

'Mélusine and Encounters of the East'

Tania M. Colwell

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Aims of project

This project aims to shed light on various facets of transnational literary transmission between France and English through the lens of an early fifteenth-century compilation, presently in the British Library, which collates the *Roman de Mélusine* alongside Jean le Long's anthology of six travel narratives and ethnographies known as *Les Fleurs des histoires de l'Orient*.

By reconstructing this now-fragmentary compilation with a focus on the theme of intercultural encounter, this research will contribute to scholarship on the reception of the *Mélusine* romance, on late medieval fascination and engagement with the East, and on the transmission and reception of compilation manuscripts. It will highlight the significance of the theme of encounter and engagement in early Franco-English reception of the *Roman de Melusine*, contextualise the compilation in light of wider contemporary anxieties about the imagined East, and illustrate how intertextual relationships between works within compilation manuscripts could inflect and shape historical reception.

Research trip

I am very grateful to the SSMLL for offering funding to support crucial primary research in London on the manuscript itself. I undertook this research in April 2014 and spent one month gathering textual, palaeographic and iconographic data from the compilation. As planned in my application, I transcribed surviving contents tables and paratextual devices within individual texts, took detailed descriptive notes for the over 90 surviving illuminations, and transcribed significant passages of text from across the seven texts.

Due to the partial nature of much of the compilation (it was significantly damaged in the Cotton Library fire in 1731), many leaves among the surviving 164 folios were warped and blackened such that complete transcription from the entire volume was not feasible. Nonetheless, it was possible to select extracts relevant to the theme of cross cultural interaction for transcription across each individual text.

During my research trip to the UK, I also attended the Medieval Francophone Literary Culture Outside France conference at Cambridge University. On 11 April, I delivered a paper on 'The Migration of the Prose *Roman de Mélusine*: Transmission and Translation in Fifteenth-Century England', which drew on preliminary work for this project to locate the British Library's compilation within the circulation history of the *Mélusine* romance in England.

Present and future plans for project

Since returning to Australia, I have contextualised the findings from my manuscript research in relation to the known/probable circumstances of the manuscript's production in France and early circulation among the Valois court prior to its removal to England with Jacquetta de Luxembourg in the 1430s.

Among the research tasks yet to be completed are a thorough examination of scholarship on the literary tastes and networks at the early- to mid-fifteenth-century English court and a critical analysis of how the collection aligns with contemporary anxieties and fantasies of the Orient. Completion of these tasks will enable me to produce the chapter, article and conference paper outputs projected in my application proposal, and to develop the longer term projects on cross-channel transmission

In addition to the aims and research outputs planned, I expect the research sponsored by the SSMLL to also contribute to a new project on Emotions of Encounter. This research explores the shifting meanings identified with visual and textual expressions of emotions both *experienced by* the different authors of the six texts in Jean le Long's anthology and *attributed to* encountered peoples across the six surviving *Fleurs* manuscripts and one early printed edition. This research aims to map the changing emotions associated with different locales over time and will contribute to a stronger understanding of how Europeans constructed both European and non-European subjectivities and identities across the later Middle Ages.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to the SSMLL for its support for my project, and look forward to the opportunity of acknowledging the Society's generosity in future publications and other outputs.