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The Sparrow Hawk Castle - A Mostly Ignored Literary Motif Across the Cultures and the Centuries

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Johann Schiltberger included a curious episode about the 'Sparrow Hawk Mountain' in his famous travelogue Reisebericht from 1427. This episode can be traced back to John Mandeville's Travels in the German translation by Michel Velser. This study examines the similarities between Mandeville's text and Schiltberger's account, but then also the use of this motif in the tradition of the Melusine novel (Jean d'Arras and Thüring von Ringoltingen). Further attempts are made to identify sources for this episode Mandeville might have drawn from, including an Armenian chronicle and even the love treatise De amore by Andreas Capellanus.

I. The History of Sleep from a Cultural-Anthropological Perspective

People (and animals) need to get enough sleep to operate effectively on a daily basis, both today and in the past. This represents a fundamental biological factor that transcends all cultures, historical periods, religions, and personal experiences.¹ Sometimes, however, people do not go to sleep despite being exhausted in times of extreme stress, war, danger, or because of religious demands. Monks, throughout time, have regularly committed voluntarily to long periods of sleep deprivation, while prison systems have used the same strategy as a form of torture. Cultural anthropologists have also distinguished specifically between societies without and those with artificial light, and observed that the latter group experienced normally much better sleep without disruptions in the middle of the night.² Sleep matters significantly in ancient Greek and Roman mythology, it is discussed in many literary works throughout history, and it is the theme of many art works. Medieval literature, however, is normally ignored in this context.³

1 See, for instance, Strobl, *Die Macht des Schlafes*; Klug, *Wol ûf*; Pedersen, "Søvnens kulturhistorie," 161-74; Mohrmann, "Zur Geschichte des Schlafes," 15-34.

2 I could not find a better study than the article on *Wikipedia* in which much of the relevant research is so well summarized: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sleep> (last accessed on Feb. 9, 2020).

3 For a few exceptions, see Wittmer-Butsch, *Zur Bedeutung von Schlaf*.

But we can also identify a situation, at least imagined by some medieval poets, in which a young man was challenged to meet the demand of not falling asleep for three days and three nights while spending time in a magical castle. If he then met that challenge, he could ask anything from a fairy, as long as it was honorable. This motif was closely connected with a bird of prey, a sparrow hawk, which the contestant has to guard. Research has until now hardly paid any attention to this bird as an iconic creature, although it played a significant role in courtly culture.⁴ In Hartmann von Aue's *Erec* (ca. 1180), for instance, the young protagonist comes across a contest involving a sparrow hawk, which the winner of the tournament is allowed to claim and to hand it over to his beloved lady who is thereby designated as the most beautiful woman at court.⁵ As far as I can tell, however, the specific motif with the sparrow hawk to be won by way of staying awake three or even seven days and nights emerges not until the fourteenth century in John Mandeville's *Travels*.

II. Hans Schiltberger and the 'Sparrow Hawk Mountain'

One of those poets or writers who engaged with that motif was the long-term slave and soldier Johann/Hans Schiltberger (1380-ca. 1440), who was forced to serve in the armies of many different lords in the Ottoman Empire, later under Tamerlane, and his successors, and this from 1396, when he was captured after the battle of Nicopolis, until 1427, when he finally managed to escape, together with four other companions. They made their way to the coast of the Black Sea, and were finally taken by sympathetic sailors and their captain, to Constantinople, from where Schiltberger could make his

4 There is no separate entry on the sparrow hawk in the famous *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* or in the *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*. The sparrow hawk is mentioned a few times, but without the literary motif as we find it in our context. Apart from many modern translations and editions, there are only a few critical studies that mostly try to situate Schiltberger's text within the framework of late medieval travel literature; see, for instance, Kehren, "Temoignages d'européens," 325-39; Hellmuth, "Hans Schiltbergers," 129-44; Weithmann, "Ein Baier," 2-15.

