Historia de la linda Melosina

Edition, Study, and Notes

by

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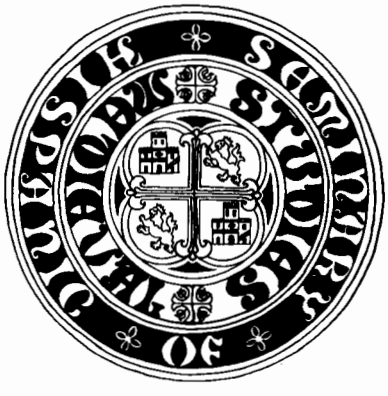

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Introduction

Jean d'Arras' *Mélusine* (c. 1387)—or *Historia de la linda Melosina*, in its Spanish translation—was a best-seller of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Jean d'Arras' narrative tells the story of the fairy Mélusine, her union with her mortal husband, Raimond, their building up of the House of Lusignan, their line, and their conquests. The conflict of *Mélusine* centers on Raimond's promise never to see Mélusine on Saturday when she secretly becomes transformed into a serpent from the waist down. His breaking of that promise causes Mélusine's metamorphosis into a purely fairy state, her departure from the mortal world, and the eventual downfall of the House of Lusignan, a fief in southwestern France, in the province of Poitou. The narrative of Mélusine and Lusignan, with its themes of passion and tragedy, of fairies and supernatural metamorphosis, of battles and court life and kingdom-building, all makes for a compelling tale which was a favorite of the Middle Ages.[1] With its realism, as well as mystery, the text resembles, on the one hand, the fifteenth-century chivalric romances, such as *Tirant lo Blanch*, with intricate detail of courtly customs, life and military strategy, and, on the other, the earlier texts, such as *Amadís*, with reference to chronicles, ages past, and cruel beings (i.e., Endriago and Orrible) who need be destroyed.

The romance begins with the story of King Elinas and his meeting of Présine in the forest. He immediately falls in love with the lovely damsel, and she consents to marry him upon the condition that he not see her during childbirth. The king so promises, and they live happily until the king, tricked by his son from a former marriage, walks in on Présine immediately after she has given birth to their three daughters: Mélusine, Mélior, and Palestine. Présine, enraged at the king for having broken his promise, leaves for the Isle of Avalon, taking the daughters with her.

On Avalon, Présine raises her daughters, telling them sadly of their lost heritage. Mélusine, the eldest, with the consent of her sisters, takes revenge on their father by imprisoning him in the mountain of Brumblerio. Présine punishes the daughters for their cruelty by assigning them each a penance. Mélusine's punishment is to be transformed into a serpent from the waist down every Saturday, a transformation she must hide from her husband should she ever marry.

The plot then shifts to the life of Raimond, who is the favorite of his uncle, Aimery, the Count of Poitiers, with whom he lives. While hunting, the count is accidentally killed by Raimond when the latter's sword passes through the attacking boar and wounds the count. Distraught by his misfortune, Raimond rides aimlessly through the forest until he meets Mélusine who reveals to him all his secrets and counsels him how to remedy his situation. By following Mélusine's advice, Raimond avoids discovery as the unwitting murderer of the count and gains lands through a grant from the new Count of Poitiers. Raimond and Mélusine marry, and Mélusine bears Raimond ten sons: Urien, Eudes, Guion, Antoine, Regnault, Geoffroy, Fromont, Orrible, Raymonnet, and Thierri. All of which, except for the youngest two, have physical defects as a result of the supernatural condition of their mother. Mélusine devotes herself not only to raising her sons but to helping Raimond regain his late father's lost lands in Brittany and to building up Lusignan and surrounding cities by constructing edifices and helping the poor.

When of age, Urien and Guion set out to seek their fortune and fight the Moors in Cyprus and Armenia. As a result, Urien and Guion marry and become the kings of Cyprus and Armenia, respectively. Antoine and Regnault follow their brothers' example and set off for Luxembourg to aid the besieged Duchy. Antoine marries the Duchess of Luxembourg; and Regnault, the Queen of Vienna. Geoffroy, the bravest and cruelest of the surviving sons, finds fame through his exploits in Ireland, Syria, and Germany. He also establishes his reputation as a tyrant by burning the Abbey of Maillezais into which his brother Fromont had entered. Geoffroy thus kills all the monks at Maillezais, including his own brother. Of the other brothers, Eudes becomes

Count of La Marche; Raymonnet, Count of Forez; and Thierri, Lord of Parthenay. Orrible is killed by Raimond to save the kingdom from the son's diabolical nature manifest in his three eyes and evil acts.

