. 51, 64 ff., note 92; L. de Heusch, *Pour une dialectique de la sacralité du pouvoir*, in: *Le Pouvoir et le Sacré*, Bruxelles 1962, pp. 15-47; T. P. Cross, *Motif-Index of Early Irish Literature*, Bloomington 1952 (H 1574.1.1² Fruitfulness of nature as a proof of kingly right, Q 153² Nature benign and fruitful during reign of good king, Q 552.3 Failure of crops during reign of wicked king.).

⁷⁷ K. Hauck, *Die germanische Auffassung von Königtum und Adel in: Rapports I—Congrès International des Sciences Historiques*, Stockholm 21-28 Août 1960, Göteborg 1960, p. 102. For considerable criticism of the "Germanic Königshel", F. Graus, *Volk, Herrscher und Heiliger im Reich der Merowinger. Studien zur Hagiographie der Merowingerzeit*, Praha 1963, *passim*; idem, *Kirchliche und heidnische (magische) Komponenten der Stellung der Přemysliden*, in: *Siedlung und Verfassung Böhmens in der Frühzeit*, ed. F. Graus, H. Ludat, Wiesbaden 1967, p. 162.

fulfil a fundamental rôle and enter into logical correspondence with the qualities represented in Dumézil's set of social functions. The network of relationships is shown in the table below, composed with the aid of Ward's findings as discussed above.

It would seem that we can say that in the avenging mice stories, too, there appears the phenomenon of rejection of the ruler by a trifunctional "whole", his exclusion from the latter equivalent to death. The impossibility of the ruler's defending himself against the mice either in a tower, or by arms, or on water reveals, through the mediation of elements symbolizing particular functions, the king's betrayal of the three orders organizing the life of the community.⁷⁸

The character of the legends of avenging mice, metaphorically described as "wet", is also explained from such a perspective. The connection between the domain of the third function and the element of water, structurally coded in various configurations, reveals and maintains its significance in our legends, despite the fact that their story sets new, entirely literary tasks for these ties, weakening the mythological undertones of the relationship. Notwithstanding their nature, the justice-dispensing mice accomplish their mission extremely well in water, or catch up with their victims on the shore after swimming through the hindrance, the latter being guilty of taking cows from widows and orphans, failure to feed the poor, profligacy and debauchery, or responsible for crop failure and famine.

So as not to duplicate our examples, we might dwell on just two interpretations—known from gypsy mice legends—of the relationship between matters, in our case transgressions, subject to the jurisdiction of the third function, and the element of water. The king who refuses a piece of bread for the beggar-woman and orders her to be sawn up, brings crop failure down on the country and is killed by mice hatching from a drop of the murdered

⁷⁸ The king combined all three functions in his person—D. Dubuisson, *Le roi indo-européen et la synthèse de trois fonctions*, "Annales ESC", 1978, No. 1, pp. 21 - 34. See also C. Ramnoux, *La mort sacrificielle du roi*, pp. 216 ff. The "revolt of the elements" has already been described in earlier literature: see A. v. Gutschmid, *Kritik der polnischen Urgeschichte des Vincentius Kadłubek*, "Archiv für Kunde österreich. Geschichts-Quellen", Bd. XVII, 1857, p. 316.

TABLE

Func- tion	Most typical categories of offence/crime	Punish- ment	Essence of sac- rificial rite	Defence of culprit annihilated by "vermes"
I	sacrilege, violation of divine laws, political offences (treason)	hanging	hanging/sus- pension of sac- rifice high on tree	escape upwards (tower, castle, mountain, etc.)
II	cowardice, cruelty in war	behead- ing, burning	beheading, im- parting of death by arms (blood sacri- fice), burning	use of arms, stick, fire
III	violence against person (women, children—plunder), lack of feeling towards starving (avarice), any kind of profligacy	drown- ing	use of water in various ways (from sprink- ling through bathing to drowning)	escape to water (boat, island)

woman's spittle.⁷⁹ The functional relationship between the deed of the offence and the deed of the punishment is still more clearly seen in the second legend.⁸⁰ A king seduces his own daughter, who becomes pregnant; a prolonged drought in the kingdom follows. The king's subjects demand that he brings about rain. The king, however, wants to conceal his sin, and therefore proposes that he sacrifice his pregnant daughter, throwing her into some water. The sacrifice succeeds, but at the same time hordes of mice emerge from the water and devour the king.⁸¹ H. von Wlislöcki, to whom

⁷⁹ H. Wlislöcki, *op. cit.*, p. 438.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 439 ff.

