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The Greatest Story Ever Sold? Marketing *Melusine* Across Early Modern Western, Northern, and Central Europe

If one had been asked to predict which late medieval narrative would end up in our Top Ten, becoming a true transcultural bestseller and staying in print up to and well beyond 1800, *Melusine* would have seemed an unlikely candidate. The story of a fairy woman cursed to transform into a half-serpent on Saturdays began as a local legend originating from the Poitou region in western France, tied to the influential Lusignan family. The earliest written versions – by Jean d’Arras (1393) and Cou-drette (around 1401) – connected the story to events surrounding the Hundred Years’ War and to a regional dynastic crisis. These accounts were written for a local audience, likely already familiar with the Melusine figure from oral legends and who had a stake in determining exactly who was or was not descended from her. The two French versions with which it all began were bound in time and place.

It is all the more remarkable, then, that this narrative turned out to have an enduring appeal across cultures, and an impressive staying power over the centuries. It was first translated into German – a move that proved to be crucial for the spread of the legend, as it was the German version which was first set to print. The success of the German incunabula likely spurred the subsequent printing of one of the French versions. Other translations soon followed, so that by 1800 the narrative had been further translated into Low German, Castilian, Dutch, English, Czech, Polish, Danish, Russian, Swedish, and Yiddish. In some regions, *Melusine* was among the first romances set to print.¹ At least 132 editions printed before 1800 are known, in eleven languages. The narrative became a truly multilingual tradition, which – as we shall see – often defies neat separations between literary

¹ *Melusine* is traditionally seen as a romance, and I use this term in this chapter when it helps to distinguish between different kinds of secular narratives. On definitions of this famously nebulous genre, which easily encompassed elements from other medieval writing like saints’ lives or chronicles, see Krueger (2000, 1–11) and Cooper (2004, 7–15). I acknowledge that the term is problematic, even more since ‘romance’ does not mean the same across modern national scholarly traditions. For instance, romance in Spanish criticism is often used for what in English criticism would be termed a ballad. I agree, however, with Putter’s statement that “we can spare ourselves the trouble of agonizing needlessly about problems of definition if we accept that we have inherited the word ‘romance’, with all its vagueness, from those who talked before us”, without losing sight that it “was never a precise generic marker” to begin with (Putter 2000, 2).

cultures. As it was rewritten and adapted time and again, the narrative generally stayed remarkably intact, though it was variably marketed as a true historical account, a love story, a tale of wonder, and part of a useful guide on how to live one's best life. The narrative also spawned offshoots and sparked new adaptations, enthralling young and old and noblewoman and legal scholar alike.

The case study in this chapter focuses on the marketing of the *Melusine* narrative across languages and across the centuries. Can we see different approaches taken by printers who are catering to an audience long familiar with the tale versus printers in regions where the story had not been published before? Is the narrative marketed differently across languages or are there also similarities, more to do with broader changes in publishing techniques not specific to one cultural context? And what can such comparisons begin to tell us about why this narrative captivated readers for so long? The earliest editions printed in western Europe have been well-studied, but the editions published in Danish, Swedish, Czech, and Polish are not as well-known, particularly in English scholarship. The second aim of this chapter is therefore to introduce these lesser-studied versions to an English-reading audience, restoring their place in the larger *Melusine* tradition.²

1 Summary of the Narrative

The two earliest French versions largely give the same account, though some episodes and details differ.³ Jean's prose version begins with the story of Mélusine's parents, the fairy Presine and the human king Elinas. Their marriage is founded on the condition that Elinas never see his wife after she gives birth, a vow he breaks when Mélusine and her two sisters are born. Presine is forced to disappear to Avalon, taking the girls with her. When Mélusine is a teenager, she finds

² For recent studies that bring together *Melusine* versions in multiple languages, see Urban et al. (2017) and Zeldenrust (2020). Both studies focus predominantly on a western-European context; this chapter offers a welcome opportunity to expand the scope to include northern and central European versions. The work for this chapter was supported by a Leverhulme Trust Early Career Fellowship.

³ Modern editions of Jean's version include those by Vincensini (2003), with modern French translation, and the French-English edition by Morris (2007), which has a foreword by Vincensini. Modern editions of Coudrette's version are by Roach (1982) and Morris and Vincensini (2009); the latter features a translation into modern French. A recent modern English translation of Jean's version was published by Maddox and Sturm-Maddox (2012); Coudrette's version was translated into English by Morris (2003). For an overview of the surviving manuscripts of the two French versions and their dating, see Zeldenrust (2020, 234–35 and 239).

out what her father did and decides to punish him by locking him into a mountain. It is this attempted patricide that causes Presine to curse her daughters, telling Mélusine that she will become a serpent from the waist down every Saturday. If she can find a husband who will agree never to see her on a Saturday and, if he does see her, never tell anyone her secret, she will live and die as a human. If he betrays her, she will be forever trapped in serpent form. The same backstory is told much later, towards the end of the narrative, in Coudrette's version, which retells the story in octosyllabic verse.

Mélusine meets her husband – the human knight Raymondin – when he is on the run for accidentally killing his uncle the count during a boar hunt. Raymondin's horse takes him to a fountain, where Mélusine tells him she knows about his misfortune and offers her help. She also offers her hand in marriage, on the condition that he never see her on a Saturday nor reveal her secret if he does. Raymondin is so dazzled by this beautiful and clever woman that he happily agrees. Mélusine then tells him exactly how he can not only get away with murder but also obtain a great amount of land from the new count. They marry and settle on the newly obtained land, where Mélusine begins several building projects, including construction of Castle Lusignan and the Abbey of Maillezais. They live together happily for years, with Mélusine bringing her husband increasing prosperity and giving birth to ten sons. Most sons are born with a monstrous token – for instance, Geoffroy has one large tooth, Anthoine has a lion's claw on his cheek, and Horrible has three eyes – reminding us of their mother's curse and supernatural nature. The narrative then relates the adventures of the sons when they are grown, as most go abroad to defeat pagan enemies and marry beautiful princesses who happen to be the only heir to politically strategic regions across Europe and the Mediterranean. The adventures connect to real life, as those who claimed descent from Mélusine and her sons included the Lusignans – who became kings of Jerusalem, Cyprus, and Armenia – the dukes of Burgundy, the lords of Parthenay, the counts of St. Pol, of La Marche, and of Luxembourg – who also ruled Bohemia – and the Plantagenets.⁴

When he finds out that his brother Fromont has joined a religious order instead of becoming a knight, Geoffroy is convinced the monks tricked him. Geoffroy traps all the monks – his brother included – in the Abbey of Maillezais and burns them alive. This action sets into motion the final events of the narrative. One Saturday, when Raymondin's brother comes to visit and tells him there are rumours Mélusine is having an affair when she disappears each week, Raymondin decides to spy on his wife. He finds her in the bathhouse and, through a peep-

4 On the families who claimed descent from Melusine, and why, see Colwell (2008, 97–133).

hole he makes in the door, sees her bathing in half-serpent form. Although he initially feels shame for having betrayed his wife and does not tell anyone what he saw, when Raymondin hears what Geoffroy has done, he decides that it is their mother's monstrous nature that is at fault. His rage leads him to betray Mélusine's secret in front of the court, all conditions of the vow now broken. Mélusine then says goodbye to her loved ones and jumps out of a castle window. She transforms into a serpent mid-air and flies off, only coming back to look after her youngest sons or to announce a change in ownership of Castle Lusignan. Jean's version ends with an episode about Mélusine's sister Melior, while Coudrette adds an episode about the fate of the third cursed sister, Palestine.⁵ Jean relates sightings of Mélusine in his own time, including when she announced that Castle Lusignan would soon be in the hands of his patron Jean de Berry. Coudrette notes that his patron is a descendant of Mélusine's son Thierry.

2 Background and Literary Tradition

This is not the first story of a fairy who turns into a serpent after human transgression.⁶ Vincent of Beauvais' *Speculum naturale* of ca. 1250 – part of his *Speculum maius* – tells of a fairy who is seen by a servant as she is bathing and subsequently transforms into a serpent. The story found in Gervase of Tilbury's *Otia Imperialia* (ca. 1210–1215) is more familiar: a knight named Raimundus meets a beautiful fairy near a stream, who offers to marry him on the condition that he never see her naked. They live happily for years, and the knight's wealth increases, until one day he breaks his promise and walks in on his wife as she is taking a bath. She transforms into a serpent and disappears. Jacques de Longuyon's *Les voeux du paon*, a chivalric work composed before 1313, includes an anecdote about a count's wife who does not want to stay in church long enough to receive Holy Communion and, when forced to do so, she turns into a dragon and flies off. An even closer analogue is found in Pierre Bersuire's *Reductorium morale* (ca. 1342), which records how a woman from Lusignan changed into a snake after her husband saw her naked. This same lady was a fairy who founded the fortress of Lusignan, whose descendants became kings of Jerusalem and Cyprus, counts of La Marche, and lords of Parthenay, and who reappears every time the fortress has a new owner. Such accounts show tantalising links to the

⁵ For more on the differences between the two French versions, see Zeldenrust (2020, 17–63).

⁶ For more detailed overviews of earlier analogues, see Le Goff and Le Roy Ladurie (1971); Harf-Lancner (1984); Prud'Homme (2017).

legend as it is known from Jean d'Arras onward, but one crucial element is missing: the fairy remains unnamed. It is Jean's *Méluſine* that first tells us her name.

Jean certainly seems to have been aware of earlier analogues, as he mentions Gervase of Tilbury in his prologue. By the time he was writing *Méluſine*, manuscripts of the *Otia Imperialia* were circulating in both Latin and French (Pignatelli and Gerner 2006). Jean also references legends of fairies who became serpents after being forced to enter a church, suggesting he was familiar with accounts like de Longuyon's too. Bersuire, moreover, was a local and his work was likely familiar to Jean. Bersuire came from the area of Vendée in Poitou, and he joined the Benedictine Order at Maillezais, the abbey said to have been burnt down and later rebuilt by Méluſine's son Geoffroy. Both Méluſine and Geoffroy were almost certainly familiar figures of local folklore before their exploits were written down.⁷ The narrative also regularly plays with real historical events, particularly in the episodes about Méluſine's sons, giving the impression that at least part of the story may be true (Péporté 2017, 163). The weaving of myth and history was a defining characteristic of the legend from the start.

Jean's prose *Méluſine* was the first to develop the story into a lengthy, semi-historical and genealogical romance, combining elements from medieval chronicle writing, tales of wonder, didactic literature, and natural philosophy. He tells us in his prologue that he wrote the narrative at the request of his patron, Duke Jean de Berry (1340–1416), and his sister Marie, Duchess of Bar (1344–1404). The romance contains more than a dedication, however – Jean writes his patron into the narrative by adding a scene that justifies his recent taking of Castle Lusignan from a baron loyal to the English. This firmly embeds the *Méluſine* legend into the events of the Hundred Years' War, reminding readers at a time when French and English diplomats were renegotiating territorial terms that Berry was a descendant of the famous half-serpent and was therefore rightful heir to the castle and – more importantly – Poitou (Autrand 2000, 133–146). We also see the contemporary context reflected in the narrative's emphasis on conquest and battles with Saracens, linking with Valois' desires to organise another crusade and restore the rule of French noblemen – most notably Léon de Lusignan, last Latin king of lesser Armenia – over *Outremer* territories (Harf-Lancner 1991).

