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## WHERE IS THERE, O DEATH, YOUR VICTORY? THE MOTIF OF DEATH IN ADAM'S SEQUENCES FROM ST VICTOR

Our natural instincts tell us to react when life is threatened. This shows that we fear death, we try to avoid it in order to save our lives. We also try to tame it somehow, to give it a slightly different tone, one that is more human, one that does not arouse instinctive animal reflexes – music, painting, poetry or philosophy are even woven with references and interjections that constantly remind us of the inevitability of death inherent in human life. These arts seem to familiarise us with this inconvenient necessity, and perhaps even inspire a degree of hope that *I will not all die* after *all*. The truth is, however, that when a person reaches the moment of his or her own dying, the most important thing he or she experiences in life is that it is “mine” – I mean the total individuality of death, which must be entered into alone, in person. And I think that is what is so dramatic about it. The emphasis here, with all the force of my human life, falls precisely on this “individuality.” It is an experience so personal and intimate that even the Son of God himself, when entering death, experienced it as devoid of the Father’s presence.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps, to some extent, the medieval belief that death should be experienced as a social, almost public event grew out of this very solitude? For medieval iconography and literature show us that a whole range of people appear at the side of the dying person: relatives, friends, angels, demons. Two worlds intermingle: the temporal and the supernatural. And the dying person is in a state of transition, from one reality to another. And although he dies alone, in this dying there is

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<sup>1</sup> See Mt 27:46.

a whole range of people who are not indifferent to it: angels and devils fight for his soul, relatives and friends wait for his last will.<sup>2</sup>

I would therefore like to look at the motif of death in a medieval context. And since the cultural output here is immense, I will on the motif of death occurring in Adam's sequences from St Victor, which, thanks to the efforts of the translation team, appeared for the first time in Polish translation.<sup>3</sup> This author, a native of the St Victor abbey near Paris, ranked among the authors of the twelfth century, is increasingly being discovered on Polish soil.<sup>4</sup> And that is why it is worth paying attention to his Sequences, which are, on the one hand, a poetry of the 12th century and, on the other, an interesting source for learning about the thinking of the time. Of all the 58 sequences given in the translation indicated, the word *walrus* appears in 32 of them. In this compilation, I deliberately omit Sequence XXXIII (*In the heat of the coals let us admire*), intended for the day of St Lawrence, martyr, and Sequence XLIII (*Rejoice in thy son, Greece*), which is dedicated to St Dionysius, bishop and martyr. The reason for this is that these sequences, although they recount martyrdom, the word 'death' does not fall in them.<sup>5</sup>

However, those sequences in which death appears, not in a descriptive manner, but is evoked literally, I have decided to divide into four groups: the Paschal sequences, those concerning the feasts of the Lord, those dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary and those dedicated to the saints.

<sup>2</sup> Cataldo ZUCCARO, *Teologia śmierci*, transl. Krzysztof Stopa (Kraków: WAM, 2004), 23-26.

<sup>3</sup> ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencje*, transl. Tadeusz Gacia, Łukasz Libowski, Marta Nowak, Agnieszka Strycharczuk, Adam Wilczyński, and Piotr Wilk, ed. Łukasz Libowski, and Agnieszka Strycharczuk (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Academicum, 2023). This edition is based on the following: Jean GROSFILLIER, *Les séquences d'Adam de Saint-Victor. Étude littéraire (poétique et rhétorique), textes et traductions, commentaires* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 243-481 (for sequences I to LIII and for supplements S.I and S.II) as well as on Clemens BLUME, and Henry M. BANNISTER, *Liturgische Prosen des Übergangsstiles und der zweiten Epoche insbesondere die dem Adam von Sanct Victor zugeschrieben* (Leipzig: Reiland, 1915), for the sequences in supplement II: SS.I, II, III, 394-396, 309-310, 155-156 (the order of the pages corresponds to the order of these sequences).

<sup>4</sup> See Łukasz LIBOWSKI, "Adam ze św. Wiktora. «Egregius versificator»," in *Mądrość wiktorynów. Z kultury intelektualnej szkoły św. Wiktora*, eds. Marcin Jan Janecki, Wanda Bajor, Dominique Poirel, and Łukasz Libowski (in print); Łukasz LIBOWSKI, "Studzy harmonii. Sekwencja «Ex radice caritatis» Adama ze św. Wiktora jako wiktoryński program życia," in *Mądrość wiktorynów. Z kultury intelektualnej szkoły św. Wiktora*, eds. Marcin Jan Janecki, Wanda Bajor, Dominique Poirel, and Łukasz Libowski (in print); Łukasz LIBOWSKI, "Wiktoryńskie florarium: motywy kwietne w sekwencjach Adama ze Świętego Wiktora," *Roczniki kulturoznawcze* 14, no. 2 (2023):161-192.