As a result of the treachery of Raimond's brother, the Count of Forez, Raimond breaks his promise to Mélusine and causes her metamorphosis into a fairy spirit and her departure from the mortal world. The grief of her parting causes Raimond to leave his kingdom to Geoffroy and seek refuge in the monastery of Montserrat, where Raimond dies.

The story ends with the tale of Mélior and how she guards the Castle of the Sparrowhawk and how a descendant of Mélusine, the King of Armenia, by his folly, causes the downfall of his line.

According to Jean d'Arras, the romance *Mélusine* is based on chronicles and documents furnished the author by the Duke of Berry and the Count of Salisbury (Salbery):

> Et pour ce, au commencement de ceste hystoire, je, cognoicent que je ne soye pas digne de lui requerir, supplie a sa haulte dignité que ceste histoire je puise achever a sa gloire et louenges, et au plaisir de mon tres hault, puissant et redoubté seigneur, Jehan, filz de roy de France, duc de Berry et d'Ouvergne, conte de Poictou et d'Ouvergne, laquelle histoire j'ay commencé selon les vrayes coroniques que j'ai euez tant de lui comme du conte de Salbery en Angleterre et plusieurs livres qui ont esté trouvez, par ce que sa noble serour Marie, fille de Jehan, roy de France, duchesse de Bar, marquise du Pont, avoit supplié d'avoir la dicte hystoire à mon dessusdit seigneur, son tres chier et amé frere, lyquelz a tant fait qu'il en a sceu au plus prez de la droite verité qu'il a peu, et m'en a commandé a faire le traictié de l'ystoire qui cy après s'ensuit.[2]

The basing of the romance on chronicle material may be true since, as Stouff points out, Jean d'Arras' patron, Jean de Berry, possessed a library rich with texts, some no longer extant, which could have served the author in the composition of *Mélusine*: e.g., the lost Latin manuscripts of *L'Istoire de Lusignem*, as well as the texts of Gervase of Tilbury (*Otia Imperialia*) and Vincent of Beauvais (*Speculum naturale*), the latter two works containing accounts of fairies who marry mortals and metamorphose.[3] On the other hand, the insistence on the veracity of the sources could be a literary topos as also found in other medieval texts such as Froissart's *Méliador*. It is most probable that, as Jean d'Arras maintains in his prologue, both oral and written sources combine to form the basis of *Mélusine*.

Basically the story of the fairy princess falls within the realm of the marvelous and fantastic, placed in the historical context of the House of Lusignan and the Crusades. The legends of Mélusine and her children are numerous, as are similar tales of water and air sprites who marry mortals and then disappear. The myth of Mére Lusine existed from the days of the Roman Empire in Gaul and has its origins in Gallo-Roman tradition as well as in Celtic beliefs.[4] Mére Lusine was thought to build her castles and churches at night by the light of the moon. Not only did she build up edifices but also dropped large stones from her apron as she carried them to the building site, thus dotting the countryside with boulders. She also was responsible for accidents during construction, and builders cited her for all mishaps and delays.

Although the story is older than the romances which tell the tale, the legend of Mélusine reaches its greatest dissemination with the texts of d'Arras and his later imitator in verse, Coudrette. The fairy depicted by d'Arras, however, is less capricious than her legendary antecedents and overshadows previous myths to become the patron spirit of Poitou. According to legend, Mélusine, the guardian and banshee of the House of Lusignan, a subterranean serpentine creature, watches over the family and, by her appearance and screams, prognosticates their deaths and the changes in control over the Castle of Lusignan. Mélusine herself, in the various legends and texts, has been portrayed as either a serpent or a mermaid, stressing her half-mortal, half-immortal existence.[5] Mélusine also combines both aqueous and aerial elements of the folkloric tradition to which her story relates. She is a water nymph, found repeatedly, even during her

mortal existence, near fountains and baths, and her penance for imprisoning her father in the mountain of Brumblerio is to spend her Saturdays transformed into a serpent from the waist down, bathing in a pool. She also makes her disappearance from mortal existence by flying away. Thus she displays the aquatic and aerial characteristics typically found in the folklore of the metamorphosis of fairies.[6]

The legend of Mélusine was taken up by Jean d'Arras at the behest of Jean de Berry and his sister Marie, who were desirous to establish their descent from Mélusine, thus glorifying their lineage and confirming the legitimacy of the Berry claim over Lusignan. Jean d'Arras states in the prologue to his romance that his purpose is to tell the history of Lusignan, which in the late fourteenth century was held by the Duke of Berry. The period in which d'Arras was writing was a turbulent one in France and the control over Lusignan and the territories of Jean of France changed significantly during the Hundred Years' War. It was important for the Duke to establish his patrimony over Lusignan, which he received from Charles V. Jean d'Arras took up the request of his patron to authenticate the latter's claim.