In 1401, less than a decade later, another French author known as Coudrette (or Couldrette) rewrote the story in verse, for his patron Guillaume VII l'Archevêque, Lord of Parthenay (d. 1401). Although previous scholarship considered Coudrette's version as written for a pro-English audience, refuting Berry's territorial claims (e.g. Stouff 1930, 8–9), recent research has produced a more nuanced picture.

⁷ See, for instance, Le Goff and Le Roy Ladurie (1971); Nolan (1974); Roblin (1985).

For a start, when Coudrette was writing his version, Guillaume l'Archevêque was no longer allied with the Plantagenets but had been loyal to the French crown for three decades, undertaking diplomatic roles and serving as counsellor for Jean de Berry (Colwell 2011, 219–220). Guillaume l'Archevêque may have been going through a dynastic crisis and he, like Berry, was inspired to write his own family into the romance, now renamed as the *Roman de Parthenay* (Colwell 2011). This means that the two French narratives are not so much competing accounts as evidence of the reach of the Lusignan dynasty. The Parthenays also traced their lineage back to Mélusine and part of their domains were Vouvant and Mervent – in Poitou, now ruled by Berry – which not only feature prominently in the narrative, but in real-life had been reinstated to Guillaume l'Archevêque in 1372–1373.

This far reach of the Lusignans meant that the narrative also had a significant reach, even before we take the many translations and adaptations into account. Many early owners of *Mélusine* manuscripts were members of the nobility, who were thought to be descendants of Mélusine or were connected to the courtly milieu around other known descendants.⁸ Known owners include key cultural and political figures of the Low Countries, such as Margaret of Austria (1480–1530), Philip of Cleves (1459–1528), and Charles de Croÿ (1455–1527).⁹ Another owner is Jacquetta of Luxembourg (1415 or 1416–1472), who took her manuscript of Jean's version with her when she settled in England (Colwell 2008, 317).¹⁰ The romance had already started to travel to Francophone regions outside France, largely thanks to extended aristocratic networks. However, the real explosion of this legend came when the narrative was set to print, a key factor in its translation history. Though the idea that several European noble houses claimed descent from this half-serpent woman and her part-monstrous children no doubt added to its appeal, the romance gradually shook off its political and dynastic implications and instead it was the tale itself that turned out to be the stuff that best-sellers are made of.

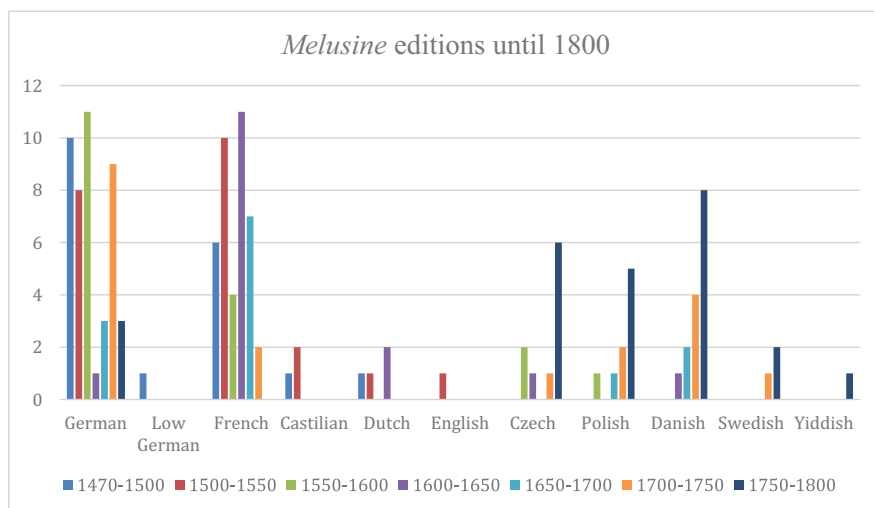
⁸ On owners of French *Mélusine* manuscripts, see Colwell (2008).

⁹ Philip of Cleves owned manuscript Paris, BnF, fr. 12575. Charles de Croÿ owned a manuscript of the *Parthenay* – Valenciennes, Bibliothèque Municipale, ms 461 (465) – and one of Jean's *Mélusine* – Bruxelles, BR, ms 10390. The latter was bought by Margaret of Austria in 1511. See the overview in Colwell (2008, 476–478).

¹⁰ Jacquetta's ex libris is found in London, BL, Cotton Otho D.II.

3 Dissemination Across Europe

Although the narrative originates from a French-language context, when it comes to its printed tradition the story starts with the German translation. The success of the early German editions likely led to the printing of the first French editions, which then spurred several new translations. Moreover, the German tradition itself sparked new translations in turn. This means we have two main strands: the translations based on the French version, and those that go back to the German version. This overview (see Graph 1) is organised by language, but this should not give the impression that the versions can always be neatly separated according to modern national categories, not in the least because people, printing materials, and individual books crossed borders as much as the story itself did.¹¹



Graph 1: Overview of *Melusine* editions until 1800.¹²

¹¹ USTC and relevant national catalogue numbers are listed where available. Not all surviving printed editions are listed in catalogues and dates are not always listed correctly, so the information is supplemented with reference to relevant criticism. I also add previously unknown editions, discovered during the research for my book on the *Melusine* translations in western Europe (Zeldenrust 2020). See also Tab. 1 at the end of this chapter, which lists the earliest extant editions in each language.

¹² Not all editions are datable with certainty. Several Danish editions without date have been added to the count for 1750–1800, their most likely dating. An undated French edition by Olivier Arnoullet has been added to 1500–1550, and that printed by Jean Crevel around the turn of the century to 1600–1650. Fragments of Czech editions thought to be from before 1800 are included in the count for 1750–1800.

3.1 Strand 1: Translations Based on the French Versions

Thüring von Ringoltingen (ca. 1415–1483) finished his German translation, based on Coudrette's version, in 1456.¹³ The earliest known edition was published by Bernhard Richel in Basel around 1473–1474.¹⁴ This was soon followed by the edition printed by Johann Bämle in Augsburg in 1474 (USTC 747180, GW 12655), and that by Heinrich Knoblochtzter in Strasbourg ca. 1477 (USTC 747182, GW 12658). The early German editions proved a good investment: there were at least ten incunables and another nineteen editions printed before 1600. There is also an incunable in Low German, based on the High German version (Schlusemann 2004).¹⁵ Printed texts did not immediately replace the manuscript tradition, as more than half of the surviving German *Melusine* manuscripts were produced when the story was already circulating in print, and one was even copied after a printed example.¹⁶ The early editions feature a high number of illustrations, around 67–72 woodcuts, reminding us that their first buyers would have been relatively well-to-do (Classen 2017, 76–77).

While the *editio princeps* was printed in Basel and there is also an incunable printed in Heidelberg in 1491, the production of German *Melusine* incunables and pre-1550 editions was concentrated in Augsburg and Strasbourg. Both were important printing cities, particularly for the publication of books in the vernacular, so their dominance is not surprising.¹⁷ In some cases, printers published one *Melusine* edition, but many of them printed multiple editions. Heinrich Knoblochtzter, for instance, published three editions in Strasbourg as well as the incunable from Heidelberg, but it is Heinrich Steiner who takes the crown, printing at least five editions in Augsburg between 1539 and ca. 1545.

From around 1549 Frankfurt am Main emerges as an important printing centre for the *Melusine* narrative, with a cluster of at least seven editions published by Hermann Gülfferich, his stepson Weigand Han, and Han's later heirs, as well as two editions by the heirs of Christian Egenolff. This coincides with the rise of Frankfurt itself as a printing centre, no longer known mainly for the lively book trade at its fairs but also as a key publishing city in its own right (Rautenberg

¹³ For an edition based on the manuscript tradition, see Schneider (1958).

¹⁴ USTC 747181, GW 12656. The number and dates of German editions in this section are based on the overview in Rautenberg et al. (2013, 6–8).

¹⁵ USTC 747179, GW 12664.

¹⁶ The Trento manuscript is copied from Johann Bämle's 1480 *Melusine* edition (USTC 747184, GW 12660) (Terrahe 2009, 51).

¹⁷ Augsburg was particularly important – more than a quarter of German-language incunables came from there (Sauer 1956, 69). On the city's leading role in publishing before 1555, see Künast (1997).

2015, 85). The printing house founded by Gülfferich, later run by Han and his heirs, specialised in the publication of secular narratives like *Melusine*, also printing multiple editions of, for instance, *Die sieben weisen Meister*, *Die schöne Magelone*, *Fortunatus*, *Ulenspiegel*, and *Pontus und Sidonia* (Rautenberg 2015, 87).¹⁸ Frankfurt often dominated the market for these kinds of narratives after 1550, as is the case for *Melusine*, with only one edition each printed in Augsburg and Strasbourg in the same period.¹⁹ This was also when many narratives appeared in smaller format – only Egenolff still printed in quarto format, with *Melusine* editions by Gülfferich, Han, and heirs all in octavo.

Gülfferich was the first Frankfurt publisher to print a *Melusine* edition, in 1549 (VD16 M 4475), for which he used woodcuts designed to illustrate his *Fortunatus* edition printed that same year. It seems that this edition found an eager audience, as Gülfferich then commissioned a new set of woodblocks specific to the *Melusine* story from the artist Hans Brosamer (d. ca. 1554), which appeared in his 1554 edition.²⁰ The Brosamer woodblocks stayed with the printing house, reappearing in editions by Han (1556 and 1562) and his heirs (1564, 1571, 1577) (Gotzkowsky 2013, 385).²¹ The cluster of editions by this Frankfurt printing family shows that, (1) the narrative was expected to sell well enough for Gülfferich to make a substantial investment in having new images made, and (2) production numbers of *Melusine* editions were likely bolstered by printers having access to existing materials to cut costs. This was a common strategy: the other Frankfurt printer, Egenolff, bought Steiner's *Melusine* woodblocks after his bankruptcy, and we find these woodcuts in the editions printed by his heirs (Hespers 2010, 170). This raises the question of how often the production numbers of narratives in our Top Ten are high because printers already had in stock images made for a specific narrative and were therefore able to bring out an edition relatively quickly and cheaply. Whereas with narratives that feature generic woodcuts reused from other texts, a printer may have first settled on a narrative to print and then looked for images to illustrate it, having access to a set of woodcuts specific to a narrative likely turned this process around, where access to images may have determined choice of text.

¹⁸ Also see the chapters on *SSR*, *Pierre et Maguelonne*, *Fortunatus* and *Ulenspiegel* in this volume.

¹⁹ Augsburg: Michael Manger, 1574 (VD16 ZV 26210); Straßburg: Christian Müller, 1577 (VD16 M 4480).

²⁰ Six *Melusine* woodcuts also appear in Gülfferich's *Pontus und Sidonia* from 1552, which has been taken as indicating that there was a now-lost *Melusine* edition printed before 1554. Gülfferich also commissioned Brosamer to illustrate other fictional narratives of entertainment, part of a deliberate specialisation in these types of text.

²¹ They were also copied in Michael Manger's 1574 edition.