5 *Complete Works of Hartmann von Aue*, 56. For a critical edition, see *Ereck: textgeschichtliche Ausgabe mit*.

way back home to Munich, Bavaria. Subsequently, he composed a highly popular travelogue or rather a history of the Ottoman Empire and other countries in the Middle East punctuated by his personal observations.⁶

The narrative framework of this specific episode of the sparrow-hawk mountain/castle seems to be entirely fictional, but Schiltberger relates this account because he and some of his fellows also reached that infamous location near the Black Sea, where one of them felt inspired to take on the challenge himself, because this would give him the chance to ask for anything he might like, as long as it would be honorable. The challenge hence proved to be highly risky, as in any fairy-tale or adventure story, for example. Correspondingly, the narrator explains that “if anybody asks for something that exhibits pride, impudence, or avarice, she [the fairy lady of the castle] curses him and his offspring, so that he can no longer attain an honourable position.”⁷

To specify the situation and to illustrate the direct consequences of a good or a bad decision on the part of the individual who submitted under that test and passed it successfully, Schiltberger relates first of a young and poor man who then asked for nothing but “that he and his family might live with honour” (42). In the second instance, an Armenian prince also managed to stay awake for three

6 Schiltberger, *Als Sklave im Osmanischen Reich*. See the sixteenth-century print: *Ein wunderbarliche/ vnd kürtzweylige // Histori/ wie Schildtberger/ einer auß der Stat München // in Bayern/ von den Türcken gefangen/ in die Heyden=//schafft gefüret/vnnd wider heymkommen.// Item/ was sich für krieg/ vnnd wunderbarlicher thaten// dieweyl er inn der Heydenschafft gewesen/ zugre=//tragen ...* (Nuremberg: Johann Vom Berg and Ulrich Neuber, 1548). For the original text, as contained in the Heidelberg manuscript (UB, Cpg 216), I draw from the edition by Neumann, *Reisen des Johannes*. For an English translation, see Schiltberger, *The Bondage and Travels of Johann Schiltberger*. See also the modern German translation, *Johann Schiltbergers Irrfahrt durch den Orient*, ed. and trans. Markus Tremmel. Tremmel relies on the edition by Valentin Langmantel, *Hans Schiltbergers Reisebuch*. Bibliothek des Literarischen Vereins in Stuttgart, 172 (Tübingen: H. Laupp, 1885), which is based on the Munich (formerly Nuremberg) manuscript (Staatsbibliothek, Cod. I, 1603); he intervenes fairly little into the text. Cf. Schiewer, “Leben unter Heiden,” 159-78; and id., “Schiltberger, Hans,” 675-79.

7 *The Bondage and Travels* (Schiltberger 1879), 41. The purpose of this paper is not to analyze the actual text in its philological minutiae; hence suffices it here to draw from the English translation. I have always compared that with the original Early New High German.

days and three nights, but since he was already wealthy enough, yet did not have a wife, he wanted the fairy to marry him, to which she responded: “Thy proud spirit that though hast, must be broken in thee and in all thy power”; and she cursed him and all his kindred” (42). In the third instance, a knight of the Order of the Hospitallers likewise managed to stay awake for the entire period, and thereupon he asked for “a purse that would never be empty” (42), clearly a reference to the same motif later included in the prose novel *Fortunatus* (first printed in 1509).⁸ Even though the fairy grants him that wish, she then condemns him and his entire Order for their evil greed: “thy order may diminish and not increase” (42).

Despite the danger which an individual might run into as a consequence of the test, which could easily expose his lack of ethics and morality, and this with devastating consequences for the entire family or the person’s social group, in Schiltberger’s narrative one the fellows wants to try his luck, after all. However, the entire company holds him back, warning him of the severe danger if he were to fall asleep before the set time frame would be over. In the case of failure, the miserable man would be a prisoner for life in that castle. Moreover, they are all told that the Greek priests in control of that mysterious castle are forbidding anyone from taking on that challenge. Consequently, this fanciful account remains what it is, especially since no one among the company examines that castle personally. Instead, as the narrator remarks, they simply “went on to a city called Kereson” (43).

This *Reisebuch* quickly gained popularity, as the ten surviving manuscripts indicate,⁹ along with numerous printed editions from 1460 (Augsburg) onwards, together with a total of ten new printed editions in the sixteenth century.¹⁰ After all, the

8 *Romane des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Jan-Dirk Müller. Bibliothek der frühen Neuzeit, 1 (Frankfurt a. M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1990), 383-585; for background, the critical examination of the relevant research literature, and interpretations, see Albrecht Classen, *The German Volksbuch*.