⁸¹ It is also from water, from the sea, that Mysing attacks the kingdom of Frothon. It is interesting that he appears as the avenger of the inhumanly treated giantesses Menja and Fenja, mercilessly exploited by the king in his miraculous mill. We thus find here the structural connection: crime in the area of the third function—retribution by mice. See A. H. Krappe, *Apollon Smintheus, passim*; *idem*, *The Song of Grotti*, "The Modern Language Review", vol. XIX, 1924, pp. 325 ff.; F. von der Leyden, *op. cit.*, pp. 58 - 61; A. Olrik, *The Heroic Legends of Denmark*, New York 1919, pp. 459 ff.; P. Herrmann, *Die Heldensagen des Sazo Grammaticus*, Leipzig 1922, pp. 381 ff.; A. Yoshida, *Piasos noyé, Cléité pendue et le moulin de Cyzique. Essai de mythologie comparée*, "Revue de l'histoire des religions", vol. CLXVIII, 1965, pp. 155 - 164.

we are indebted for recording both the legends, also wrote a commentary explaining the appearance of the mice in more detail: the drowned princess gave birth to them in the water.⁸³

It seems probable that in the older versions of the legend a *dénouement* prevailed in accordance with which the unfortunate ruler, waging a hopeless struggle for his life, surrendered to his assailant in a tower on an island. His opponent had driven him to a place between sky, earth and water. This “between”, neither on earth, nor on water, nor in the air, draws the fugitive ruler into a position described by the brothers A. and B. Rees, authors of the work *Celtic Heritage*, as “this sacred state in which all things are possible”.⁸⁴

And so it is—“between”, “half way”—in these magic vestibules of reality, which simultaneously suspend and enforce the latter’s laws, the impossible becomes possible, characters immune to earthly dangers perish, and people coming to their aid always risk their own annihilation. Belonging neither “here”, nor “there”, nor “anywhere”, they are cast “beyond”—as if removed from existing reality. In our case the heroes of the legends are liquidated by predatory mice. This expressive way of annihilating the evil ruler is the complement of the sealed fate of a victim already thrust beyond the pale of reality. The animals carry out the sentence and physically remove the ruler condemned to death. There is literally no trace of him left. This total annihilation of the victim is characteristic.⁸⁴ The king’s power falls and simultaneously, in consequence of the sentence the ruler himself ceases to exist physically. The entire process, as we have underlined, is carried out without the participation of human forces, and is so

⁸³ *Ibidem*, p. 440.

⁸⁴ A. and B. Rees, *op. cit.*, p. 346; on the special properties of the middle/borderland state see S. Czarnowski, *Le morcellement de l'étendue et sa limitation dans la religion et la magie*, in: *Actes du IV Congrès International d'Histoire des Religions*, Paris 1925, pp. 339 - 358; G. B. Bronzini, “Nel mezzo del camin [...]”, “Giornale storico della letteratura italiana”, vol. 490, 1978, pp. 161 - 177.

⁸⁴ See H. Wlislöcki, *op. cit.*, p. 436: “Als kein Haar, kein Knochen mehr vom bösen König zu finden war da begann es zu regnen und bald wurden die Felder und Wälder wieder grün [...]” The mice do not withdraw from the victim until the end—“[...] cum ipso [Alewico] simul tumultati sunt”, *Chronicon Ebersheimense*, p. 442. Toads act in a similar way in popular legends, see note 57.

perfect that upon its completion an ideal political situation arises for the new claimant to the throne. The former king's sins weighing heavily on the country are cancelled out. The throne is vacant, but not by way of a coup or by the use of other unsanctioned methods of gaining power, branding the new dynast as a usurper. There is a great likelihood that our story, and related variations, portrayed, or rather reflected in terms of mythical thinking, the ritual of putting to death a ruler regarded as the originator of the adversities befalling a country. The symbolic, mythical recording of events overcame a contradiction which it was impossible to avoid, but desirable to eliminate. On the one hand the necessity of getting rid of an unfortunate king, and on the other the taboo of power, the dictates of obedience towards a lawful dynast.

In linking, somewhere in the 11th century, the legend of mice devouring a ruler to an exposition explaining the ascent of the Piast house to the throne, the desire was to thus show the legal path of the new line to the royal title, a path which could raise no objections. Using the theme of the old ruler Popiel being eaten by mice, a deliberate opposition was set up: tyrant king, bad for the country/"fortunate" representative of the Piast house, guaranteeing prosperity to his subjects. Popiel dies from the bites of mice, whilst Piast, ushering his son onto the Polish throne, is presented to the future subjects of the new dynasty as a hero of harvest, wealth and provisions.⁶⁵ Beer flows from King Popiel's table into ploughman Piast's barrels, whilst during the hair-clipping feast of his son Siemowit, two mysterious guests bring about a multiplying of the meat. In the context created by the legend, the allotting to Popiel of that death in particular which he suffers, allows one to conclude that in reaching for the above *dénouement*, the significance of the notion of "death inflicted by mice" was realized, and that there was all the more intention to present the Piasts as a dynasty which, in contrast to the old one, was able to guarantee good harvests and economic prosperity to its subjects.