In 1587, Johann Feyerabend printed for his cousin Sigmund a collection of love stories entitled *Buch der Liebe* (“Book of Love”), also in Frankfurt (VD16 B 8959).²² *Melusine* is included in this collection of thirteen prose narratives, alongside *Kaiser Octavianus*, *Florio und Biancelfora*, *Die schöne Magelone*, and *Ritter Pontus*. There is a gap in production after Feyerabend’s edition, with a slight resurgence of interest in the later seventeenth century, starting with the edition by Michael Pfeiffer in Hamburg in 1649 (VD17 18:727001S).²³ Hans-Jörg Künast (2010, 29) has commented on the difficulty of cataloguing *Melusine* editions from the seventeenth century onwards, as many lack information about the place of printing, printer, or date. Moreover, their more standardised appearance means it is no longer easy to distinguish printers or locations by typographical features (Künast 2010, 35). Several eighteenth-century editions mention they were ‘printed this year’, which tells us nothing except that it was presented as coming hot off the press. From the few editions that do mention the place of printing – including Nuremberg (1672), Annaberg (1692–1693), Leipzig (three editions ca. 1800–1820), Cologne (ca. 1810) and Reutlingen (three editions before 1813) – it seems there is no longer one city that dominates.

The narrative undergoes some significant changes after 1700, when two sub-strands emerge: the adaptation printed under the title *Historische Wunder-Beschreibung* (*HW*; “Historical Marvel Account”, fifteen editions) and that known as the *Wunderbare Geschichte* (*WG*; “Marvellous History”, five editions), both printed until the 1810s. Their title pages list the number of sheets used for the edition in the bottom right corner. These are likely a sign of the colportage or book peddling trade, with *Melusine* having become a chapbook paid for according to the number of pages (Künast 2010, 37).²⁴ Only three post-1700 *Melusine* editions are not *HW* or *WG* editions. Overall, at least 57 editions of the German *Melusine* were printed before the 1810s.

At least three German incunables had been printed by the time the *editio princeps* of the French *Méluſine* by Jean d’Arras appeared in 1478, published by Adam Steinschaber in Geneva (USTC 71174 and 765244, FB 30835).²⁵ It was the prose version that was to have a long printing history; Coudrette’s version was not printed until the nineteenth century. There are six French *Méluſine* incunables and

22 Roloff has published an edition of Feyerabend’s text, featuring reproductions of the woodcuts (1991).

23 It is possible that David Franck – Michael Manger’s stepson – printed a *Melusine* in 1612, but its existence is uncertain and therefore not included here (Behr 2014, 179).

24 On defining the term ‘chapbook’ and problems with anachronistic use, see Newcomb (2009).

25 Note that French incunables discussed here have duplicate entries in the USTC, under different numbers, but in each case there is one edition that was mistakenly recorded twice.

another fifteen editions printed before 1600.²⁶ No other editions appeared in Geneva after the *editio princeps*, though copies continued to circulate – for example, the German lawyer Michael von Kaden bought a copy of the 1478 Geneva edition in Limoges in 1539.²⁷ From ca. 1479 onward printing of *Mélusine* editions shifted to Lyon, with immigrant German printers like Martin Husz (USTC 71175 and 765279, FB 30836) and Gaspard Ortuin (USTC 71176 and 765625, FB 30837) inspired by the story's success back home.²⁸ After 1498, editions also appeared in Paris. Looking at the place of printing does not give many surprises here. Quite a few French narratives were first printed in Geneva, including *Olivier de Castille* in 1482 (GW 02770) and *Apollonius* ca. 1482 (GW 02279). Lyon was also important for the printing of French romances, particularly before 1500, so if a narrative was printed during the incunable period, it is likely to have at least one edition from Lyon. Paris was a little behind on this front, and it was not until at least a decade later that it started to become a key city for the production of printed romances.²⁹ We see this with *Mélusine* too – whereas two-thirds of the incunables were printed in Lyon and only one in Paris, in the sixteenth century an impressive three-quarters of editions were printed in Paris.

It was also in Paris that the French *Mélusine* underwent a significant modification. Possibly as early as 1517 but certainly by 1525, an enterprising printer – probably Michel or Philippe Le Noir – took out the episodes which detail the adventures of Geoffroy and printed them as a separate narrative about a heroic knight (Harf-Lancner 1988, 361). It seems to have found a keen audience – at least ten editions of the new *Geoffroy à la grand dent* were printed before 1600 and four more appeared before 1700, as part of the *Bibliothèque bleue*. They were initially printed alongside a version of *Mélusine* which no longer has the Geoffroy episodes, suggesting these split editions were marketed together, but over time *Geoffroy* was also printed on its own.

Mélusine was also incorporated into the *Bibliothèque bleue*, starting in the early seventeenth century (Andries 2000). That these were books designed to be sold cheaply is reflected in their illustrations, as the editions feature small, generic-looking woodcuts. Many had nonetheless been updated for a new era. Some printers had begun to modernise their editions in the late sixteenth century, using

²⁶ See the overview in Zeldenrust (2020, 235–238).

²⁷ This is the copy now in Wolfenbüttel, HAB. See the notes in the online catalogue: <https://opac.lbs-braunschweig.gbv.de/DB=2/XMLPRS=N/PPN?PPN=385049005> (27 August 2022).

²⁸ For a study of the activities of German printers in Lyon, see Barbier (2011).

²⁹ Antoine Vérard is usually credited as a pioneer for the printing of romances in Paris, though in the case of *Mélusine* it was the bookseller and financier Jean Petit who played a key role, as the first two Paris editions were printed for him. These were the editions by Pierre Le Caron, after 1498 (FB 30840) and Thomas Du Guernier, ca. 1503 (FB 30842).

roman type instead of *bastarda* and updating the spelling, and this process continued as *Mélusine* joined the *Bibliothèque bleue* (Mounier 2015). However, there were also publishers who shied away from the fashionable and simply reprinted earlier material without much updating. Such editions are often slated for looking archaic, but it is worth asking whether we could see the reprinting of older fonts and layouts not as complacency but a legitimate marketing strategy. Some readers may well have preferred the archaic design, and sticking to a recognisable formula would not be a strange choice when the narrative continued to sell.³⁰ Reflecting its important status at this time, Troyes was the main place of printing for French *Mélusine* editions in the seventeenth century, though there were also editions from Rouen and Lyon. No editions were printed in Paris. Later *Geoffroy* editions were printed in a smaller format than most *Mélusine* editions, which may indicate that these were destined for colportage (Bouquin 2000). In total, at least 40 French *Mélusine* editions were printed by 1800.³¹

The earliest Castilian edition of *La Historia de la linda Melosina* (“The History of the beautiful Melosina”) was printed by Juan Parix and Estevan Cleblat in 1489 (USTC 344879, IB 50128).³² Its source is one of the French editions printed in Lyon in the 1470–1480s (Frontón Simón 1996, 158–160; Rivera 1997, 135–137). Interestingly, the first Castilian edition was printed not on the Iberian Peninsula but in Toulouse, by German printers. Parix came from Heidelberg and he is credited with operating the first printing workshop in Castile, in Segovia. It was a short-lived enterprise and by the time he printed *Melosina* he had moved to Toulouse and teamed up with Cleblat, to print works for the Spanish market from there (Cassagne 2013). This was an edition destined to cross borders, and it was the product of multiple cross-cultural exchanges. The text is based on a French version, but the images come from woodblocks designed to illustrate the first German *Mélusine* edition by Bernhard Richel. These woodblocks had been used shortly before to illustrate several editions of Jean’s *Mélusine* printed in Lyon, likely brought there by Martin Husz – Richel’s former apprentice who had inherited some of his printing materials. Using their connections with printers in Lyon, Parix and Cleblat borrowed the same woodblocks for their edition (Zeldenrust 2020, 108–110). Interestingly, a copy of this edition then crossed borders again, as it was owned by Margaret of Austria,

³⁰ On this issue, also see Blom (2021a).

³¹ For an overview of French editions printed after 1600, see Blom (2012, 337–408), where *Mélusine* is included in a list of chivalric romances printed in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

³² USTC 344879, GW 12666. Critical editions of the 1489 edition, with a diplomatic edition of the 1526 edition, are found in Corfis (1986) and Frontón Simón (1996).

who took it back with her when she returned to the Low Countries after the premature death of her husband Juan, Prince of Asturias (d. 1497) (Colwell 2008, 333).

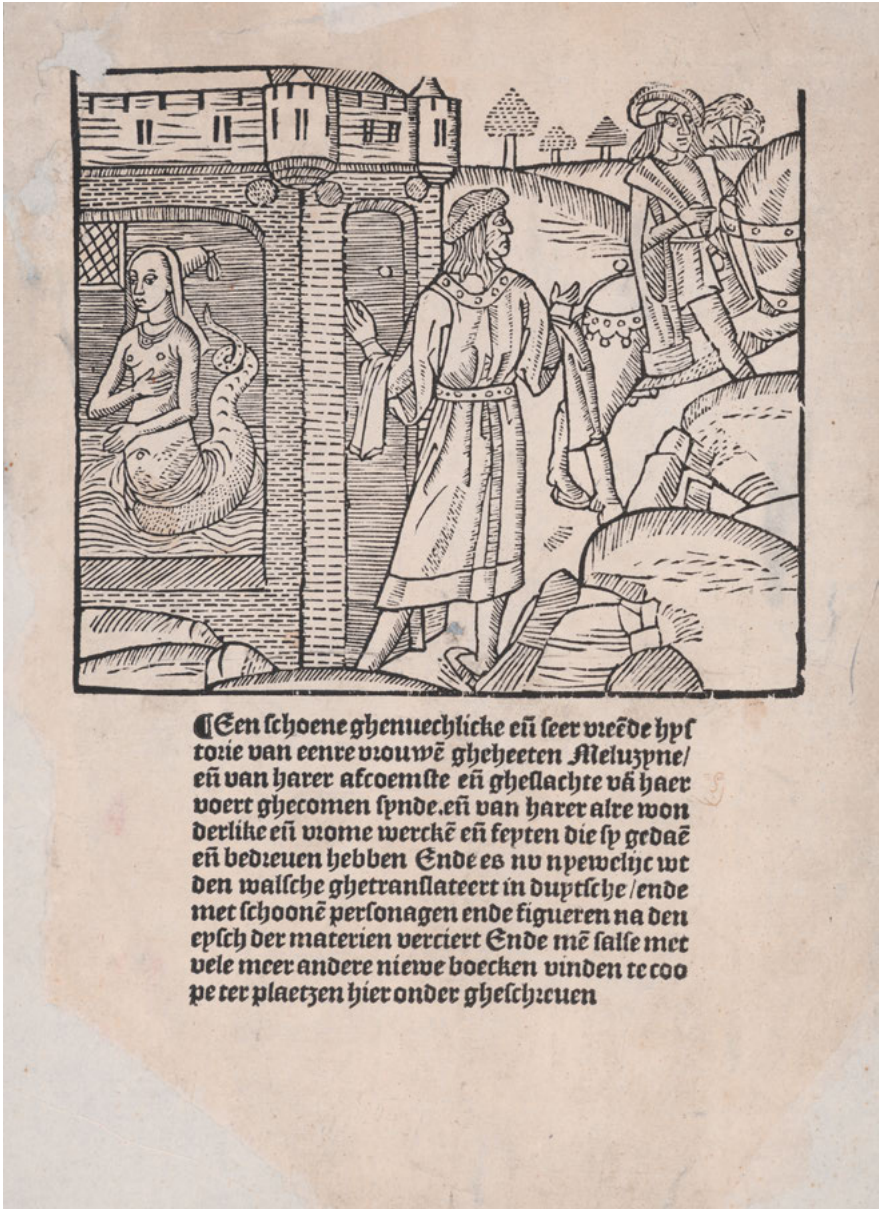
There were at least two more editions of the Castilian *Melosina*. The inventory of the library of Hernando Colón (1488–1539) – the famous book collector and son of Christopher Columbus – lists a *Melosina* printed in Valencia in 1512 (USTC 347537), but no copies survive (Huntington 1905, no 3963). We do have copies of an edition printed in 1526, by the German-born printer Jacobo Cromberger and his son Juan in Seville (USTC 337807, IB 12764). That there is a gap in printing has more to do with the challenges of the Iberian printing market than a lack of appetite for the story – it is not uncommon to see a gap between the 1490s and the 1510–1520s.³³ The landscape looked very different by the time the Crombergers rose to prominence as arguably the most important Spanish printing family. The Iberian book market no longer relied primarily on imported books and local printing centres had become sustainable (Griffin 1988). Although *Melosina* does not seem to have had as enduring a success as other secular narratives translated from French, like *Oliveros de Castilla*, *Magalona* or *Roberto el Diablo*, which continued to be published after the 1520s, it captivated Castilian audiences for some time.