9 The only accurate and latest update about these manuscripts can be found online at <http://www.handschriftencensus.de/werke/3859> (last accessed on Feb. 9, 2020).

10 For the sixteenth-century prints, see the VD16; for the one seventeenth-century print (1605), see the VD17, both online.

imminent danger by the Turks on the southeastern flank of Europe, particularly after the fall of Constantinople in 1453, made this rather detailed travelogue highly valuable in political and military terms.¹¹ Moreover, Schiltberger's travelogue continued to appeal to the various audiences even during the following decades, as documented by the new prints that appeared in 1605, 1650, 1659, and 1678.¹² Considering the numerous modern editions and translations of this text since the late nineteenth century, we can be certain that this author's personal experiences combined with many historical reflections intrigued countless readers both in the West and in the East, probably because here we encounter a truly global 'traveler' who moved around much as a slave and soldier, traversing many Middle Eastern areas where normally no European ever set foot in, and this at a time when most people had very little understanding or knowledge of the more exotic world to the east and the south of their own traditional boundaries.¹³

This unique perspective toward the hitherto mostly unknown Middle East can easily explain the extensive reception history of this *Reisebuch*, although Schiltberger offered considerably less exciting reading material than Marco Polo, and even less than John Mandeville, from whom he probably copied major segments. This also includes this curious 'Sparrow Hawk Mountain' episode, the object of our investigation, one of a few others with which he obviously tried to spice up his narrative. There are, however, throughout the *Reisebuch*, no references to exotic creatures, apart from slight comments about people in the far north who were allegedly completely hirsute, except in their face and on their hands. At one point, Schiltberger also mentions an extraordinarily old man, a true Methuselah, who had reached the age of three hundred and fifty years (p. 45). Otherwise, Schiltberger stays clear of fantasizing,

11 Höfert, *Den Feind beschreiben*.

12 For this information, I have consulted the catalog Worldcat, which actually goes beyond what the VD17 offers (both online).

13 For further explorations of this topic, see the contributions to *East Meets West*, ed. Albrecht Classen.

in remarkable contrast to many of his source, such as Mandeville's *Travels* (ca. 1357-1371), and he pursued a rather serious effort to relate as objectively as was possible for him the history of the wars and political events in the Ottoman empire and in neighboring countries to the east and the south.

Hence, the account of the 'Sparrow Hawk Mountain' represents an intriguing test case as to Schiltberger's use of some of his sources (maybe beyond Mandeville) and the wide dissemination of this unique motif in the late Middle Ages. But why would he have included this episode, when he otherwise refrains from offering fanciful reports? Although he traveled to many different truly distant countries, maybe even up to modern-day Kazakhstan (see the common reference to the land of Tartary), there are hardly any comments on any monsters, for instance, or on any hybrid creatures, as was the case in the much earlier *Descriptio Cambriae* (1194) by Gerald of Wales, here disregarding Schiltberger's almost meaningless reference to a giant in Egypt (64). Instead, our author is mostly interested in the various wars, the armies, the political developments, and then in the individual religions practiced in the Middle East, especially the Greek-Orthodox faith and Islam. He pays great attention to the different cultures that he encountered during his more than thirty years in those distant countries, and he openly admits what he knows from his own experience and what he can relate about only through second-hand reports, such as the holy sites in Jerusalem (57-58) or the St. Catherine monastery on the Sinai (54-56).

In other words, the inclusion of the episode with the 'Sparrow Hawk Mountain' strikes us as rather unusual, and some previous scholars have utilized this as an occasion to search for the actual site of that mountain with its castle perched on the top. J. Buchan Telfer went so far as to try to identify it even in specific geographic terms, comparing it to "Virgin's towers" that are "by no means uncommon in the East." He claims, for instance: "The author says, that on quitting the neighbourhood of the mysterious castle, he proceeded to Kerasoun; it is, therefore, just possible that the legend of the sparrow-

hawk was attached to an ancient Kiz-Kalesi seen by Ainsworth . . . near Tash Kupri, close to the road that leads from Kastamuni to Boiabad, both to the south-west of Sinope.”¹⁴ The absurdity of such an attempt does not need to be elaborated here, whereas we face the important task of tracing the origin of this motif and its relevance for contemporary writers. Maybe understandably, modern research has followed Telfan’s model, treating this *Reisebuch* as a more or less accurate outline of the world of the Middle East because the author claims that he and his companions sought out that castle with the help of a guide but then simply continued on their way.¹⁵