<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, I believe that these sequences deserve a separate study because of, for example, the stylistic devices accumulated there or the substance of the events they describe.

## 1. PASCHAL SEQUENCES

This section contains six sequences. All are intended for the octave of Easter. This collection consists of sequences XIII to XVIII.<sup>6</sup> In sequence XIII, for Easter Monday, Adam shows this sacred exchange: *light replaces darkness, resurrection – death.*<sup>7</sup> What follows here is a series of enumerations indicating what came after what: joy after sorrow, glory after confusion, truth after shadow, new after old, comfort after mourning. This exchange is carried out by Christ himself, who, like Samson, by dying won victory over his enemies. It can be assumed that these numerous “enemies” over which he gained victory are precisely those realities that have been displaced by what is new. Interestingly, in juxtaposing Christ with Samson, Adam shows that death can be both a victory and a defeat: for those defeated by Samson-Christ it is a defeat, since they are cast down into death<sup>8</sup> (*in morte plures stravit*), while for Samson-Christ himself it is a victory. Death, then, is an action, it is an event from which someone emerges a winner and someone a loser.

The next piece, intended for the following day, adds new information to us regarding Christ’s victorious death. By the adjective *indebita*, Adam shows that Christ did not deserve it, death was not due to Him. It is different in our case: to human beings it was due. In this way, Adam shows the essential difference between Christ and human beings. Although we are all subject to it, we are not subject to it in the same way: human beings are subject to it of necessity, as something due to us; one would like to say: by virtue of a nature corrupted by original sin. Christ, on the other hand, was subject to it not of necessity, but experienced it freely. This makes His death life-giving (*vivifica*). This is the second epithet that describes Christ’s death to us: undue and life-giving. Already, then, it can be seen that Christ’s death is the complete opposite of our death: that which puts us to death, that which renders us incapacitated, in Christ acts, bestows life; Christ’s death does not interrupt, but bestows life.<sup>9</sup> That is why Adam concludes this sequence with the cry: *Death, which thou hast not yielded to death, give us this prize of life!*<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> The translator of these sequences is M.H. Nowak. See ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencje*, 99-121.

<sup>7</sup> XIII, 1 (Roman numerals denote sequences, and Arabic notation denotes the stanzas of a given sequence).

<sup>8</sup> XIII, 5.

<sup>9</sup> Forcellini next to the keyword *vivificus* gives the juxtaposition *vivus et facio*. See *Vivificus*, in Egidio FORCELLINI, *Lexicon totius latinitatis*, vol. 4 (Bologna: A. Forni, 1965), 1024.

<sup>10</sup> XIV, 8.

The sequence assigned to Wednesday in the Octave also contains a reference to death. This time, however, death does not so much refer to an event in the life of Christ, but rather is itself a character. Death becomes a character, she is someone who reigns, who has *an empire*. The context indicates that her kingdom can be identified with hell, for *when Christ plunders hell, / death conquers*.<sup>11</sup> Death is therefore here the ruler who is defeated. A distinction can now be made: depending on the context of the piece in question, death is either an event in human life or an independent figure, hostile to Christ and humans.

Both of these shots occur in the following sequence, in which death is both an event and a separate character. In the case of death as an event, Adam introduces another novelty. Here, in the statement *with his Death alone / he provides the remedy / for our death the second*<sup>12</sup> is contained the truth of the Catholic faith about the second death. What is meant here is the second death, i.e. the resurrection to damnation, which St John indicates in the Apocalypse.<sup>13</sup> Man's rescue from it is the death of Christ, which bears the epithet of *the one (simplex)* and which was the sacrifice for sin.<sup>14</sup> In this way Christ puts death to death (*In qua mors occiditur*).<sup>15</sup> It seems plausible to suppose that this putting to death consists precisely in this apocalyptic vision of the second death, when *Death and the Abyss were thrown into the lake of fire. This is death two – the lake of fire*.<sup>16</sup> Christ's victory would thus be the fulfilment of the apocalyptic prediction of the defeat of death.

Sequence XVII of the three references<sup>17</sup> does not add any new news about death, except one: death is characterised by ice – *The ice of death therefore melts*.<sup>18</sup> It is, however, difficult to determine at present whether these ices are a reference to the coldness characterised by human corpses in which blood no longer circulates, or whether there is some connection to the motif later used by Dante, who sees the damned at the bottom of Hell encased in ice?<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, death, for Adam, is characterised by an icy coldness that is overcome by Christ.

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<sup>11</sup> XV, 1.