Melusine also travelled to the Low Countries. The earliest witness to the anonymous Dutch *Meluzine* is the edition printed by Gheraert Leeu in Antwerp, dated to 1491 (USTC 436129, GW 12665).³⁴ The Dutch version is largely based on the text of a French incunable, with episodes from Coudrette’s *Roman de Parthenay* added towards the end, possibly mediated through a German edition. There is a surviving sales prospectus of this edition, which advertises it as “een schoene, ghenuechlicke ende seer vreemde hystorie van eenre vrouwen gheheeten Meluzyne” (“a beautiful, pleasant, and very unfamiliar history of a lady called Meluzine”), adding that it has images that follow the contents (Fig. 1).³⁵ Indeed, almost all of its 50 woodcuts were commissioned especially for this narrative, with three woodcuts reused from Leeu’s earlier French, Low German, and English editions of *Paris et Vienne* (Kok 2013, 267). There are also three woodcuts which illustrate scenes that appear in Coudrette’s but not in Jean’s version. These woodcuts could not have been copied after French *Melusine* incunables, which use the text of Jean’s version. However, we do see the same scenes illustrated in German *Melusine* incunables – not surprising if we remember that the German version is a translation of Coudrette. Indeed, the woodcuts that depict Meluzine’s sister Pales-

³³ We see the same with *Grisel y Mirabella*, for instance, with editions in 1495, 1514, and 1526, and with *París i Viana*, with editions in 1495 and 1499 (Catalan), and 1524 (Castilian).

³⁴ A recent edition and translation into modern German is by Schlusemann (2022b).

³⁵ On this prospectus, see Schorbach (1905) and Boekenoogen (1905). All quotations from Leeu’s prospectus throughout this chapter are from the reproductions that accompany both articles.



Een schoene ghenuechliche en seer vreedē hyl
 torie van eenre vrouwē gheheeten Meluzyne/
 en van harer afcoemste en gheslachte vā haer
 voert ghecomen synde. en van harer alre won
 derlike en vrome werckē en seften die sy gedaē
 en bedreuen hebben Ende es nu nyewelich wt
 den walsche ghetranslateert in duytsche/ende
 met schoonē personagen ende figueren na den
 eysch der materien verciert Ende mē salse met
 vele meer andere nieuwe boecken vinden te coo
 pe ter plaetzen hier onder gheschreuen

Fig. 1: Sales prospectus for *Meluzine*. Antwerpen: Gheraert Leeu, 1491 (Leipzig, Deutsches Buch- und Schriftmuseum der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek, Bibliothek des Börsenvereins der Deutschen Buchhändler, Bö Ink 134). By courtesy of Deutsche Nationalbibliothek, Leipzig, with the licence CC BY -SA-3.0-DE.

tine in a castle surrounded by monsters, an English knight being eaten by one of Palestine's monsters, and Meluzine's son Godefroy on his deathbed, look very similar to woodcuts illustrating the same scenes in German incunables. It is as if Leeu's woodcutter had not only a French but also a German incunable in front of him, meaning that Leeu's edition is likely the product of more than one cross-cultural exchange.³⁶

Three more Dutch editions appeared later: a 1510 edition printed by Henrick Eckert van Homberch (USTC 436815), a 1602 edition by Hieronymus [I] Verdussen, and an edition by Jan van Soest (USTC 1436325), which the USTC dates to ca. 1636.³⁷ The Dutch *Meluzine* editions were all printed in Antwerp. This is perhaps not surprising considering Antwerp's importance as a printing centre, particularly in the sixteenth century. Plus, the legend was well-known in Flanders: not only were manuscripts produced and read in Flanders, but the Tanners' Guild in Ghent had a statue of Melusine on their guild house, supposedly because she was their protector. Leeu's sales prospectus confirms the story's popularity, as it uses the announcement about the Dutch *Meluzine* to get people interested in "vele meer andere nieuwe boecken" ("many more other new books") by the same printer.³⁸

The narrative did not have a long printing history in English. There are two surviving manuscripts in English, one is a translation of Jean's *Mélusine* and the other of Coudrette's *Roman de Parthenay*.³⁹ For the printed tradition, however, we only have fragments of a prose *Melusine* published by Wynkyn de Worde in London ca. 1510 (USTC 501139, STC 14648). Six fragments are found in the Bodleian Library in Oxford (Colwell 2014, 276), and two leaves once in the Bodleian are now in private hands, among the so-called Bandinel fragments (Freeman 2008, 407–11). De Worde was "the most prolific printer of romance" after 1500 (Sánchez-Martí 2009, 9–10) and he was known for his high number of illustrated editions. The *Melusine* edition also features woodcuts, which were copied from French examples (Zeldenrust 2020, 190–192). Its large folio format is less typical of

36 For a more detailed discussion of these three woodcuts – accompanied by reproductions of Leeu's woodcuts and comparable images from German incunables – see Zeldenrust (2020, 162–165). Because of frequent image copying among German *Melusine* editions, it is difficult to pin down exactly which edition Leeu's woodcutter may have accessed; see also Zeldenrust (2020, 72–74).

37 Verdussen's edition is not listed on the USTC, but a copy is found in Göttingen, SUB, 8 FAB III, 2011.

38 All translations in this chapter are my own.

39 London, BL, Royal, 18. B. II. (prose); Cambridge, Trinity College, R. 3. 17 (verse). An edition of the prose translation is by Donald (1895) and the verse translation by Skeat (1866). Sarah Higley is working on an updated edition of the verse *Partenay* for the TEAMS Middle English texts series, but at the time of writing this has not been published.

De Worde's production, since he mostly published romances in quarto volumes (Meale 1992, 292). Only looking at material printed in English does not give us the full story here, however. French *Mélusine* manuscripts also circulated in England (Zeldenrust 2020, 196–198), and a copy of the French edition printed by Martin Husz in Lyon after 1479 was found in a London printing shop not long after it was published (Rau 1956).⁴⁰ The narrative was read in England in both English and French.

3.2 Strand 2: Translations Based on the German Version

The German translation spurred several new translations in turn. All central and northern European versions go back to this version, whether directly or indirectly. The narrative was published in Czech possibly as early as 1555, by Kašpar Aorgus in Prostějov (near Olomouc), though no copies of this edition survive (USTC 568854, KPS K03516). We know about its existence from Josef Jungmann's bibliography (Jungmann 1849, III no. 101), while a "Kronika o Meluzíně" ("Chronicle of Meluzína"), without printer or date, was also mentioned on bishop Vilém Prusinovský's list of books permitted to be sold (Voit 1987, 122 [no. 62]). An edition from 1595 does survive, but we do not know the printer or its place of printing (USTC 568855, KPS K03517).⁴¹ The title page says it is "opět z nowu gest w jazyku českém wytisštěná" (A1r; "again printed in the Czech language"), seemingly confirming that there was at least one earlier edition. There is a seventeenth-century edition from Litomyšl, and at least seven editions were published in the eighteenth century (Kolár 1960, 68–69). Most of these were printed in Prague or Olomouc, though one is from Jindřichův Hradec, in south Bohemia (KPS K03522).⁴² There are two text groups: text A represents the text as found in the 1595 edition, and text B is a "Christianised" version more focused on the salvation of Melusine and her sisters (Kanikova and Pynsent 1996, 66). The exact number of editions is difficult to pin down, as with some fragments it is hard to tell if they are from before or after 1800. Overall, though, there were at least 26 editions published by the end of the nineteenth century (Kanikova and Pynsent 1996, 65), which shows

⁴⁰ On French manuscripts in England, and the relation of Husz's edition to the English prose translation, see Zeldenrust (2020, 190, 196–198).

⁴¹ One copy survives in London, BL, General Reference Collection C.190.e.8 (formerly London, British Museum, 12430.a.39).

⁴² Known publishers include Petr Antonín Bennek, Karel Josef Jauernich, and Josefa Terezie Hirnleová.

that, even though the *Melusine* story came to the Czech language area relatively late, it had a long staying power.⁴³

The narrative was also translated into Polish, by Marcin Siennik (d. 1588). Siennik was a papermaker and translator, who translated several key Latin and German works for the Polish market (Wierzbicka-Trwoga 2020, 269). It has been argued that he was of German descent, and that his real name was Merten Heuwrecher (Bela 2016, 146). The earliest edition of Siennik's translation was printed in Kraków in 1569, but it is now lost. A copy of a sixteenth-century edition is mentioned in a nineteenth-century antiquary bookseller's list, but this copy was already lost by 1900 (Estreicher 1900, vol. 18, 215). The earliest edition that does survive is from 1671, an octavo volume printed by Wojciech Gorecki in Kraków.⁴⁴ Subsequent Polish *Meluzyna* editions, representing a modernised version, are predominantly from Kraków (1731, 1744, 1763, 1768), with two editions possibly from Lviv (1760, 1769), in modern-day Ukraine (Małek 2002, 12; Krzywý 2015, 19–20).⁴⁵ All seem to be in small, octavo format. One edition from 1787 has no details about the printer or place, and some editions are known only from bookseller's lists, as no copies survive. Such book lists can be helpful in getting a sense of production numbers – for instance, the 1621 inventory of Andrzej Cichończyk's bookstore in Jarosław mentions that he had sixteen copies of *Meluzyna* in stock. An inventory of Marcin Horteryn's bookstore lists thirteen copies of a *Meluzyna*.⁴⁶ At least nine Polish editions were printed by 1800.

Józef Muczkowski's work on Polish woodcuts in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century editions lists two woodcuts as belonging to a *Historia o Meluzynie* edition, now likely lost (1849, items 856 and 859). These are of interest because they not only confirm that there must have been more editions before 1700, but are also close copies of woodcuts designed by Hans Brosamer for Hermann Gülfferich, which first appeared in Gülfferich's 1554 German *Melusine* edition. It is not the only example of the copying of German images: the title pages of the 1731 and 1744 editions also feature an image made after a woodcut designed by Brosamer for Gülfferich, though this one was designed for *Fortunatus*.⁴⁷ Such instances show that this was more than a linguistic exchange, as materials were also copied. It also suggests it would not have been difficult for Polish printers to get their hands on German editions, and raises the question whether it was an edition

⁴³ For a more recent study of the Czech translation than Kanikova's, see Hon (2016).