For Schiltberger, however, this Sparrow Hawk Mountain did not seem to have mattered much, although he included the episode in his text, probably for entertainment purposes. Instead, as soon as he and his companions have left that site behind them, he is only concerned with the travel route which they subsequently took, discussing the various countries and cities, populating for the reader a mental map: “I have also been in Lesser Armenia; the capital is Ersinggan. There is also a city called Kayburt, and it has a fertile country” (43). In other words, we are simply to assume that this fanciful mountain and castle would have to be located somewhere in realistic terms, although travelers would have a hard time finding it without the help of a local guide because it is “hidden by trees, so that nobody knows the way to it” (43).

III. John Mandeville’s Travels and the ‘Sparrow Hawk Mountain’

Previous researchers have already recognized that Schiltberger here drew from an unspecified German translation of John Mandeville’s *Travels*, where we already learn about this Sparrow Hawk Mountain with its fairy-tale set-up.¹⁶ In this case, Mandeville proves to be rather detail-oriented, as imaginary as the entire travelogue otherwise may

14 J. Buchan Telfer, trans. (see note 6), 149. This is a perfect example of what a positivistic approach can or cannot achieve in literary analysis.

15 Helmuth “Hans Schiltbergers Besuch” (see note 4), 140-42.

16 Ridder, *Jean de Mandevilles*, 28-59. The passage with the ‘Sparrow Hawk Mountain’ can be found in ch. XVI, 289-93. See also Henss, *Fremde Räume*.

be.¹⁷ He remarks that the test really lasted seven days and seven nights, though he also admits that the period possibly consisted only of three days and nights, “as some men say” (112). In other words, Mandeville himself drew from older sources, which are, however, very hard to detect. In addition, the challenge in this episode was not simply to stay awake, but to make sure the whole time that the sparrow would not fall asleep, whereas Schiltberger does not specify this particularly clearly (41).

In *The Travels*, the first candidate to try his luck in this test was the King of Armenia, and he also requested the fairy as his wife. She rejected this outright and full of anger, emphasizing that this would be impossible at any rate “because I am not an earthly but a spiritual creature” (112). The king was insistent, however, thus committing an egregious folly, as she underscored, and hence she imposed upon him as a penalty that he and all of his progeny would “have war and no lasting peace unto the ninth generation, and shall always be in subjection to your enemies and lack all kinds of goods” (113).

The second candidate mentioned was a poor man who after having succeeding in the task only asked for wealth, which the fairy also granted him without any negative consequences (113), especially because he was, as the narrator comments explicitly, wiser than his predecessor (113). The third man who also passed the test was member of the Order of the Hospitallers, and he requested an inexhaustible money purse, which she gave him immediately, and yet then she predicted “that he was asking for the undoing and the destruction of his Order, because of the great pride in his riches and the great trust he put in his purse” (113).

Mandeville subsequently closes the account of the Sparrow Hawk Mountain, advising his audience that anyone who takes on the charge of watching over this sparrow hawk never ought to fall asleep, otherwise he would stay in that castle as a prisoner for the rest of his life (113). Nevertheless, the author also emphasizes that even though that castle is located off the beaten path, it would be worth a

17 *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, 112-13.

visit, especially for those “who want[] to see wonders” (113). Then, the narrator comments no further on this curious episode, the source of which remains a mystery, unless he invented it himself.