<sup>12</sup> XVI, 5.

<sup>13</sup> See Rev 2:11; 20:6; 21:8.

<sup>14</sup> XVI, 4.

<sup>15</sup> XVI, 7.

<sup>16</sup> Rev 20:14.

<sup>17</sup> It speaks of *life conquering death* – XVII, 4; and of the release of those *who were subject to death* – XVII, 5.

<sup>18</sup> XVII, 3.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Dante ALIGHIERI, *Boska komedia*, transl. Edward Porębowicz (Warszawa: nakł. Gebethnera i Wolffa, 1909).

The final Paschal sequence contains several references to death, but these echo the content that resounded throughout the octave. Here the Christ-martyr breaks down the gates of death. There is a clash between life (Christ) and death, in which life wins. Death is put to sleep (*cuius morte mors sopita*), and for people – by the grace of Christ – there is hope of rescue from death a second.<sup>20</sup>

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The sequences for the octave of Easter show death first and foremost as an enemy that has been defeated by Christ in battle. Thanks to this victory, people are no longer threatened by eternal death. It is an event for us which, although necessary and belonging to our nature, is nevertheless not devoid of hope and, moreover, in Christ becomes life-giving.

## 2. SEQUENCES FOR THE FEASTS OF THE LORD

There are five sequences in this collection in which death is directly invoked: VII (for the Circumcision of the Lord),<sup>21</sup> IX (for the Octave of Epiphany),<sup>22</sup> XIX (for the Octave of Ascension),<sup>23</sup> XXXII (for the Transfiguration)<sup>24</sup> and SS.III (for the Nativity).<sup>25</sup> By their very nature, they do not constitute a thematic unity. However, since there is a death motif in each of the above and they have in common that they relate to feasts related to the mysteries of Christ's life, let us therefore try to look at them together.

First, because of the chronology of Jesus' life, the sequence SS.III. Destined for the Nativity mentions death only once, speaking of the poor condition of humanity – Adam speaks of the death that is ours (*nostrae mortis*).<sup>26</sup> This is our sad condition, which we owe to Eve.<sup>27</sup> This is contrasted with the Mighty One (*gigas*), who is swift (*velox*), brave (*fortis*) and armed (*accinctus*). This

<sup>20</sup> XVIII, 5,10,12,13.

<sup>21</sup> Translated by P. Wilk. See ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencje*, 75-78.

<sup>22</sup> Translated by P. Wilk. See ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencje*, 83-86.

<sup>23</sup> Although liturgically the Ascension of the Lord now belongs to the Paschal period, because we are dealing with a sequence applicable to the octave of the feast (which already suggests a certain distinctiveness), I have decided to separate it from the Paschal sequences. Translated by M.H. Nowak. See ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencje*, 123-125.

<sup>24</sup> Translated by Ł. Libowski. See ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencje*, 185-189.

<sup>25</sup> Translated by T. Gacia. See ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencje*, 303-305.

<sup>26</sup> SS.III, 7.

<sup>27</sup> SS.III, 4.

description of the Mighty One should not be surprising. What is surprising, however, is that this description is applied to the feast of the Nativity: behold, the Virgin brought forth the Child, wrapped him in nappies and laid him in a manger.<sup>28</sup> Where, then, is the Mighty One? In this Child, who was born to save mankind – *the Mighty One has conquered our death*.<sup>29</sup> This is the fulfilment of the prophecies that point to the Bridegroom pictured by the sun coming out of his chamber, rejoicing like a giant running his way<sup>30</sup> and pointing to the Mighty One who, having a sword at his side, ascends his chariot towards great deeds.<sup>31</sup>

Sequence VII, still celebrating the event of the Nativity, abounds in poetic phrases with a clear Christological meaning. Phrases such as *He refused complicity/ in sin, but not in nature, or the Root issues a wand, the wand a flower, or, finally, Jesus, child immortal,/ temporal, though from eternity*<sup>32</sup> indicate a certain freedom to navigate the precise field of theological formulations, where inaccuracy carries the risk of being accused of hangover. However, this does not prevent Adam from weaving sharp and clear terms into his poetry. In this sequence, the poet also uses the motif of death in an interesting theological application. The final stanza, which closes this poetic Christological lecture, reads as follows: *Thou after this mortal life/ or after this life-giving death/ graciously restore to us/ immortal life*.<sup>33</sup> In this stanza we have an antithesis: *this mortal life* or *this life-giving death*, from which we hope that *immortal life* will follow *for human beings*. The alternative refers to Jesus (the stanza has a prayerful dimension) and seems to be intended to intensify the overtones of human requests. Such a procedure is all the more intended to persuade the Saviour to show his grace. The author asks the Saviour for grace, supposedly not only because of His death, but also because of the fate of human life that He wanted to share with people. In this way, he shows the Lord that He has a double basis for showing grace to people and giving them eternal salvation: not only on the basis of His Passion, but also on the basis of His Incarnation. The fact of the end of life and the fact of its commencement (humanly

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Lk 2:7.