⁴⁴ An incomplete copy is in Kraków, BJ, 3112317 I.

⁴⁵ Known publishers include Jakub Matyaszkiwicz, Michał Dyaszewski, and Stanisław Stachowicz.

⁴⁶ The posthumous inventory was recorded in the city books in 1635 (Żurkova 1988, 206).

⁴⁷ The title page of the 1744 edition is reproduced on the cover of this book. For other occurrences of the *Fortunatus* images, see the chapters on *Fortunatus* and *Apollonius* in this volume.

from Frankfurt – where four editions published before 1569 feature Brosamer’s woodcuts – that played a key mediating role for the Polish tradition.⁴⁸

There are also two Russian translations, both of which are based on the Polish translation by Siennik. The dating of the earlier Russian translation is uncertain, but it may be from around 1676, and the second translation ends with a note that gives a date of 12 January 1677 (Małek 2002, 19–21). They survive only in manuscripts – two for the first translation and eight for the later translation by Ivan Goudanski, a professional translator employed by the ministry to transfer works from Polish to Russian (Małek 2002, 19–22). These versions seem to have been read by a literary elite, as manuscripts were found in the libraries of Tsar Peter I the Great (1672–1725) and Prince Dmitri Mikhailovich Golitsyn (1721–1793) (Małek 2002, 26). One Russian manuscript was owned by a Swedish diplomat, Johan Gabriel Sparwenfeld (1655–1727) – who travelled to Russia between 1684 and 1687 – making its way to Sweden not long after it was made.⁴⁹ There are also two fragments of a Yiddish edition, likely printed around 1800 (Singer-Brehm 2020, 13–14). Fragment 1 consists of two leaves in octavo format, the title page and the first page. Fragment 2 also consists of two leaves in octavo, showing a title page and the last page. The fragments appear to be from different copies of the same edition, but the printer and place of printing are unknown.

The earliest surviving edition of a Danish translation dates to 1613, printed by Henrich Waldkirch in Copenhagen (USTC 270409). This is an edition of Claus Pors’s (d. 1617) collection *Leffnetz Compas* (“Life’s Compass”), which puts *Melusine* alongside other works with a didactic and moral aim, all translated from German. After this, the *Historie om Melusina* was also printed on its own, first in 1667 and 1697. Another twelve editions were printed before 1800, bringing the total to at least fifteen editions (DFB 7, 253–262). As we saw with German editions printed after 1600, quite a few Danish editions do not list a place of printing, the printer or the date, making it difficult to get a sense of the printing history. Another similarity is that some editions are marked as “trykt i dette Aar” (“printed this year”). However, those editions where the place of printing is known were all printed in Copenhagen. This is not unexpected for a narrative that came to Danish after 1600, when Copenhagen was the main printing city, especially after a royal open letter from 1562 stated that the only books sold in Denmark should be those printed in Copenhagen (Ridderstad 2005, 1244).

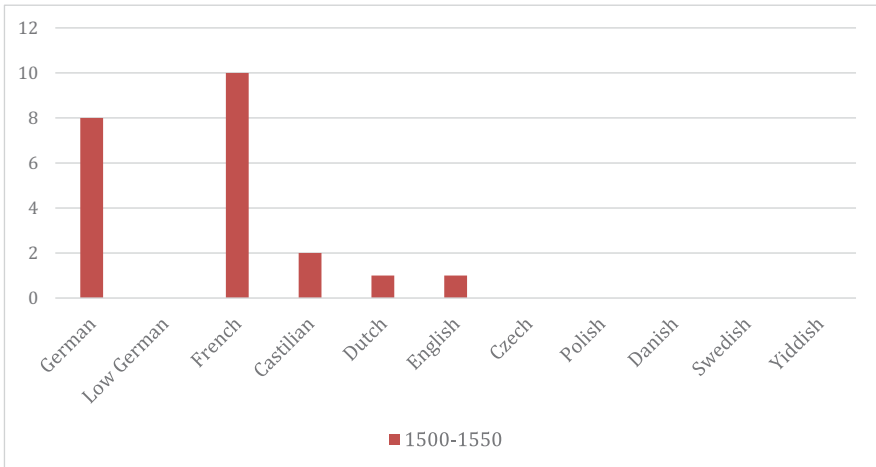
⁴⁸ See also the observation that the Polish editions condense the German prologue, as is done in editions from Frankfurt (Wierzbicka-Trwoga 2020, 270).

⁴⁹ Uppsala, UUB, Slav. 34.

The Danish translation, itself based on Thüring's German translation of Courette, in turn sparked a translation into Swedish at the start of the eighteenth century. There seems to be a Swedish *Melusine* manuscript dating from the beginning of the eighteenth century (Richter 2013, 227). The earliest edition was printed in 1736, but its printer and location are unknown – the problem of not always having details about the printer or place of printing returns here too. There is another edition from ca. 1760–1770, and one printed in Stockholm in 1772. There were only three Swedish editions before 1800 (SF I 1845, 327). However, the story seems to have taken off after that, as at least 43 more were printed in the nineteenth century, together making up five different versions (Richter 2013, 227). As with the Czech version, we see that the *Melusine* story arrived relatively late, but it nonetheless took the local book market by storm. Moreover, *Melusine* seems to have been familiar to Swedish literary circles in other ways, as Georg Stiernhielm (1598–1672) notes in his epic *Hercules* (1658) that her story was well-known and was printed in Danish. Editions in Danish – and perhaps also in German – were already being read by a Swedish audience in the seventeenth century.

If we look at the overall number of editions across Europe, there are two peaks of production: the periods 1500–1550 and 1750–1800. However, the geographical distribution is very different for these periods (Graphs 2 and 3). When *Melusine* was stealing the hearts of readers in western Europe, no editions had yet appeared in northern or central Europe. When it was at the peak of popularity in Czech, Polish, and Danish, only three editions were published in German, and none in French or other western European languages. The first generation of translations based on the French versions had its heyday in the sixteenth century and by 1800 we see that the narrative is either not printed anymore – in Castilian, Dutch, and English – or it survives in a new form, inspiring adaptations and spin-offs. In German, these include dramatic adaptations by Hans Sachs (1494–1576) in 1556 and Jakob Ayer (ca. 1543–1605) in 1598, a fairy tale rewriting by Justus Friedrich Wilhelm Zachariae (1726–1777) printed in 1772, and a new chapbook version printed from 1830 onwards (Classen 2017, 75). In French, new versions appeared, thanks to figures like François Nodot (d. ca. 1710) and Pierre Garnier (d. 1738) (discussed below). Spin-offs included the anonymous political pamphlet *La Complainte et lamentation ou prophétie de Mélusine à la France* (“The Complaint and lamentation or prophecy of Mélusine to France”), printed in both Lyon and Paris in 1575 (FB 30851 and 30852), and *Le roman de Mélusine par M.L.M.D.M.* attributed to the Marquise de Mosny, Isabelle Jouvenel des Ursins (d. 1644), printed in Paris in 1637 (Bouquin 2000). These works can be taken as further evidence of the narrative's popularity – especially since Mélusine's name features prominently in their titles – though not necessarily in its original form. However, claiming that the narrative was in decline would be a too western-centric view, as the second generation of translations, based on the

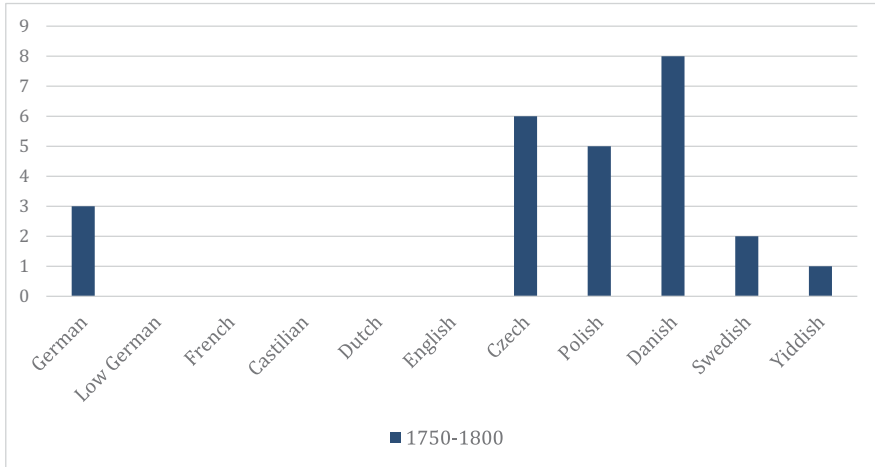
German version, was only beginning to come to life. The data also reminds us that comparisons are always relative – three editions before 1800 is a fair number for a Swedish context, even though it pales in comparison to the 57 German editions.⁵⁰ Finally, one noticeable gap in the data is the lack of Italian editions, though some German manuscripts were copied in regions that today are part of Italy, which suggests it was at least known in the northern border region.⁵¹



Graph 2: *Melusine* editions printed between 1500–1550.

⁵⁰ Compare the number of Swedish *Melusine* editions, for instance, to the numbers for other narratives discussed in this volume – three Swedish editions for *Aesopus*, three for *Fortunatus*, two for *Reynaert*, and four for the *Historia septem sapientum Romae*. That a narrative like *Apollo-nius* has fifteen editions makes it a notable outlier. The cut-off date of this study also impacts our understanding of the relative numbers, since *Melusine* arrived relatively late in Sweden. With 43 editions printed after 1800, the narrative gained momentum at a later point in time. This total of 46 Swedish editions would eclipse the number of French *Melusine* editions printed before 1900.

⁵¹ Trento, Biblioteca Comunale, Codex 1951, was copied in Trentino; Berlin, SBBPK, Ms. germ. fol. 1064, was copied in Tirol.



Graph 3: *Melusine* editions printed between 1750–1800.

4 Marketing a Multilingual Tradition

Since early printed books were sold without a cover, the ideal place to pique the interest of a prospective reader or buyer was through its preface material – the title page, prologue or other paratextual elements. These are the features a reader would first encounter when browsing a book in a printer’s shop, bookshop, market stall or at a fair. Traders looking to buy wholesale for the retail market would likely have judged the potential saleability of a book in this manner too. Alexandra Da Costa has noted that printer’s prologues often indicate that browsing was an assumed part of the book buying process, and that printers adjusted their strategies accordingly (2020, 15–18). As marketing techniques developed over time, prefatory material did much of the heavy lifting in making the book appeal to readers. Though this is not a comprehensive overview, this section zooms in on several key features and developments in the way the *Melusine* story was marketed to its audiences. The examples give insight into the key role played by publishers in the narrative’s spread across languages and survival across time, and what they thought would be its main attraction for their readers.

4.1 Translation Sells

The different *Melusine* versions show an interesting tension between local and supralocal. Although translators tend to adapt the story for a local audience and introduce updates that ensure it fits within a local literary context (Zeldenrust 2020), one of the most striking features found across almost all versions is that their status as translated, transcultural texts is highlighted from the start. In many cases this even became a selling point.