The Lusignan family had held its fief from the Counts of Poitiers since the earliest records of the region. Hugues II, the second lord of Lusignan, built the Castle of Lusignan in the mid-tenth century.[7] Lusignan was held by the family until 1308 when Guy de Lusignan died leaving no male heir, whereupon Philip le Bel of France annexed Lusignan to the crown.[8] The line of Lusignan thus ended in France but continued in the East where descendents of Lusignan were rulers of Cyprus from the late twelfth to the fifteenth century and of Armenia from the mid to late fourteenth century. Jean de Berry received Lusignan from Charles V in 1357, but it was ceded to England in 1360 with the Treaty of Brétigny and then returned again to Jean de Berry in 1369.[9] The Duke's fate was no more certain during the Hundred Years' War than that of his territories. The son of Jean le Bon, King of France (1350-1364), Jean de Berry was a patron of the arts and a leader of cultural life but plagued by political disaster. In 1360, he not only lost holdings to the English but was exchanged as one of the hostages to release his father who was captured during the Battle of Poitiers. Later, with the insanity of King Charles VI, the Duke of Berry was to support the Armagnacs against the Burgundians and find himself on the side of the vanquished.

The historicity of the characters of the Mélusine tale is not as clearly identifiable as is the history of the place and patron of the text. As Stouff, Morris, and Roach show, one can find similarities between individual characters of the text and documented members of the Lusignan family, but the identification is not always certain.[10] Stouff mentions various possibilities for the historical counterparts of Raimond and Mélusine: Raimond, Count of Forez, successor of Guy II, and his wife Marie, daughter of Hugues le Brun, King of Albania. Mélusine might also be Mélisende, daughter of Baudoin du Bourg, third king of Jerusalem, wife of Foulque d'Anjou (King of Jerusalem, 1131-1142). Another Mélisende, daughter of Isabelle and Aimery, married to Boémond IV le Borgne, prince of Antioch, is also a possible antecedent of Mélusine. Eustache Chabot (d. 1229), daughter of Thibaut Chabot II and wife of Geoffroy I and mother of Geoffroy á la Grand Dent, also has been suggested as Mélusine.[11] On the identity of Mélusine's sons, the figure of Geoffroy, the sixth son, is historical (Geoffroy á la Grand Dent, d. 1248), while the identification of the other sons is less certain. Though Stouff maintains that all sons except Geoffroy are fictitious, Roach does present convincing similarities between historical members of the family and the sons.[12] As tenuous as the similarities may be, they do suggest a certain amount of historical accuracy even if correspondences and chronology are not always perfect. For example, Roach maintains that Urien, the eldest son, represents Jean de Brienne (d. 1237), brother-in-law of Hugues de Lusignan, King of Cyprus; and Guion, the third son, combines elements of the first Lusignan to take Cyprus in the twelfth century (Guy, d. 1194) and the first Lusignan to hold the crown of Sicily in the fourteenth century (Guy, d. 1344).[13]

Even the historical link between Lusignan and the lands Jean d'Arras attributes to Mélusine's

kingdom-building is uncertain. Many times the political connection is implicit rather than one of direct control. However, all towns mentioned in the romance did come under Lusignan's sphere of influence even though they were not all officially attached to the fief.[14] Stouff contends that Lusignan never held Guyenne, Gascony, or most of Aunis and Saintonge, nor ever held La Rochelle, Saintes, or Châtelaillon.[15] Thus a strict correspondence between legend-text and history can not be claimed even though resonances of historical truth are woven into the tale to make the context seem veridical.

As mentioned, Jean d'Arras, supported by the Duke of Berry, had a specific purpose for writing the romance *Mélusine* and the history of Lusignan: to document the descent of the Duke from the fairy princess and thereby assure his rights. This was not unique in the Middle Ages, and many families attempted to falsify genealogies to show descent from legendary figures.[16] The historical importance of verifying the Berry claim to Lusignan was more than that of prestige, however, given the tensions between the English and French over the control of the area. As Morris points out, "English" did not necessarily mean English living in England, but also English living in France. In Poitiers, a quarter of the population (those who held the power) were determined to remain "English."[17] Jean d'Arras' version of the *Mélusine* strongly aligns the tale and Lusignan politically with the French faction, supporting the claim of Berry and the French over Lusignan.