<sup>29</sup> SS.III, 7.

<sup>30</sup> See Ps 19(18):6.

<sup>31</sup> See Ps 45(44):4n.

<sup>32</sup> VII, 3,6,11. Regarding the motif of the blooming wand, it is worth pointing here to a study by Łukasz Libowski, who discusses floral motifs in Adamic sequences in depth. See LIBOWSKI, "Wiktoryńskie florarium: motywy kwietne w sekwencjach Adama ze Świętego Wiktora," 161-192.

<sup>33</sup> VII, 11: *Tu post vitam hanc mortalem/ sive mortem hanc vitalem/ vitam nobis immortalem/ clementer restituē.*

speaking) constitute a certain bracket within which people entreat His grace for themselves.

In the octave of Epiphany, on the other hand, Adam offers us Sequence IX, in which death appears in a marginal sense – mentioned only as announced by the gift of myrrh (*mirra mortem memorantes*).<sup>34</sup> Apart from this, the piece has a completely different tone: it focuses on the juxtaposition of the unbelieving synagogue and the converted Gentiles, forming a new people. Thus, it can be said that the death motif is not more broadly addressed here.

It is different in sequence XXXII, intended for the feast of the Transfiguration. There, death appears several times: first as conquered by Christ, the mighty God and giver of life.<sup>35</sup> It is mentioned, as it were, in the first part of the sequence, at the beginning, in the stanzas introducing the mystery of that feast. After stanzas that are poetic paraphrases of the Gospel narrative, there are stanzas that may constitute a certain theological synthesis. In between, we also find such lines: *Dying, he healed us,/ rising, he renewed us,/ gave us life and condemned/ the power of death*.<sup>36</sup> Let us pause at it. The very first words seem to go bolder and further than the prophet Isaiah dared to go. While Isaiah foreshadowed healing through His wounds,<sup>37</sup> Adam speaks of the healing death of Jesus. Here Adam does not proceed in contradiction to Revelation, for, as the Apostle says, *By the blood of His wounds* (let us add: mortal wounds) *we have been healed*.<sup>38</sup> So Adam goes no further, but shows how well he knows the Scriptures, how he is able to handle them and bring out their meaning before his hearers. After all, the wounds of Isaiah's Servant foreshadow just that: the saving death of Jesus.

What follows, among other things, from the resurrection is the condemnation of the power of death. This condemnation (*damnare*) is about recognising that death is guilty, deserving of punishment. In a specific translation, it could also be about recognising as guilty the one who has bound others to himself, e.g. by the necessity of delivering something (in this sense it could be about the whole human race, which by virtue of sin is obliged to die); or it could be about the accuser, who by condemnation passes sentence and executes it on the condemned.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> IX, 2.

<sup>35</sup> XXXII, 3.

<sup>36</sup> XXXII, 11 *Moriendo nos sanavit,/ qui surgendo reparavit/ vitam Christus et dampnavit/ mortis magisterium*.

<sup>37</sup> Is 53:5.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. 1Peter 2:24.

<sup>39</sup> Both of these meanings are given by Forcellini as rarely occurring. See *Damno*, in Egidio FORCELLINI, *Lexicon totius latinitatis*, vol. 2 (Bologna: A. Forni, 1965), 5.

It seems that this third translation is equally justified here, since in the following stanzas Adam writes that Christ, as the triumphant one, having risen to life after death, has defeated death, the enemy of life.

Death in this sequence, then, is the subject, it is the enemy of men who, through the merits of Christ, has been defeated. And interestingly, although this enemy has already been defeated, this victory has been achieved, yet through the holy Mother requests are made for deliverance from death. This shows that although historically salvation has been accomplished in the past, eschatologically looking at it, it is an event still before us. And therefore it can be said that insofar as I do not accept salvation, insofar as I do not accept that it has certain effects in my life, the other death is still a real threat to man.<sup>40</sup>

The last sequence in this section is related to the octave of the Ascension of the Lord, so after the fulfilment of the mystery of redemption, viz: *After the destruction of the enemy*.<sup>41</sup> Everything that relates to death or can be associated with it is mentioned here as past, closed. Christ has already completed the work of redemption *and no longer needs to purify/ with his death human guilt*.<sup>42</sup> Death is thus only hinted at. Christ now lives indefinitely and people have been cleansed. The predominant theme, therefore, is that of the living Christ and the disciples who proclaim by word and deed his teaching.