Moseley only refers to the fact that “Haiton of Armenia recounts the foundation of the Byzantine Empire of Trebizond by Alexius Comnenus in 1204, after the Crusaders had occupied Constantinople.”¹⁸ This Haiton, also known as Hayton of Corycus (ca. 1240-ca. 1310/1320), was an Armenian prince whose brother forced him into exile because he had attempted a coup d’etat against him. While he spent time in Poitiers, France, he composed the *La Flor des estoires de la terre d’Orient* (Flower of the Histories of the East), in Latin disseminated as *Flos historiarum terre Orientis*, which he had dictated upon Pope Clement V’s request in 1307. It contains the history of Asia, especially as it pertained to the Muslim and then the Mongol conquests, and it deeply influenced late medieval minds regarding that world. This *Flor des estoires* has survived in eighteen manuscripts, while the Latin translation in thirty-two manuscripts.¹⁹ There does not seem, however, a reference to the ‘Sparrow Hawk Mountain,’ which might have been, after all, nothing but John Mandeville’s result of pure imagination, although, as we will see later, the sparrow hawk appears many times as an iconic bird in a variety of high medieval literary narratives. After all, Haython, Heiton, or Hethum was a chronicler and focused entirely

18 Moseley, trans. (see note 17), 199.

19 *Het’um the Historian’s History of the Tartars* online at: <http://www.attalus.org/armenian/hetumtoc.html> (last accessed on Feb. 9, 2020). See also *Die Geschichte der Mongolen des Hethum von Korykos (1307) in der Rückübersetzung durch Jean le Long “Traitez des estas et des conditions de quatorze royaumes de Aise” (1351): kritische Edition mit parallelem Abdruck des lateinischen Manuskripts Wrocław, Biblioteka Uniwersytecka, R 262. Traitez des estas et des conditions de quatorze royaumes de Aise*, ed. Sven Dörper. Europäische Hochschulschriften. Reihe XIII: Französische Sprache und Literatur, 236 (Frankfurt a. M. and New York: Peter Lang, 1998). I could not detect any reference to such a mysterious castle in this chronicle, despite a thorough examination of the edition. Hethum mentions one mountain in Armenia which he identifies as the tallest in the world (probably, Ararat), where Noah’s Arc landed after the deluge (Book I, ch. 8, 21-25, pp. 202-03), but he has nothing else to say about a mysterious castle on a sparrow hawk mountain. See also Dardel, *Recueil des historiens des croisades*. Vol. 2. For an online version (with many mistakes) https://archive.org/stream/RecueilDesHistoriensDesCroisadesDocumentsArmeniensTomeSecond/RecCrosArm2_djvu.txt (last accessed on Feb. 9, 2020).

on the history of his country, as far as he could tell. There are no fanciful reports, no comments on monsters, or magical or mystical beings, at least in Jean de Long's translation from 1351 (*Traitez des estas et des conditions de quatorze royaumes de Aise*).

In her effort to detect an additional or possible source, Christiane Deluz refers to an ancient Armenian legend related by Wilbrand of Oldenburg (before 1180-1230), bishop of Paderborn and Utrecht, who had returned from his pilgrimage to the Holy Land and traversed Armenia on his way home in 1211. He had heard of a legendary mountain in the vicinity of the castle of Thila called the 'mountain of adventures,' but those who wanted to take on the challenge there would have to spend seven weeks up there, whereupon they would gain good luck and happiness.²⁰ In essence, however, all these efforts to track down Mandeville's source for the 'Sparrow Hawk Mountain' episode remain, until today, mostly speculation.

IV. Schiltberger and Mandeville

Schiltberger might have drawn specifically from the German translation of John Mandeville's *Travels* created by the Tyrolean aristocrat and court administrator Michel Velser, sometime between 1393 and 1399.²¹ It has survived in forty-four manuscripts,²² while the translation by Otto von Diemeringen (d. in 1398) is extant in forty-five manuscripts.²³ In Velser's version, the time period during which the candidate has to stay awake and take care of the sparrow hawk is also limited to three days and nights. Velser lists first the attempt by a king, without specifying what country he ruled over, and then he follows his source, Mandeville's *Travels*, closely insofar as the king also wants nothing but the fairy as his wife, for which she condemns him because she is not a human being and cannot grant him that wish, cursing him and his next generations down to

20 Deluz, *Le Livre de Jehan de Mandeville*, 218-19; von Oldenburg, *Itinerarium Terrae Sanctae*, 179-80.

21 *Sir John Mandevilles Reisebeschreibung*, 95-96.