The German tradition is a good example. The earlier editions include the translator's prologue, where he declares that "ich / Thüring von Ringol/tingen [...] ein zû mol selcene und gar wunderliche fremde hystorie fun/den in franczösischer sprache und welscher zungen [...] zû tütscher zungen gemacht und translatiert" (*Melusine* 1473–1474, A1r–A1v; "I, Thüring von Ringoltingen [...] made and translated into the German tongue an especially rare and marvellous unknown history found in the French language and French tongue").⁵² The prologue repeats several times that Thüring is working from a "welschen buch" (*Melusine* 1473–1474, A1rv; "French book"). In several later editions, this announcement about a French source moves to the title page. For instance, Georg Messerschmidt's 1539 edition states that the story is "erstlich in Französischer sprach beschriben" (A1r; "first written in French") and was then "verdeutschet" (A1r; "translated into German"). Similarly, the 1578 edition by Egenolff or his heirs (VD16 M 4474) announces that it is "Ausz Frantzösischer Spraach in Teutsch verwandelt" (1r; "Changed from the French Language to German"), a notice repeated in the edition printed by Egenolff's heirs in about 1580 (VD16 ZV 28676). The title page of Michael and Johann Friedrich Endter's 1672 Nuremberg edition (VD17 7:667599Z) also highlights that it was translated "aus Französischer Sprache in die Teutsche" (A1r). When this notice was found only in the prologue, it was already easy to spot by a reader browsing the opening pages. When it is later moved to the title page, it becomes a key component in how printers sell their *Melusine* books, likely signalling a fashionable, cosmopolitan literary work.

The 1489 Castilian edition similarly mentions that the story was "hizieron pasar de Françés en Castellano" (Frontón Simón 1996, 986:18; "made to pass from French to Castilian"). That some printers used the work's status as a translation as a selling point is confirmed by the sales prospectus advertising Leeu's 1491 edition of the Dutch *Meluzine* (Fig. 1). Perhaps even more so than a title page, this prospectus – a single sheet to be put up at strategic places around the city – was designed to draw in prospective buyers. Its purpose is to sell. Alongside the notice

⁵² For a facsimile and transcription of the German *editio princeps*, see Schnyder and Rautenberg (2006).

that this is “een schoene, ghenuechlicke ende seer vreemde hystorie” (“a beautiful, pleasant, and very unfamiliar history”), where “vreemd” may suggest something unknown and foreign, Leeu highlights that it “es nu nyewelijc wt den walsche ghetranslateert in duytsche” (“is now newly translated from French to Dutch”). The *Meluzine* advertisement is even used to drum up interest in “vele meer andere nieuwe boecken” (“many more other new books”) published by the same printer. Again, the identification of a French source likely suggests a fashionable work of high literary style, showing that translation sells. This is more than a linguistic label – French becomes a shorthand for a respectable, high-status literary source.

The northern and central European versions – possibly taking their cue from German editions – also mention their source, which leads to increasingly longer literary genealogies. The 1671 Polish edition, for instance, says it is “Teraz nowo z niemieckiego języka na polski przełożona” (A1r; “Now newly translated from German to Polish”). Editions from 1731 and 1744 similarly state that they are “z niemieckiego języka na polski przełożona” (A1r; “translated from German to Polish”). The prologue of the Czech version adds the French source, noting that it was “sepsana Ržečj Wlaskau z kterězto teprw wyspaná gest Nemecky a z němčiny na Češkau” (A1r; “written in French, from which it was written in German, and from German to Czech”). The prologue of the 1613 Danish edition also traces this longer line, noting that the story was translated “aff Fransoiske / oc paa Welsk / aff Welsk / siden oc paa Tydske. Oc vil ieg samme Historie saa korteligen vdsætte paa vort Danske Tungemaal” (Yy5r: “from French to Romance [synonym for French], and afterwards from Romance to German. And I want to put the same History briefly into our Danish Tongue”). The Swedish editions, however, win the longest genealogy contest: although the title page of the 1736 edition mentions only that the story was translated from Danish to “Moders måhl” (A1r; “our Mother tongue”), the prologue says that it went from French to German, German to Danish, and finally from Danish to Swedish.

It is tempting to wonder what such notices can tell us about the perceived prestige of certain literary cultures, and the value of aligning one’s own literature with these cultures through translation. The fact that not all translations of the German version mention that there is an earlier French account is interesting in this respect, revealing a more eager orientation towards German literary culture. Most of all, though, these notices remind readers that we are dealing with localised versions of a shared European narrative. We see a shared desire to have the latest fashionable hits available in one’s own language. It was also likely the success of the story in other regions that gave publishers the confidence that it would sell in their target area too.

4.2 Title Pages Depicting Melusine's Hybrid Body

A good example of a shared element that nonetheless has localised features is the typical title page, featuring an image of Melusine in hybrid form, which appears in editions in multiple languages. In each language context this is done differently, and there are also changes across time, but this phenomenon nonetheless tells us something about which elements of the story had a more universal, cross-cultural appeal.

The earliest *Melusine* edition to feature a title page was Johann Bämmler's second German edition of 1480 (USTC 747184, GW 12660). It has a large woodcut of Melusine in her bathtub, alongside her two sisters and with a family tree above her, depicting several sons. The image emphasises the marvellous aspects of the narrative – Melusine is naked in half-serpent form, and Geoffroy's large tooth is shown – as much as its dynastic concerns. Partly because of the copying and reuse of images among German printers, this setting was to become the standard depiction of title woodcuts across almost all sixteenth-century *Melusine* editions, whether printed in Augsburg, Strasbourg or Frankfurt.⁵³ These German title woodcuts are distinct in showing Melusine alongside her blood relatives (Fig. 2).

Over time, however, the dynastic element disappeared, and her marvellous nature took the foreground. In the woodcut that opens *Melusine* in Feyerabend's collection, the family tree is gone, though Melusine is still depicted as a hybrid alongside her sisters. The eighteenth-century *Historische Wunder-Beschreibung* editions have the same setting on their title page, showing Melusine in a bathtub outside, with a sister on each side. The title calls further attention to Melusine's supernatural nature, reminding readers that Melusine is a "Sirene oder Meer-Wunder" (A1r; "Siren or Sea Miracle"). The title pages of the *Wunderbare Geschichte* editions, printed from the late eighteenth century until around 1810, highlight her marvellous nature even more, with a woodcut showing a siren or mermaid playing a harp.⁵⁴ Gone are Melusine's sisters, and, though the figure is still half-naked and

53 Not all title pages feature a woodcut. The editions by Knoblochzer printed in 1491 (USTC 747187, GW 12663) and Messerschmidt in 1539 advertise in the title that it has "figuren" or images, but neither printer took the opportunity to highlight its illustrative contents by putting a woodcut on the title page. The 1549 edition by Gülfferich does not have a hybrid Melusine on the title page, but this is because it is the edition illustrated with *Fortunatus* woodcuts; his 1554 edition features the typical German title woodcut.

54 See, for instance, the copy of a *Wunderbare Geschichte* printed in 1750, held in Berlin, HUB, Yi 31760:F8, which has been digitized: <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:kobv:11-711348>.

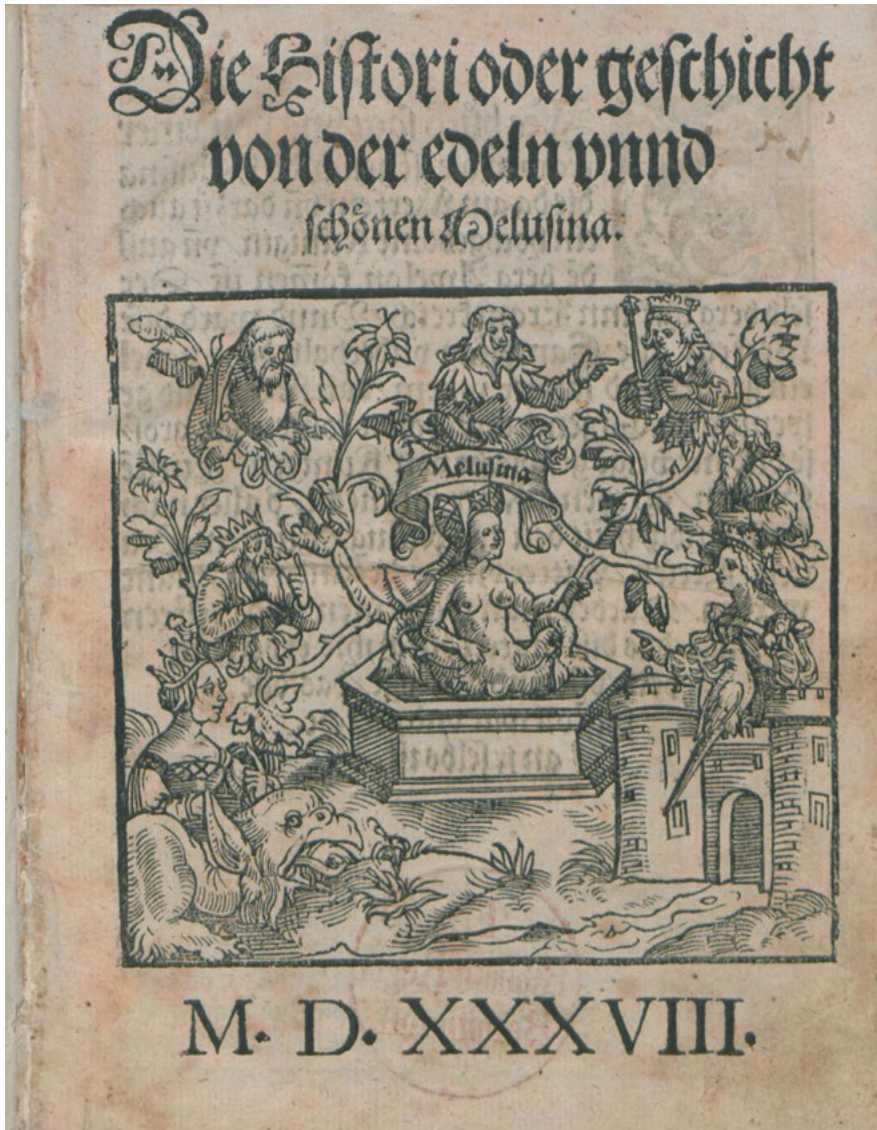


Fig. 2: *Die histori oder geschicht von der edeln unnd schönen Melusina.* Augsburg: Heinrich Steiner, 1538, A1r (Berlin, SBBPK, Department of Manuscripts and Historical Prints, Yu 821: R). By courtesy of Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz.

partly submerged in water, she is not in a tub and she has a fishtail rather than a serpent's.⁵⁵ The image looks to be inspired by depictions of sirens more so than by the pictorial *Melusine* tradition. In these later German title pages, Melusine loses her dynastic identity and the emphasis is on her hybrid nature.

The Dutch editions of 1491, 1510, and 1602 all feature an image of a hybrid Meluzine on their title page too. Leeu likely set the precedent, as both Eckert van Homberch and Verdussen copied Leeu's images in their editions. That Leeu recognised the potential for this image early on is also seen in his sales prospectus, which features the same title woodcut, placed above the announcement of a new *Meluzine* edition (Fig. 1). It takes up half the page and is clearly meant to be the main focal point, drawing the attention of both new readers – who will surely wonder why this woman has a serpent's tail – and those already familiar with the story with what is perhaps the most pivotal, emblematic scene of the narrative. Unlike in the German editions, this woodcut was not made specifically for the title page – Leeu reused a woodcut from the main text that illustrates the scene where Raymondin discovers his wife's serpent's tail.