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In concluding this section, I would like to note as a certain novelty of this section that Adam not only tells us about death by the semantics of the words, but also in the structure of his songs we can guess certain things. The Christmas and post-Christmas sequences, moving along the death-life line, place a much stronger emphasis on life. Where it begins, or where it has triumphed, death is shown either marginally or as defeated and weak in the face of the One who has proved to be its victor. By contrast, in the sequence dealing with what falls between these extreme points, i.e. the sequence on the Transfiguration, death, yes, weaker and shown as defeated, is interwoven with life more often than at the birth or after the triumph. Was this a deliberate intervention by the creator or a mere coincidence? It is impossible to know today, and therefore some room for conjecture remains here.

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<sup>40</sup> XXXII, 13.

<sup>41</sup> XIX, 1.

<sup>42</sup> XIX, 3.



## 3. SEQUENCES DEDICATED TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

In four sequences concerning the Virgin Mary, death is invoked. These are the three sequences XXXIV, XXXV, XXXVI (for the octave of the Assumption)<sup>43</sup> and sequence LI (on the Blessed Virgin Mary).<sup>44</sup>

In the first sequence of this section, i.e. XXXIV, death appears as a kind of definition of the human condition – man is robbed of the garment of life,<sup>45</sup> by which he is also condemned to death (*morti dedit hominem*).<sup>46</sup> This condemnation is the result of Eve-mother's sin. The Adam-father does not appear here, since the sequence oscillates around the divine motherhood of Mary; hence the juxtaposition of the two mothers is understandable. Thus, death is the condition of humanity, from the first generation of humans. However, thanks to Mary, this death goes away, as life returns to man and salvation is given to him. Adam's theology of the incarnation is expressed in succinct terms: until the Son of God took it upon himself, until he, as it were, put it on himself, human nature was robbed of life and was therefore dead, condemned to a fate marked by death. On the other hand, from the moment the Virgin consented to become Mother, that is, from the moment of the incarnation of the Word of God, within human nature *Guilt perishes, death passes away, life returns and salvation*.<sup>47</sup> From now on, death is no longer a sentence or a void of robbed life – from now on, death can be precious in the eyes of the Lord.<sup>48</sup>

The next sequence (XXXV) shows death as a threat to man, whose boat is sailing on the waters of life. Interestingly, this deadly threat awaits man from: pleasure sirens, a dragon, dogs and pirates.<sup>49</sup> Mermaids, according to the 12th century, are half people and half birds, who put ignorant and careless sailors to sleep with their sweet singing. As a result, when the sailors fall asleep seduced, the mermaids pounce on them and tear them apart.<sup>50</sup> The dragon, on the other

<sup>43</sup> Translated by A. Wilczynski. See ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencje*, 197-211.

<sup>44</sup> Translated by A. Strycharczuk. See ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencje*, 269-271.

<sup>45</sup> See MARCIN J. Janecki, "«Adamie, gdzie jesteś?» Dialogiczna egzegeza Hugona ze św. Wiktora we fragmencie jego Super Ecclesiasten," *Biblica et Patristica Thoruniensia* 15, no. 2 (2022):21-40. The polish translation of Hugo's fragment of the *Commentary on the Book of Kohelet* presented there is also available in audio: [https://youtu.be/3x32ymmp0s?si=Z\\_RjRUJ4fB5XOCSE](https://youtu.be/3x32ymmp0s?si=Z_RjRUJ4fB5XOCSE).

<sup>46</sup> XXXIV, 8.

<sup>47</sup> XXXIV, 8: *Culpa perit, mors recedit, datur salus, vita redit*.

<sup>48</sup> XXXIV, 14.

<sup>49</sup> XXXV, 2: *Hic sirenes voluptatis, draco, canes cum piratis, mortem paene desperatis haec intentant omnia*.

<sup>50</sup> *The Book of Beasts. Being a Translation from a Latin Bestiary of the Twelfth Century*, ed. Terence Hanbury White (New York: Dover Publications, 2002), 134-135.