22 <http://www.handschriftencensus.de/werke/1911> (last accessed on Feb. 9, 2020).

23 <http://www.handschriftencensus.de/werke/851> (last accessed on Feb. 9, 2020).

the ninth degree. Only then does the narrator reveal that this had been the King of Armenia (96). The second candidate is the poor man who gains his happiness because he only requests riches (96). The third is, as in Mandeville's narrative, a knight of the Order of the Hospitallers, and he is told the same ominous prophecy by the fairy: "Und also ist es geschenhen" (96; sic; and thus it happened). His final comments closely match what he had found in his source: that castle is not close to the main road to Armenia, but not too far away either (96).

More recent Mandeville scholars have not yet figured out exactly where this famous author might have drawn his inspiration for this episode from. Josephine Waters Bennett, for instance, only concludes with this observation: "Whether Mandeville invented it, or not, apparently he was responsible for the attachment of this story to the legend of the house of Lusignan. The king of Armenia, when the *Travels* was being written, was a member of the house of Lusignan (1342-75), as Mandeville undoubtedly knew."²⁴ Malcolm Letts observed that "Other versions mention the king, but the poor man and the templar seem to be Mandeville's own embellishments."²⁵ Liria Montañés avers, differentiating further, "La historia del 'castiello del caballero del Temple puede estar inspirado por la caída de la Orden en 1309, que tanto impresionó a toda Europa."²⁶ Despite many attempts to specify the sources from which Mandeville culled his information, there are huge gaps, but for our purposes, we do not need to press much further in this regard.²⁷ I will, however, at the end make a new suggestion as to a possible twelfth-century source.

V. The *Melusine* Tradition

A more promising trail takes us into a very different genre, the novel dealing with Melusine and her two sisters, all three of them hybrid

24 Bennett, *The Rediscovery of Sir John Mandeville*, 27.

25 Lett, *Sir John Mandeville*, 53.

26 *Libro de las maravillas del mundo*, 143.

27 Bovenschen, "Untersuchungen über Johann von Mandeville," Ph.D. Berlin 1888; see now Svatopluk Frinta, "Searching for the Sources," 7-30; Tzanaki, *Mandeville's Medieval Audiences*.

creatures and all of them waiting for their redemption so that they can leave the world of fairies and join humankind once again.²⁸ They were cursed by their mother, Presine, after they had punished their father, King Helmas, who had broken a taboo imposed upon him by his wife, never to sleep with her during her time in childbed. Now, operating only as fairies, they themselves impose taboos on men that are then broken by their husbands, lovers, and wooers. The first German version of that text, however, was not written until 1456. Thüring von Ringoltingen drew from two French sources, Jean d'Arras's prose version from 1393, and Couldrette's verse version from ca. 1400, so he created his translation of the French text long after Schiltberger had published his *Reisebuch*.

Schiltberger was apparently a highly skilled linguist, after having spent more than thirty years in the Turkish empire and in many countries of the Middle East. After having returned home to Bavaria in 1427, he might have easily been able to pick up French, reading about the Sparrow-Hawk Mountain motif in the original text by this famous armchair traveler, but it is much more likely that he drew directly from Michael Velser's German translation of Mandeville's *Travels*.

Since we cannot easily unravel or even fully comprehend this intricate web of textual dependencies, let us pursue further the question how Jean d'Arras and then Thüring von Ringoltingen developed that motif within their own literary frameworks. Their *Melusine* novels treat the interaction between the young nobleman Raymondin (Jean d'Arras)/Reymund (Thüring) and the fairy Melusine, if 'fairy' is the right term for her.²⁹ Let us first follow the version as developed by Thüring. After all, she operates very much like an ordinary woman, as a mother, and as a very successful wife, but on Saturdays she disappears behind closed doors, and her husband is not allowed to follow her or to investigate what she might be doing there. This is the condition for their marriage, a taboo of great significance, which Reymund easily accepts without

28 Juan de Mandevilla, *Libro de las maravillas del*, XXXIV-XXXV.

29 Goodrich, "Fairy, Elves and the Enchanted," 431-64.

any concern. In fact, his married life with Melusine proceeds very happily; with the help of her enigmatic resources, she can build a number of spectacular castles; she delivers many sons, but all of them are marked in their faces with a monstrous feature which reveals their mother's hidden nature as a hybrid creature. Those young men quickly prove to be outstanding knights and achieve heroic deeds, thus establishing their own dynasties in distant lands.