Another version of the Mélusine legend, a romance in verse by Coudrette, written some ten years after d'Arras' romance, brought the tale of Mélusine to the English.[18] It is not certain if Coudrette based his text on an earlier poetic version ("Des troys fut vostre livre extrait, / Ainsi le dit on et retrait" [vv. 113-14]), or if the source to which he refers is actually Jean d'Arras' text.[19] Stouff suggests that if there were an earlier poem which was the model for both d'Arras and Coudrette, it is odd that there is no existing evidence of the work.[20] Stouff also notes that it is interesting that besides the narrative similarities between Coudrette's and d'Arras' texts, d'Arras entitles his text *La noble histoire de Lusignan*; and Coudrette, *Histoire de Lusignan.* This is the same title of two Latin manuscripts found in the inventory of the Duke of Berry's library: *L'Istoire de Lusignem.*[21] Perhaps the Latin text is the missing source. In either case, as Herbet demonstrates, the d'Arras version was prior to Coudrette's; and as Morris shows, there is evidence of Coudrette borrowing directly from d'Arras.[22] Whether d'Arras' text was Coudrette's primary source or not, Coudrette knew d'Arras' text and worked with it.

Coudrette adapted the *Mélusine* into octosyllabic verse for Guillaume de Parthenay, one of the strongest supporters of the English cause. Coudrette seizes every opportunity to exalt his patron, just as d'Arras praises the Berrys. The difference in political alignment could possibly account for the abundant dissemination of d'Arras' romance (thirteen manuscripts, twelve of which are extant, with thirty-seven printed editions, the first being from 1478) and the lesser publication of Coudrette's text (eleven extant manuscripts with the first edition published in 1854).[23] In translation, however, Coudrette's work appeared in early editions in German and English. Jean d'Arras' text appeared in early Spanish, English, Dutch, and Czech editions. Later, the Mélusine romance was translated into Flemish, Swedish, Icelandic, and Russian. Without question, the legend was popular throughout Europe, showing the universal folkloric appeal to which a wide variety of cultures could relate and identify their own myths.

After the appearance of the Mélusine story in its prose-romance form in the d'Arras text and in its verse-romance form by Coudrette, many leading families of Europe attempted to derive their lineage from Mélusine in one way or another. The fictions related to the legend were taken seriously. According to Stouff, statements of invented genealogies were attributed to Jean d'Arras but, in fact, were not his. The families of Dauphiné, Agenois, Forez, Luxembourg, and Lorraine drew their descent from Mélusine.[24] Similar phenomena occurred with other legends as well. The Swan Knight, a figure of late twelfth-century French origin, for example, represented a frequent object of invented genealogies. Indeed, Jean de Berry claimed lineage from both the Swan Knight

and Mélusine.[25]

Jean d'Arras' reference to Aragonese and Catalan cities and to the monastery of Montserrat in the *Mélusine* is not unimportant. Jean d'Arras had first-hand knowledge of Catalonia from his visit there as part of the entourage of the Duchess Violant de Bar.[26] The romance evokes the geography of northern Spain and Catalonia in several instances: Palestine (Mélusine's sister) being imprisoned in Mount Canigó as punishment for her part in her father's imprisonment in the mountain of Brumblerio; Raimond's retirement to Montserrat after Mélusine's departure from the mortal world; Geoffroy's following his father to Montserrat; and the King and Queen of Aragon attending Raimond's funeral and taking Eudes' son, Bernardon, back to Aragon with them, thus linking the line of the Cabriera family of Aragon to Mélusine. Stouff raises the posssibility that the reference to Cardona in *Mélusine* might have influenced the Count of Cardona to give asylum to Thomas of Lusignan who was ousted from rule in Cyprus in the late fifteenth century.[27] As Deyermond notes, this was precisely the period when the first Spanish translation of 1489 was circulating, and the Count of Cardona could have known the romance in its Spanish version.[28]

Regarding the Spanish translation of *Mélusine*, Deyermond has accurately pointed out that the two extant early editions of the Spanish version of Jean d'Arras' *Mélusine* (1489 and 1526) represent two distinct translations of the French romance.[29] The number and nature of the textual differences are too significant to result from textual transmission alone. Indeed, to attempt a collation of the variants would be, in effect, to copy both texts almost in their entirety. As to why two translations were made, Deyermond's hypothesis, based on the research of N. F. Blake, seems most plausible.[30] Prose works aimed at a general audience tend to be discontinuous. According to Blake, the lack of a conscious tradition in these works of general appeal led to the production of various translations of the same text, each translation different and with no apparent knowledge of the others.