hand, is a giant snake that can float in the air. It kills not with venom but with its grip, which is capable of knocking down even an elephant. People in Victorian times unequivocally identified the dragon with the devil, who is able to attack from ambush with false hopes of glory and earthly bliss, and fools who believe him – die suffocated by him.<sup>51</sup> When it comes to the dog – medieval people did not spare praise for its fidelity or its hunting and tracking abilities. They valued it so much that even the clergy likened it to a dog because of its watchfulness over the flock. However, some disadvantages were also noted. Well, the dog returns to its own vomit and eats it again. And it is also greedy – if it sees its reflection in the water with the prey it already has in its mouth, then it opens its mouth and tries to catch this second piece by dropping the one it already has.<sup>52</sup> In such greed and returning to one's own sins<sup>53</sup> all too clearly there is a risk for the Christian. As, moreover, do the pirates, whose assaults posed a danger to the population. And certainly the evocation of this motif was an all too clear sign of danger to the audience. Death, then, is a threat that can arise from a variety of circumstances. Mary is therefore the one who helps the sailors (i.e. the faithful) under the command of Christ to reach the port of salvation.<sup>54</sup>

In a very similar tone, i.e. in a sailing context, death is evoked in sequence XXXVI, where it is mentioned only once, in the last stanza, as if in passing. The emphasis there is on Mary's intercession rather than on dying, which is evoked only as the end point of the sailing (as the context suggests: sailing through mortal life), after which the supplicant hopes to enter into rest.<sup>55</sup> This intercession of Mary is based on her great merits before the Son, and this is to be the cause of the visitation of people with the gift of grace. The point of the Adamic sequence seems to be to show the audience such a scheme: a person can receive grace from Christ precisely because Mary (we can guess that Mary is understood as one of us, one of the people) is rich in such exceptional merits before God. And these merits are precisely what the sequence itself praises. If she, a woman, the daughter of Adam and Eve, has such merits before the Lord, then the same Lord can also visit us with his grace. Her human "merit" before God means that grace can also fall to us as a gift in this life, which ends with

<sup>51</sup> *The Book of Beasts*, 165-167.

<sup>52</sup> *The Book of Beasts*, 61-67.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Rev 3:16. Christ speaks there of vomiting out those who are lukewarm, i.e. neither cold nor hot. Cf. Michał WOJCIECHOWSKI, *Apokalipsa świętego Jana. Objawienie, a nie tajemnica. Wstęp. Przekład z oryginału. Komentarz* (Częstochowa: Edycja Świętego Pawła, 2012), 166, 168.

<sup>54</sup> XXXV, 9.

<sup>55</sup> XXXVI, 13.

the experience of death. One can thus clearly see here an echo of Mary's mediation of grace.<sup>56</sup>

However, an interesting phenomenon can be found in sequence LI, where death appears in stanzas 5 and 6. Here, too, death is evoked only in passing, in requests made by people aware of their sinfulness, unreliability, in a word: their weak condition. But what is surprising is precisely the wording of these requests addressed to Mary: *destroy the snares of death (...) deliver us from death*.<sup>57</sup> In reading the sequence, it is clear that although the text indicates that Mary is first after Christ (*Quae post Christum prima sedes*),<sup>58</sup> i.e. that Christ is more important than she is, it is to her that the power to destroy the snares of death (*mortis rumpe retia*) is attributed, and she is even asked to be saved from death (*nos a morte libera*). It seems, then, that the prayers of this piece recognise that Mary can grant salvation, that is, that which belongs to Christ. This belonging of salvation to Christ seems to resound in stanza 7. when the sequence cries out to Jesus, who is the fullness of gifts, for the saving grace.<sup>59</sup> So, on the one hand: salvation belongs to Christ, it is grace, and in him this grace is found, and on the other hand, Mary is the one through whom this gift can be given to people.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> See Waclaw SIWIAK, "Ku pośrednictwu w Chrystusie: o soborowym przełomie w mariologii," *Salvatoris Mater* 16, no. 1/4 (2014):37-53 (in the context discussed here, particular attention should be paid to point. 2 of this article).

<sup>57</sup> LI, 5,6.

<sup>58</sup> LI, 6.

<sup>59</sup> LI, 7.

<sup>60</sup> As an aside, I would like to point out some associations that may come to mind between this Adamic sequence from St Victor and the discussion of the dogma of Mary as Co-redemptrix at the last Council. An outline of this dispute can be seen, among others, in: Wojciech ŻYCIŃSKI, "Maryja jako Współdkupicielka w współczesnych kontrowersjach mariologicznych," *Polonia Sacra* 2, no. 46 (1998):265-273. It is also worthwhile to consult texts that outline the biblical-theological background for this association: Stanisław GRĘŚ, "Współpraca Maryi z Bogiem Ojcem w dziele zbawienia," *Salvatoris Mater* 1, no. 1 (1999):132-140; Zbigniew MORAWIEC, "Ustanowienie przymierza Boga z kobietą: Maryja, kobieta w historii zbawienia," *Salvatoris Mater* 2, no. 4 (2000):289-307; Piotr LISZKA, "Pośredniczka w Duchu Świętym," *Salvatoris Mater* 4, no. 3 (2002):130-160. At the same time, it should also be noted that the articles indicated give a rather contemporary theological interpretation and give little or no attention to this issue in relation to the Middle Ages. This creates a new opportunity in which it would be appropriate to look closely at medieval texts and analyse in them how the question of Mary Mediatrix or Mary Co-redemptrix was addressed by medieval authors.