One day, however, instigated by his own brother, Reymund develops a sense of jealousy of his wife whom he suspects of committing adultery. He drills a hole in the door behind which she had disappeared, and then he realizes to his great surprise, maybe horror, but also with amazement, that Melusine is resting in a bathtub, having transformed into a half-snake and half-woman. He quickly leaves and hides in the bedroom, deeply afraid of her having found out that he had transgressed his own promise; yet when his wife finally arrives late in the evening, she pretends as if nothing had happened which allows the marriage to continue as before. Later, however, catastrophe strikes. One of their sons, Geffroy, gets extremely angry about the fact that one of his brothers has joined a monastery, and as a punishment he sets fire to the convent and burns it down, killing all the monks and the abbot, including his own brother. When Reymund learns the terrible news, he collapses, and to find some kind of relief from his emotional pain, he publicly accuses his wife of having been responsible for this horrible development because all their children are somewhat monstrous. Thus, with the husband having revealed at court her true nature, that is, having broken the taboo, she is forced to leave her family and humankind for good and thus has to wait until the Day of Judgment for her redemption.³⁰

The 'Sparrow Hawk Mountain' episode occurs much later, when the poet relates the history of Melusine's sons, and the differences to Mandeville's tale are in fact rather minimal. Considering the latter's enormous popularity throughout the late Middle Ages and well beyond, it does not come as a surprise that

30 Classen, "The Melusine Figure," 74-94.

his *Travels* exerted a direct influence on Jean d'Arras and then Johann Schiltberger.³¹ Mandeville's alleged travelogue appeared in manuscript form sometime between 1357 and 1371, so about twenty to forty years before Jean d'Arras created his *Mélusine* in 1393. Altogether, there are ca. two hundred manuscripts containing *The Travels*, many in different European languages, including German (see above).³² In other words, Mandeville exerted a tremendous influence on his contemporary and subsequent audiences, so we can safely conclude that Jean d'Arras used *The Travels* as one of his many sources.³³

One of the reasons for drawing on Mandeville's narrative is, as the author emphasizes, that the kings of Armenia are descended from the House of Lusignan, hence from this mysterious woman Melusine, and since many stories about the members of that dynasty circulate at the courts, Jean wants to wrap up his account with the legendary report about the events at the 'Sparrow-Hawk Mountain' (223). Here, the time-span during which the protagonist has to stay away and watch over the sparrow hawk consists of three days and nights; as a reward, he could then ask for anything he might desire, "with the exception of carnal sin or touching her body" (223). The narrator is very specific about when the entrance to the castle would be granted during the Christian calendar year and about how the king prepares himself. Moreover, the account is richly embellished with many new details, dramatizing the entire event quite elegantly by way of drawing on late medieval courtly culture, so as to the perch for the sparrow-hawk: "at one end was a perch made of a unicorn's horn; it had a piece of velvet over it, the sparrow hawk on it, and a glove beside it" (224). The old man who guides the king to the room with the sparrow hawk even instructs him explicitly what he can and cannot wish after having succeeded in passing the test: "but do not ask for her body, for that you cannot have" (224).

31 Mandeville, *Le Livre des merveilles du monde*, 28-59.

32 Röhl, *Der livre de Mandeville*; Higgins, *Writing East*; see also Quesada, "Reale und imaginäre Welten," 55-76.

33 For Jean d'Arras, see *Melusine*, 223-26. Maddox and Sturm-Maddox refer to a Middle English version of the same account, as related by Louis Stouff, n. 1. That text is contained in British Museum MS Cotton Titus c.xvi.

Keeping himself entertained, the king looks around and thus learns about the history of King Elinas of Scotland (King Helmas, in Thüring's text), his wife Presine, and their three daughters (224), which closes the circle and connects this episode with the central part of the novel. Moreover, the fairy realizes that he is a descendent of King Guyon, one of Melusine's sons, and since she herself is Melusine's sister (Melior), a relationship with the King of Armenia would constitute incest (225).