We also see Melusine's hybrid form on the title pages of several French editions, starting with those printed in Paris in the first half of the sixteenth century. These title woodcuts are different again, as they combine two scenes in one image. On the left we see Raymondin spying on Mélusine in the bath, whilst in the top right corner Mélusine flies away after her betrayal and final transformation (Fig. 3). It is another example of a snapshot of key scenes from the narrative used to draw the eye of any reader browsing for entertaining books. The earliest edition to feature this title woodcut is that printed by Philippe Le Noir ca. 1525, though it may have been copied from Michel Le Noir's 1517 edition (USTC 72734, FB 30843), of which no copies survive (Bouquin 2000, 217).⁵⁶ The image appears on the title pages of at least five other Parisian editions.⁵⁷ The edition printed by Olivier Arnoullet in Lyon in the 1540s (USTC 56007, FB 30850) also features a woodcut of Mélusine as a hybrid, though it is different – like Leeu, Arnoullet reuses the cut designed to illustrate the bathing scene. The two-part image is found much more often. It was taken over by printers in Troyes in the seventeenth century, who used this as the standard title page for *Bibliothèque bleue* editions. Though it does not show much innovation on the part of Troyes printers, the

55 For more on these later adaptations, see Schnyder (2010) and Künast's updated study (2013).

56 Philippe Le Noir's edition is not listed on the USTC, but a copy is found in Paris, Ars., Rés. 4-BL-4338.

57 These are the editions by Jean [II] Trepperel ca. 1527–1532 (USTC 72937); Alain Lotrian and Denis Janot printed ca. 1531–1532 (USTC 73042) and ca. 1533–1534 (USTC 56061); and two undated editions by Jean Bonfons or his widow, Catherine Sergent.

reuse highlights how reliable this title woodcut is. Because of the repetition across time, readers know what they are picking up – this is not laziness but clever marketing. Since we know of at least eleven editions from Troyes in this period, the formula apparently worked well.

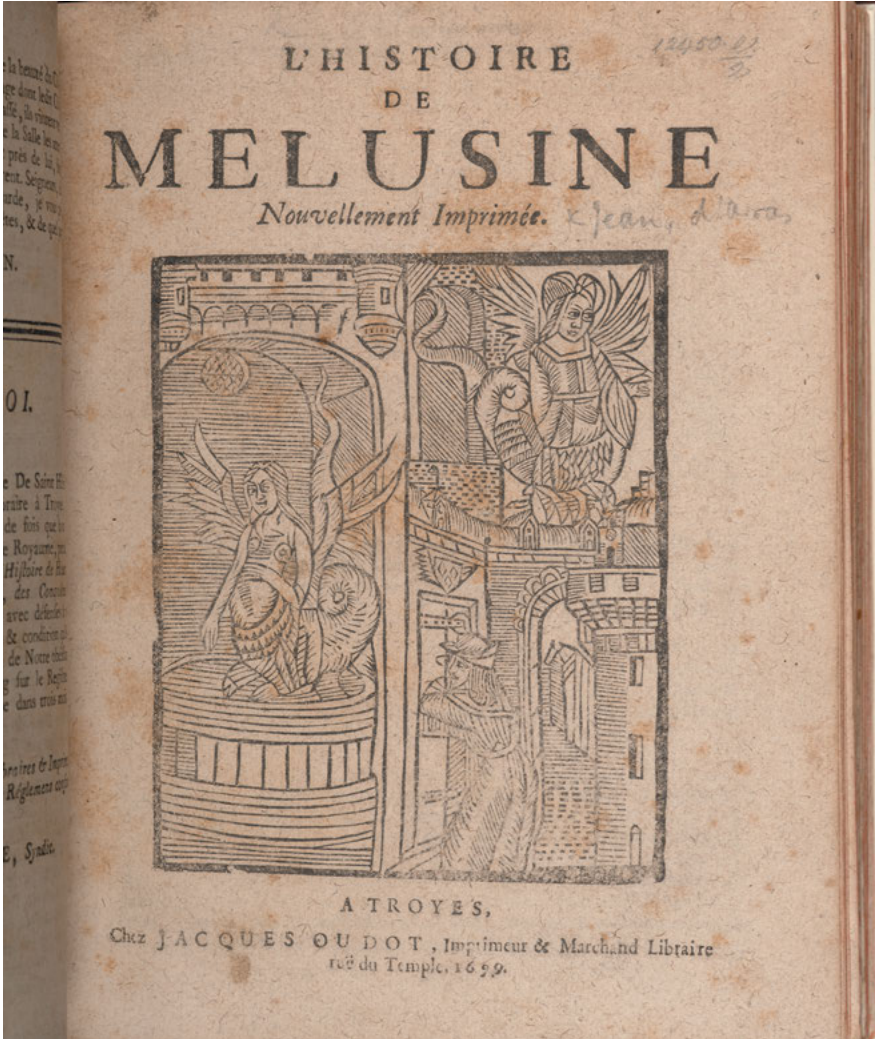


Fig. 3: *L'histoire de Melusine*. Troyes: Jacques Oudot, 1699, A1r (London, BL, General Reference Collection 12450.e.24.(2)). © The British Library Board.

Several Czech editions also have title pages showing Meluzína as a half-serpent or mermaid-like figure. The 1595 edition has a stocky hybrid figure with a scaly tail, who is on land rather than water, with no Raymondin or sisters in sight (Fig. 4). The 1701 edition (KPS K03519) has a different image, more in line with the typical bathing scene, with Meluzína in a bathhouse and Reymond spying on her on the

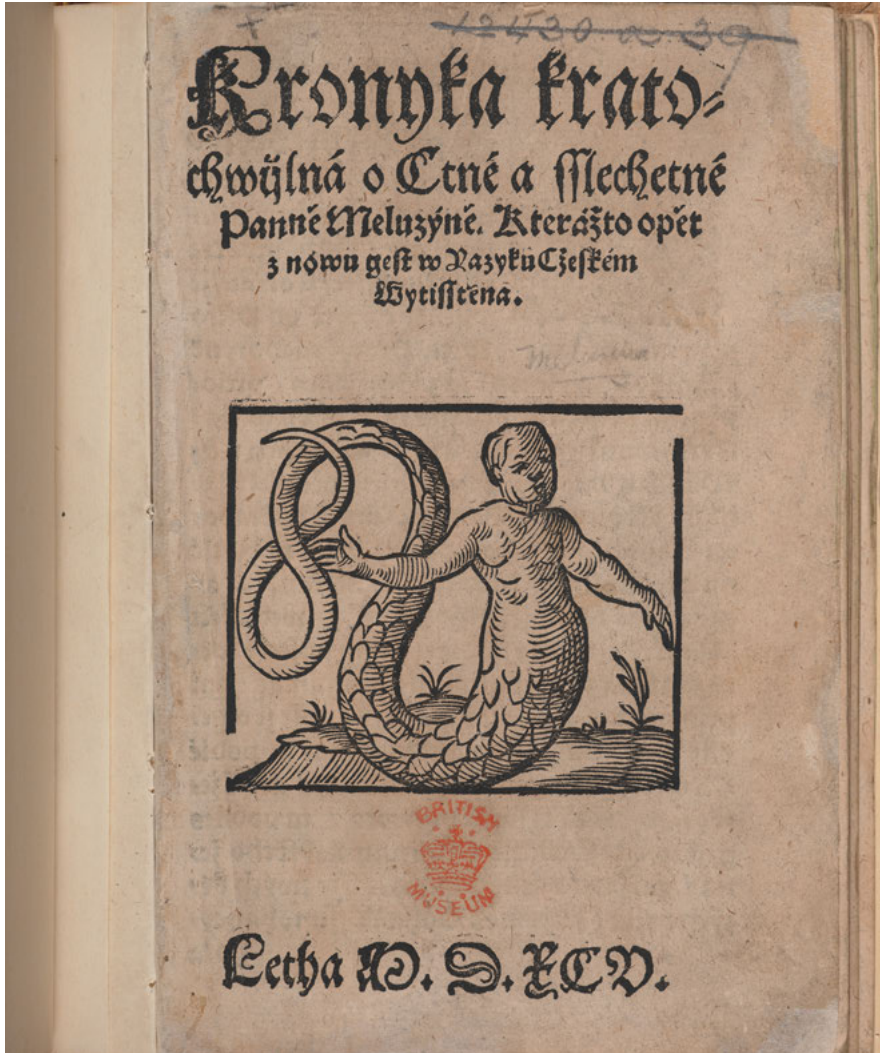


Fig. 4: *Kronyka kratochwilná o Ctné a sšlechtné Panně Meluzýně*. S.l.: s.n., 1595, A1r (London, BL, General Reference Collection C.190.e.8.). © The British Library Board.

left. The edition printed by Karel Josef Jauernich in Prague ca. 1755–1767 (KPS K03520) and an edition printed ca. 1780–1820 (KPS K03522) share the same image, a copy of the title woodcut of the German *Historische Wunder-Beschreibung* editions. It shows the familiar setting of Meluzína in a tub outside, flanked by her two sisters. Czech printers may have taken their cue from the German editions in deciding to put a hybrid Meluzína on the title page. This is a marked contrast to, say, the 1744 Polish edition with the woodcut from *Fortunatus*, where the depiction of a man and woman meeting hands might suggest an amorous theme.⁵⁸ Czech printers purposely chose to market this not as a love story or a didactic work, but they expected it would be the supernatural elements that would attract their readers.

Melusine's hybrid body becomes an emblem and an effective marketing tool that was not bound by one region or language. This depiction was used so often that, in theory, one could walk into a bookshop in a region where one did not speak the language – or indeed, one could travel through time – and still be able to find the local *Melusine* version going by the title page alone. It reminds us how woodcuts can function as a kind of *lingua franca*, creating a shared discourse not bound by one language, signalling content across regions and texts.

4.3 Change and Innovation

It is tempting to think with medieval narratives that later become chapbooks that if these texts were not constantly reinvented, they were superseded, abandoned for something more fashionable. How else could they keep from being seen as outmoded? Before we zoom in on some of the notable changes in the way this story is presented, it is worth reflecting that, on the whole, the *Melusine* narrative stayed relatively intact as it was retold time and again, across an impressive number of languages. Translators made adjustments that can have a drastic effect on how the story is read, even if they seem minor, but the core of the story rarely changed. This suggests that the narrative had a certain timeless appeal, partly explaining its continuing currency. There were only a few occasions when it needed to be reinvented. Even then, a publisher would often simply shift the emphasis, taking an element already present in the narrative and bringing it to the foreground, or removing scenes so that what remained took on new significance.

⁵⁸ The image depicts a man and woman exchanging a purse, but the quality and size of the woodcut is such that the purse is hard to make out against the backdrop of trees and shrubbery. A reader not familiar with the *Fortunatus* story may well have overlooked the purse. See the reproduction of the 1744 title page on the cover of this volume.

