

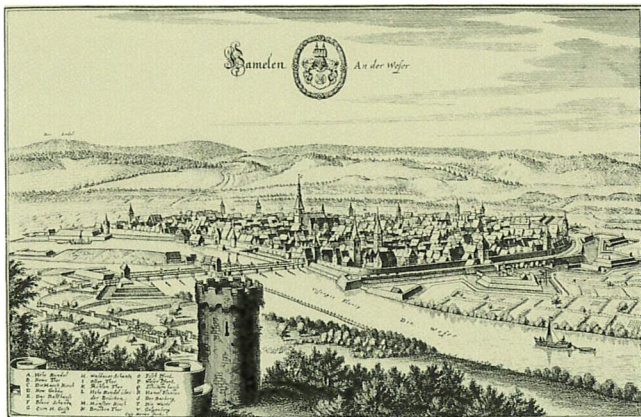
The legend of the Pied Piper

In the year 1284, a strange man appeared in Hameln. He wore a gown of colourful cloth in many shades and claimed to be a rat-catcher, promising to deliver the town from all rats and mice for a certain fee. The burghers agreed to pay him the reward, and the rat-catcher produced a small pipe and whistled. Soon, rats and mice came creeping out from all the houses and gathered around him. When he was convinced that none had remained behind, he walked out of the town and into the river Weser; the whole pack followed after him, fell into the water and drowned. But when the burghers found they had been delivered from this plague, they regretted their promise of a reward, and they denied the man his money, so he left in anger.

On 26 June he returned, though, in the form of a hunter of frightful appearance, with an odd red hat, and while everyone had gathered in church, he once again let the sound of his pipe ring through the alleys. Soon, not rats and mice, but children, boys and girls aged four and older, came running in great numbers. Playing all the while, he led them out the eastern gate and into a mountain, where he vanished with them.

Only two children returned, because they had come late; of those, one was blind, so that it could not show the place, the other was dumb, so it could not tell anything. One boy had turned back to get his coat and had thus evaded the misadventure. It was said that the children had been led into a cave and come out again in Transylvania. In all, 130 children had been lost.

(Based on „German Legends“ by the brothers Grimm)



Historic background of the legend

The „Pied Piper of Hamelin“ is considered the most famous figure of German legends in the world. The legend has been translated into approx. 30 languages, and is a standard work studied at school in many countries. Up to the present day, it has not been possible to shed light on its details. The most probable version is the colonization of Eastern countries (Silesia, Moravia, Pomerania, Prussia). In this, some nobles are supposed to have recruited citizens of Hameln to settle in those territories. Especially the Count of Schaumburg, who moved to the Olmutz area (now in Czechia), is mentioned frequently. This is based on the fact that at that time, a city's inhabitants were often called „children of the city“. The connection to the „rat-catcher“ may originate in frequent rat plagues at the time, which were tackled by rat-catchers, although with more realistic methods than in the legend. Both events may have blended into one another in tradition.

Of course, you can find out more about the Pied Piper legend at the Hameln Museum, in Osterstrasse 8/9.