In later versions of the mice legend the spectacular punishment which the evil ruler encounters is pushed to the foreground and treated independently. The narrative structure is remodelled in

⁶⁵ See *Gallii Anonymi Chronica*, I, 1 - 3, pp. 9 - 13.

such a way as to give rise to an *exemplum*, a parable containing a reminder that even a king or a bishop must not ignore his subjects and cannot perpetrate evil with impunity. This significative current, after all, creates its own narrative tradition and employs independent *dénouements*.

Finally, we might raise the point that the symbolism of animals administering justice to offenders also relates to the sphere of third function issues. It was believed that mice were harbingers of plague, spread pestilence and were capable of destroying literally everything—not only all livestock, and harvests and cultivation in the fields.⁶⁶ They are animals of the gods and saints able to offer protection from the aforesaid calamities and using these rodents for retribution.⁶⁷ Like the chthonic deities, mice are also allocated the job of executor of vengeance on murderers who go unpunished. They were supposed to personify the souls of victims deprived of life, who in this guise retaliated after death against their killers.⁶⁸ This conviction of the existence and activity of so-called “angry souls” makes itself felt in certain versions of the legends of Hatto and Popiel. It makes its appearance in a not

⁶⁶ A. H. Krappe, *Apollon Smintheus, passim*; Thompson L. 392 (Mouse stronger than wall, wind, mountain); “Maus”, “Mäusesagen”, in: *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, ed. H. Bächtold-Staubli, vol. VI, Berlin-Leipzig 1934-1935, pp. 31-38, 60-62; O. Neustatter, *Mice in Plague Pictures*, “Journal of the Walters Art Gallery”, vol. IV, 1941, pp. 104-113.

⁶⁷ H. Grégoire, R. Goosens et M. Mathieu, *Asklèpios, Apollon Smintheus et Rudra. Etudes sur le dieu à la tige et le dieu au rat dans La Grèce et dans l'Inde*, Académie Royale de Belgique, Classe des lettres et des sciences morales et politiques, XIV, 1949, *passim*, pp. 165 ff. It is symptomatic that the saints whose symbol are mice (Gertrude, Fina) are strongly associated with the domain of the third function (pestilence—crop failure—deflection of pestilence—harvest) and display properties appropriate to the Erinyes and the Valkyrie; see the miracula of St. Fina, *Acta Sanctorum, Martii* vol. II (8), pp. 239-242; P. Clemen, *Die Geschichte der heiligen Fina von San Gimignano*, pp. 20-21, illus. 5 and 6, in: *Italienische Studien*, Paul Schubring zum 60. Geburtstag, Leipzig 1929; B. Beckman, *op. cit.*, pp. 148-175; E. Wüst, *Erinyes*, in: *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, Supplbd. VIII, Stuttgart 1956, pp. 94, 107, 114 ff.; U. Strutynsky, *The Three Functions of Indo-European Tradition in the “Eumenides” of Aeschylus*, in: *Myth and Law among Indo-Europeans*, pp. 224 ff.

⁶⁸ See A. H. Krappe, *The Science of Folklor*, pp. 104 ff.; L. Petzoldt, *Deutsche Volkssagen*, München 1970, pp. 366, 412 ff.; *idem*, *Historische Sagen...*, vol. I, pp. 125 ff., 375 ff.; J. Cornelissen, *De muizen ratten in de folklore*, Antwerp 1923.

very clear form, representing more of a secondary rationalization and an attempt at a better explanation of the appearance of the mice-Erinyes.⁸⁹ However, choice of the “tool of revenge” in the legends which interest us seems to be connected with the symbolism of mice as animals of economic calamities, which is indirectly confirmed by the texts of the legends themselves.

(Translated by Phillip G. Smith)

⁸⁹ The relationship between the crime and the punishment is explained by the information, “[...] *hic Pompilius [Popiel] habuit consuetudinem sic dicendi: ‘Si hoc vel illud non fecero, mures me devorent’ quod in eo et suis liberis [...] impletum est [...]*” (*Chronica principum Poloniae*, p. 435). Similarly, concerning Hatton (*Compilatio chronologica*, p. 63): “[...] *iurare consuevit ‘Si non est verum devorer a muribus’, unde et sic evenit sibi*”. Subsequently it is explained, “*Als nun die Menschen unter den Flammen wimmerten und jammerten, rief Bischof Hatto: ‘Hört, hört wie die Mäuse pfeifen!’*,” see L. Petzoldt, *Historische Sagen*, vol. I, pp. 24-26. Wincenty Kadłubek writes that the mice arose “*ex cadaverum corruptela*”; this is an indication of the “technical” way they arose—the primary reason for their appearance lies in Popiel’s crimes.