



South Tyrol – Land of Myths and Legends

The Mouse Trial and Exodus

At one time, there were vast numbers of mice in the field meadows of Glurns in Val Venosta (Vinschgau). There was no means by which to exterminate them: all the cats in all Tyrol, yea, in all Germany had not destroyed them, and phosphorus had not yet been discovered. The wise city council of Glurns deliberated at length about how to approach this plight and how to cope with the countless little grain robbers. Finally, they decided that they had no other choice but to sue the mice and take them to court, *optima forma*. Since the mice were unable to defend themselves, the court assigned them a lawyer and the proceedings began. They were charged with unauthorised sacrilege of field and garden, reduction of civic foodstuffs, speculation in secret (because the mice dragged the grain under the earth into their holes), and also of living in sin, agitation, incitement (stirring up of the soil), etc.

The lawyer argued in their defence that it was for the field police to control the trespass of field and garden through good supervision – and less wine drinking at the inn. Concerning the reduction of food, this accusation is justified only if man would begrudge mice all grain – for all God’s creatures must be allowed to live, mustn’t they? As to the living in sin, the lawyer said that consideration should be given to the fact that the mice were only following the examples they had before them, about which he would not go into exact detail, especially because and so forth, *exempla essent odiosa**. Further, agitating is also not a mortal sin, all beings stir things up: some rummage for money, others in books or parchments, one in a heap of corn, one in manure, one by seducing beautiful women and so on. The little mouse must also rummage: it only follows his instinct.

In spite of the brilliance of the lawyer’s defence, the only thing he managed to do was to transform the court-imposed death penalty into banishment for all the mice. Any return to their homeland was forever prohibited. To this end, a date of emigration was magnanimously scheduled in 14 days; to that, the lawyer argued further that there were a great many very young children in the Mouse Republic at that time so they could not go yet; also, there were many women who wanted spend their puerperal period in their beloved fields of Glurns. So the wise and insightful council gave them a grace period of another 14 days.

The exodus followed. As other émigrés have also done in more recent times, the little mice eventually came back by and by – and possibly to rummage even more than before.

* Examples too disgusting to cite