This section of the sequence shows death as embedded in the panorama of human life. And although the pieces presented here operate with a variety of allegories and symbols, it can be argued that death, unless it meets Christ the Saviour, is not presented as a negative character. Rather, it is a sad, unpleasant condition of the human condition. However, we have someone to flee to as human beings, and we have someone to cry out for rescue – and this is dominant here, in these sequences; death, on the other hand, is not the focus of these pieces.

#### 4. SEQUENCES DEDICATED TO THE SAINTS

Turning to the sequences dedicated to the saints of the Lord, it is important to begin by noting that the collection presented here consists of 17 pieces. These sequences are: II (on St Stephen), III (on St John the Apostle and Evangelist), IV (on St Thomas Becket), VIII (on St Genevieve),<sup>61</sup> XI (on the conversion of St Paul),<sup>62</sup> XXIX (on St Paul the Apostle), XXX (on the octave of Sts. Peter and Paul), XXXI (on St Victor),<sup>63</sup> XXXVII (on St Bartholomew), XL (on St Evangelists),<sup>64</sup> XLIV (on St Martin),<sup>65</sup> XLV (on St Catherine), XLVI (on St Andrew), XLVII (on St Apostles), LII (on the beheading of St John the Baptist), LIII (on St Agnes),<sup>66</sup> S.II (on St Mary Magdalene).<sup>67</sup>

As the collection is the most numerous and the themes of these works are quite broad, I will therefore be more concerned to show certain recurring ways of presenting or evoking the theme of death, rather than presenting each work in turn.

Perhaps the most numerous texts are those in which death is portrayed as something over which the saints have gained victory. Death is therefore not a threat or an enemy beyond human strength (although there are texts saying that it saddens us (S.II, 4) or that it is an expression of the human condition in general (LII, 9) – but these are not predominant in this collection), but, on the contrary, it is death that must obey the commands of the saints: *death and disease he commanded* (III, 4), *He gives orders to death, disease/ demons and the elements*

<sup>61</sup> Translated by P. Wilk. See ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencje*, 53-57, 59-62, 63-66, 79-82.

<sup>62</sup> Translated by T. Gacia. See ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencje*, 93-94.

<sup>63</sup> Translated by Ł. Libowski. See ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencje*, 171-174, 175-179, 181-184.

<sup>64</sup> Translated by A. Wilczynski. See ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencje*, 213-216, 225-228.

<sup>65</sup> Translated by T. Gacia. See ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencje*, 241-244.

<sup>66</sup> Translated by A. Strycharczuk. See ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencje*, 245-248, 249-252, 253-257, 273-275, 277-280.

<sup>67</sup> Translated by T. Gacia. See ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencje*, 289-292.

(VIII, 12), *disease recedes, death obeys* (XXX, 11). Therefore, death is an event that does not cause fear in the saints: *having despised physical death* (IV, 8), *he was not at all afraid of death* (XLIV, 4).

Furthermore, death, which can also be an expression of sin (XXIX, 3), and a sin that threatens our salvation (XL, 9), or it can be an expression of defilement, decay (XLVII, 5), is ultimately shown, however, to have been defeated by the saints: *they overcome the laws of death* (XXX, 7), *death is not feared at all* (LIII, 8). It is the saints who proclaim the victory over death, which takes its origin from Christ – He is the one who first, like a lion (XL, 7), defeated death once and for all (S.II, 6). Henceforth, what has hitherto been for us an unpleasant necessity of our human condition (human life as the valley of death – LII, 9) is what can constitute a reason for pride worthy of remembrance (XLVI, 10). Such a death should be the culmination of a saintly life (LII, 8), which, for all intents and purposes, does not end at all, but only begins: *death is your birth* (II, 6), *after death you live by merit* (VIII, 11).

Such a death, which has been borne for Christ and for his Cross (XXIX, 6; XLVI, 7), is the beginning of the eternal glory and joy of the saved: *through his death he rejoices/ in his already immortal reward* (XXXI, 10), *he enters into the joy of life* (XLV, 10). Therefore, the saints, who already enjoy the glory of the saved, can by their intercession assist us so that eternal death does not consume us (XI, 5).