Nevertheless, in spite of their differences and the seeming independence of the translations, the Spanish texts do have a common source. It is clear that Jean d'Arras' text, and not Coudrette's, is the version on which the Spanish translations are based. Coudrette's version of the Mélusine romance is distinct from that of d'Arras in many narrative features. Most obvious, perhaps, are Coudrette's addition of the story of Mélusine's sister, Palestine, and the laudatory poem dedicated to the Parthenays. In the tale of Mélusine itself, the episodes and their order are basically the same in both Coudrette's and d'Arras' texts. However, Coudrette has streamlined the detail, omitting, for example, the story of Elinas and Présine at the beginning, the story of Hervieu de León and his first wife, and the first voyage of Guion to Armenia. Other adventures of the brothers are also deleted, such as Geoffroy's trip to Ireland and his travel to the East to help his brothers, Urien and Guion, fight the Moors. The trek of the six brothers to Germany to rescue the King of Aussay is also omitted by Coudrette. In these and other elements different in the texts of d'Arras and Coudrette, the Spanish translations follow the version as told by Jean d'Arras. As Deyermond observes, the Geneva 1478 printed edition of Jean d'Arras' romance seems to be the French source of the Spanish translations.[31] The variants unique to the 1478 French edition are found in the Spanish translation: omission of the seven liberal arts in the episode of Aimery of Poitier, Raimond's uncle; the farewell of Geoffroy to his brothers after the war in Syria; the appearance of the serpent before the death of Raimond; the variant spellings of the name Eudes and Orrible, among others.[32]

In the case of the Spanish translations of *Mélusine*, linguistically the first version (1489) tends to translate more directly from the French, at times seeming to transliterate difficult or obscure French words and phrases directly, thus rendering certain passages confusing in Castilian:[33]

> Sire, acheterez vous ce cuir de cerf que je tiens en mon sac? On en fera bonnes cottes chasseresses pour voz veneurs. Par foy, dist Remondin, oïl, se tu veulz; et que me coustera il, ainsi qu'il est? Par Dieu, sire,

vous en payerés cent solz, se vous voulez. Amis, dist Remondin, apporte le a mon hostel, et je te paieray. (ed. Stouff, p. 33)

—Señor, ¿plazervos ya de me conprar vn muy buen cuero de çiervo para hazer buenas cuerdas e correas a vuestros caçadores?

—Sy, por çierto, sy tu quieres —dize Remondin. —¿Quanto me costara, en vna palabra tanto como ciento?

—Por la fe que a Dios tengo, señor —dize el labrador—, vale cient sueldos.

—Tu los avras. Vale, vale a [casa] —dize Remondin—, e seras pagado. (1489, fol. 21v)

El qual hombre traya a vender vn cuero de vn cieruo. Y Remondin, que lo vido, luego lo compro, diziendo que era para cuerdas a sus caçadores. Por el qual le dio cien sueldos. (1526, fol. 9c)

Lors jura Gieffroy la dent Dieu qu'il les feroit venir a raison. (ed. Stouff, p. 197)

E juro Geofre, al diente de Dios, que el moriria o los subjugaria. (1489, fol. 101v)

Hizo juramento que el moriria o lo sojuzgaria. (1526, fol. 41d)

Quant Gardon l'entendy, si commence de rire, et lui a dit: Par ma foy, folz, pour la grant haultesse et le grant hardement que tu as en toy et en ton cuer, j'ay pitié de toy. (ed. Stouff, p. 246)

E quando el gigante lo oyo, se començo de rrejr e le dixo,

—Por mj fe, loquillo, por la grand viueza e alcaza de tu coraçon, yo he piedad de ty. (1489, fol. 121v)

Quando el gigante esto oyo, començose de reyr y dixole,

—Por mi fe, cauallero, por la gran biueza de coraçon que muestras, yo he piedad de ti. (1526, fol. 50c)

The versions also show extensive differences in the art of the translators: in characterization and in inclusion or suppression of narrative detail in the various episodes. The 1489 version again follows the French narrative more closely.