One remarkable shift in the marketing of *Melusine* is its presentation as a love story. Feyerabend's *Buch der Liebe* is the clearest example, with the title page introducing the collection as "Allerley Alten und neuen Exempel" (1r; "Various Old and new Examples") from which one may learn "was recht ehrliche / dargegen Old was unordentliche Bulerische Lieb sey" (1r; "what is truly honest and what is, by contrast, inappropriate, Lecherous Love").⁵⁹ Feyerabend adds that the tales are also a model of "Ritterschaft" (1r; "Chivalry") as practised by the nobility. From the start, the emphasis is on the narrative's generic qualities. Forget about the mix of dynastic history and tale of wonder – this is a love story. Fittingly, the woodcut on the title page is a generic depiction of two lovers, which is then re-used across various texts, stressing generic applicability over the specific features of each story.⁶⁰ Woodcuts are recycled throughout the edition, so that the lovers in each tale look much the same.

The 1526 Castilian edition achieves a similar effect in its reuse of generic-looking images. The printers – Jacobo and Juan Cromberger – reused woodblocks they already had in stock, as several images also appear in their 1510 edition of *Olivier de Castille* and their various editions of *Amadis* (Romero Tobar 1987, 1013). The recycled woodcuts illustrate scenes – like weddings and battles – commonly found in chivalric romances, highlighting the formulaic aspects of these narratives. The title page of the 1526 *Melosina* shows a composite of two factotum woodcuts, one of a knight on horseback accompanied by a servant, and the other a noble lady on a horse. The lady is supposed to represent Melosina but – unlike with the title pages that highlight her hybrid nature – she looks no different from any other noble lady. Indeed, the same factotum cut is used to represent other female characters in the main text (Zeldenrust 2020, 112). Spanish chivalric narratives printed around this time typically have a title page with a large woodcut of a knight on horseback, as is the case, for instance, with the edition of *Amadis* which the Crombergers also printed in 1526 (USTC 337574; IB 16428). Although a defining characteristic of *Melosina* is that our main, titular character is a woman, the 1526 title page follows the mould and shows us a knight on horseback, with Melosina relegated to the role of love interest. The images help foreground generic elements of a more typical knight-conquers-lady narrative in an edition likely designed to cash in on the rising popularity of *libros de caballerías*.

⁵⁹ The modern edition of Feyerabend's *Melusine* by Roloff (1991) does not feature the main title page of the entire *Buch der Liebe*. Quotations are therefore from the digitized copy of Feyerabend's edition held at Basel, UB, Wack 688, <https://doi.org/10.3931/e-rara-21652> (26 August 2022).

⁶⁰ The title woodcut also appears, for instance, on 35v illustrating *Magelone*, and on 127r to illustrate *Florio und Biancaffora*. This is not to say that all woodcuts in this edition are generic; some are specific to *Melusine*.

We might not immediately think of *Melusine* as a model of love – presumably it is included in Feyerabend’s collection as an example of what not to do – but Feyerabend is not the only one who saw its didactic potential. In Pors’s *Leffnetz Compass* (“Life’s Compass”), it is said to offer life lessons, as part of a “nyttig Huss-bog” (A1r; “useful Household Book”) full of “victige Lærdomme / Atvarsler oc Paa-mindelser / som en huer Christen Ven Kand rette sit Liff oc Leffner effter” (A1r; “true Lessons, Warnings and Admonitions, on which every Christian Friend Can model their Life and Conduct”).⁶¹ The first part of the collection has nine chapters and is organised by theme, covering concerns from marriage to old age and death, but also topics like dreams, theft, and drunkenness (Richter 2009, 189). The second part contains 253 narratives, with the *Historie om Melusina* appearing as the final text, after a translation of *The Golden Ass*. Pors’s version is shorter than the German version, leaving out, for instance, the adventures of Melusine’s sons (Richter 2009, 189). As the mention of a Christian reader on the title page suggests, the Reformation also left a trace – as it did on printing and translation activities in Denmark more widely – as Pors removed many Catholic elements (Richter 2009, 196–199). However, the main change is the context in which the narrative appears, becoming part of a manual for those “som haffuer lyst til at leffue retsindelig” (A1r; “who want to live righteously”), though by noting that the stories are “lystig at læse” (A1r; “pleasant to read”), Pors reminds us that wise lessons can have entertainment value too. This didactic element disappears with the later Danish editions, where the narrative is published on its own. In these editions, the emphasis lies more on the reading experience: for instance, the 1667 edition introduces it as “En smuck lystig Historie / Om Melusina / Dog saare ynckeligt oc bedrøffveligt paa det sidste at læse” (“A beautiful, pleasant History of Melusina, Though very pitiful and sad to read at the end”) (Bruun 1902, 501).

The Danish *Leffnetz Compass* is unusual in recasting the narrative before it is introduced to a new audience, as drastic transformations are more common in regions where the story was known for some time. As the French context highlights, this was not necessarily because the story did not sell and needed to be reinvigorated. The split *Mélusine* and *Geoffroy* editions show quite the opposite. They were broken up out of economic motivations, as printers could now sell two books to anyone who wanted the complete story, and also provide a seemingly new option that responded to a growing vogue for chivalric romances. It was the already-existing demand for *Mélusine* that allowed *Geoffroy* to ride another, albeit smaller, wave of interest. That *Geoffroy* was not a new text, but “a patchwork of episodes hastily stitched together” (Pairet 2006, 197), and that the split *Mélusine* edition lacked crucial

61 Quotations are from the digitized copy of København, KB, 4,-9 8° 163 on EEBO.

narrative links, seems not to have mattered, considering their continued reprinting for more than a century. One important consequence of the unravelling of Jean d'Arras's careful *entrelacement* of the adventures of mother and son is that many scenes with a historical tone are gone and the split *Mélusine* version shifts its focus more towards the marvellous episodes (Harf-Lancner 1988, 350–352).

There is also an interesting tension between the narrative's mythical and historical elements in two adaptations from the turn of the eighteenth century. The first is François Nodot's *L'Histoire de Mélusine* published in Paris in 1698.⁶² Nodot introduces new episodes and characters, makes Mélusine more demonic, and emphasises the story's supernatural aspects, so that it becomes more like a fairy tale. In an epistle added at the start, Nodot says he makes these changes for “Mademoiselle”, who loves stories of fairies – but he also adds that such stories are true (Blom 1996, 21). In a period often seen as the rise of the mass market and the ‘general’ reader, this edition was intended for an aristocratic readership (Blom 1996, 21–22). Another change happened within the context of the *Bibliothèque bleue* editions printed in Troyes. Around 1728, Pierre Garnier published a censored version of the narrative that takes out its possibly problematic scenes and severely reduces its marvellous aspects (Bouquin 2000). Though Garnier was obliged to gain official permission before printing, which means the censoring may not have been his personal choice, it is noteworthy that his approach in adapting this staple for a new age is the opposite to Nodot's. The approach does not seem to have done any favours with readers, though, as Garnier's censored version was not reprinted and *Mélusine* subsequently disappeared from the *Bibliothèque bleue* (Blom 2012, 129). In French, *Mélusine* lost momentum as it moved into the eighteenth century, but it is important to remember that in other regions of Europe the narrative was still going strong, continuing to capture the imagination of new readers.

The narrative's adaptability – thanks to its combination of a range of genres and themes – as well as its accessibility, no doubt helped its continued survival. Publishers did not always have to change much – introducing a different title page, tweaking a prologue or changing the woodcuts would go a long way in updating the narrative. A common strategy was to remove sections from the sprawling medieval narratives, so that the story slimmed down over time. However, apart from the split *Geoffroy* and *Mélusine* editions, the editions that introduced drastic changes were one-off experiments, which were not reprinted. The narrative did not always need any fancy alterations, and it held its own for a long time. Luck must have played a role too – if the right, trend-setting printer picked up the tale or if illustrative material was already available, this likely boosted the narrative's chances of being printed again. In

62 Nodot also wrote a *Histoire de Geoffroy* around 1700.

the end, however, the secret to why *Melusine* captured readers' imaginations across time and space may simply be that it was a really good story. After all, who would not want to read about a beautiful fairy who turns into a serpent?

Tab. 1: Earliest extant editions of *Melusine* in European vernaculars.

Language	Title resp. incipit or colophon	Title / incipit / colophon (English translation)	Place, printer-publisher and year	Reference
High German	No title page in first edition Incipit: "Dis ouentürlich bûch bewifet wye von einer frouwen ge/nant Melufina die ein merfeye vnd dar zû ein geborne kû/nigin vnd vff den berg awalon kommen was"	This adventurous book teaches us about a lady named Melusina, who was a mermaid as well as a born queen and came onto mount Avalon	Basel: Bernhard Richel, [1473–1474]	USTC 747181, GW 12656
French	No title page in first edition Colophon: "Cy finist le livre de melusine en francoys"	Here ends the book of Melusine in French	Genève: Adam Steinschaber, 1478	USTC 71174 and 765244, FB 30835
Low German	[<i>Historie van eenere koninginnen geheten Melusina</i>] ⁶³	History of a queen called Melusina	Lübeck: Lukas Brandis, [ca. 1478]	USTC 747179, GW 12664
Castilian	No title in first edition Colophon: "Fenesçe la istoria de Melosina"	Here ends the history of Melosina	Toulouse: Juan Parix and Estevan Cleblat, 14 July 1489	USTC 344879, IB 50128
Dutch	No title page in first edition Incipit: "Hier beghint een schoen historie sprekende van eenre vrouwen gheheeten Meluzine / van haren kinderen ende haren geslachte / ende van haren wonderliken wercken"	Here begins a beautiful history that tells of a woman called Meluzine, of her children and her descendants, and of her marvellous works	Antwerpen: Gheraert Leeu, 9 Febr. 1491	USTC 436129, GW 12665

⁶³ The surviving copies of the Low German incunable are all incomplete and no title page survives; the title given here is a reconstruction used in modern catalogues.

Tab. 1 (continued)

Language	Title resp. incipit or colophon	Title / incipit / colophon (English translation)	Place, printer-publisher and year	Reference
English	No title page known, survives only in fragments Title given in modern catalogues: <i>Melusine a tale of the serpent fairy</i>	—	London: Wynkyn de Worde, [1510]	USTC 501139, STC 14648
Czech	<i>Kronyka kratochwijná o Ctné a sšlechtné Panně Meluzýně</i>	Brief Chronicle of the virtuous and noble Maiden Meluzína	S.l.: s.n., 1595	USTC 568855, KPS K03517
Polish	<i>Historia wdzięczna o szlachetnej a pięknej Meluzynie</i>	A pleasant History of the noble and beautiful Meluzyna	Kraków: Wojciech Gorecki, 1671	Kraków, BJ, 3112317 I
Danish	<i>Nu efterfølger en anden offuermaadige smuck oc lystig Historie / om Melusina, dog saare ynckeligt oc bedrøffueligt paa det sidste at læse</i>	Now follows another exceedingly beautiful and pleasant History of Melusina, although [it is] very pitiful and sad to read at the end	København: Henrich Waldkirch, 1613	USTC 270409
Swedish	<i>En wacker och behagelig doch ther hos mycket ynckelig Historia om Princessan Melusina och Gref Reimundt</i>	A beautiful and pleasant but also very pitiful History of Princess Melusina and Count Reimundt	S.l.: s.n., 1736	Copy: Stockholm, KB [no shelfmark]
Yiddish	<i>Historie Wunderliche beschreibung fun der schene Melusina ain kinigs-tochter aus frankreich</i> ⁶⁴	History Marvellous account of the beautiful Melusina, a king's daughter from France	S.l.: s.n., ca. 1800	Described in Singer- Brehm (2020)

⁶⁴ Title transcription in roman letters is from Singer-Brehm (2020, 16).