In addition to such spiritual-theological references and references, there are also indications that can be described as historical or hagiographical. Death there is referred to in the context of narrative descriptions of certain events to which the sequence refers. For example: in the sequence XXX (for the octave of Sts Peter and Paul) the death of Simon the Magi, which provoked the roar of an angry Nero, is evoked (XXX, 11), while in the sequence XXXVII (about St Bartholomew) there is mention of pagan priests (the context of the work allows us to guess that they are Indian priests) who beg Astiages,<sup>68</sup> to condemn Bartholomew to death (XXXVII, 13). There are also mention of miraculous events in which saints learn ahead of time the day of their own or another saint's death. We have such a mention in Sequence XLIV, 6-7, where both St Martin and St Severinus anticipate or recognise the day of death.

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To sum up, it should be noted that when it comes to the sequences dedicated to the Lord's Saints, the motif of death that appears there differs from the image

<sup>68</sup> Not to be confused with Astiages, the last king of the Medes. See Dan 14:1.

we have in the sequences for the Lord's Saints as well as for the Marian ones. Death here is not an enemy with which one fights a fierce battle, it is not shown as a negative figure or event from which one seeks care and rescue. Rather, the dominant image is of death being defeated by the saints through the victory won by Christ; death is subject to the power of the saints. In these sequences, clearly the saints rise above death. Yes, also in the Marian sequences, and even more so on the feasts of the Lord, both Christ the Lord and the Virgin Mary rose above death; but there one sensed that this battle was, as it were, above our heads: God Incarnate, His Virgin Mother are in battle with death, in our interests. Now, on the other hand, it is the saints, those who are among us, who have lived among us, walked among us, performed miracles among us. So we feel that this battle is not fought above us, but among us. And what is more, it is a victorious battle. And although the saints also have to end their earthly life with a death chord, it is for them the beginning of life in the heavenly glory of the saved, among whose ranks we all hope to be included. *May the heavenly court deign to receive us/ as co-heirs,/ that God's grace may be/ glorified by one, another* (XLI, 12).

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Wanting to generally conclude the Adamic theology of death contained in the collection of sequences presented above, I would like to draw one overarching conclusion: death is always inferior to God's grace. And although death in medieval mentality is a figure or an unpleasant experience for human beings, medieval culture, at least in the slice of it presented here, saw in it a space for hope. Death is not a dramatic end, but is a tense moment in which God's grace, in which God himself reveals his power and determination to snatch man from bondage to the freedom of eternal life. The text thus becomes a certain contribution to weakening the stereotype still present in the wider culture, which claims that the Middle Ages only held people in intimidation of hell and death. Yes, there are texts designed to arouse the viewer's abhorrence of hell and trepidation of punishment, but there are also texts, such as the Adam sequences from St Victor, which make it clear that death always stands at a loss in relation to the eternally living Christ and those who trust in Him.

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WHERE IS THERE, O DEATH, YOUR VICTORY? THE MOTIF OF DEATH IN ADAM'S  
SEQUENCES FROM ST VICTOR

Summary

The article discusses the death motif in the sequences that Adam of St Victor wrote. Divided into several sections (Paschal sequences, on the feasts of the Lord, Marian sequences, on the saints of the Lord) it shows a varied description of the death motif. Death can be seen both objectively as an event and subjectively as a figure hostile to Christ and humans. Through Christ's Resurrection, it has been overcome. The saints of the Lord, and especially the Virgin Mary, share in this victory of Christ and show that although death is a threat to eternal life, it is possible to triumph over it and pass through it to new life, in the glory of heaven.

**Keywords:** Adam of St Victor; Christ; Victorians; death; medieval; sequence; poetry; allegory

GDZIE JEST, O ŚMIERCI, TWOJE ZWYCIĘSTWO? MOTYW ŚMIERCI  
W SEKWENCJACH ADAMA ZE ŚW. WIKTORA

Streszczenie

Artykuł omawia motyw śmierci w sekwencjach napisanych przez Adama ze św. Wiktora. Podzielony na kilka sekcji (sekwencje paschalne, na święta Pana, sekwencje maryjne, na świętych Pana) ukazuje zróżnicowany opis motywu śmierci. Śmierć można postrzegać zarówno obiektywnie, jako wydarzenie, jak i subiektywnie, jako postać wroga Chrystusa i ludzi. Dzięki zmartwychwstaniu Jezusa została pokonana. Święci Pana, a w szczególności Dziewica Maria, uczestniczą w tym zwycięstwie Chrystusa i pokazują, że chociaż śmierć stanowi zagrożenie dla życia wiecznego, możliwe jest zwycięstwo nad nią i przejście przez nią do nowego życia, w chwale nieba.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Adam ze św. Wiktora; Chrystus; wiktorianie; śmierć; średniowiecze; sekwencja; poezja; alegoria