Consequently, she curses him and his future generations, and then sends him away, but he tries to take her by force, which he fails to do as well because she simply vanishes. Subsequently, he is badly beaten by invisible hands, hauled out of the fortress, and dumped beyond the ramparts. So, he survives, and is also not kept a prisoner for life, but misfortune later strikes the entire family, first with his brother who takes over the kingship after his death, and the subsequent heirs who "met with great adversity and suffered many tribulations and afflictions, as was and still is apparent" (226).

The narrator then breaks off and only comments further on the genealogical connections between the king of Cyprus and the king of Armenia, who can be traced back to the dynasty of the Lusignan in Poitou" (227). In short, in contrast to Mandeville's account, Jean limits his anecdote to just one test case, whereupon the fairy disappears, and there are no further words about the 'Sparrow-Hawk Mountain'.

Although Thüring relied mostly on Jean d'Arras's version of *Melusine*, he provides a different background and framework insofar as we are informed immediately that the king of Armenia was Geffroy's brother and that the mysterious castle is populated by this ghost-like figure, the fairy, whom the narrator calls a "gespenst" (157; ghost), and then specifies as originating from "Awelon" (157), the world of medieval utopia. Already Marie de France has a fairy figure in her *lai* "Lanval" (ca. 1190) come from there and disappear in that mysterious country once again along with her lover, Lanval who is deeply disappointed about the injustice and cruelty of King Arthur and his court.³⁴

³⁴ *The Lais of Marie de France*, 162-95. She uses the term "Avalun" (v. 642). See now Classen, "Outsiders, Challengers, and Rebels in Medieval Courtly Literature," 67-90.

In clear contrast, in Thuring's version, the candidate who wants to accept the challenge of staying awake for three days and three nights, guarding the sparrow-hawk, would have to be of a high-ranking noble family, connected with the dynasty of the Lusignan (157). The successful contender could also request any wish to be fulfilled, except for winning the ghost or fairy as his wife. The rest of the story proceeds pretty much along the same lines as in Jean d'Arras's version, with the King of Armenia trying his good luck because he wants to have this mysterious woman as his wife. In opposition to Thuring's French source, however, the old man warns the king that he would have to stay in this castle not only for the rest of his life but until the Day of Judgment (158), that is, like the three fairy sisters. However, despite the guardian's warning not to ask for the lady's hand, the young man secretly plans on doing just that, which the narrator emphasizes strongly, indicating thereby how much the king operates rather deceptively. The king also enters a special chamber that serves as a portrait gallery depicting all those knights who had tried their luck as well but had failed because they had fallen asleep. In Jean's text, they were then forced to stay in that castle until the end of their lives, while in Thuring's version, they have to stay there until the Day of Judgment (159). There is also another difference. The king comes across three portraits of knights who in the past had managed to stay awake for the whole time, and who then had asked appropriately for something valuable in their lives, without, however, transgressing the rules: "sein gob redlich gewonnen hett" (159; had won his gift honorably). Jean told more or less the same story, but in his case, there are no portraits to be seen, only coats of arms (225).

At any rate, this particular feature served both authors exceedingly well to authenticate their accounts and to assure their audiences that this adventure of the 'Sparrow-Hawk Mountain' could be realized successfully if the candidate observes the rules and does not ask for something dishonorable. However, the entire narrative of *Melusine*, in whatever language version, was always predicated on this critical concept of transgressing the taboo or the rules, and it appears as if every generation, from the three women's

father Helmas down to the grandchildren, here the king of Armenia, follows the same path and fails to uphold the regulations and laws, and each time this transgression is sexually determined.

In Thüring's version, Meliora specifies the genealogical connections even further as she identifies this Armenian king as the son of Gyot, who was one of Melusine's sons. In fact, she relates the entire story of her own father, Helmas, his transgression of the taboo imposed by Presine, the transgression committed by Reymund, and then she recognizes the inheritance trait in Gyot as well who could have gained great riches and happiness, but lost it all for himself and his heirs: "wer dir dise abentewr zuo einem gelück geraten, die muoß dir nun ein großer fluoch sein" (162; this adventure could have resulted in your good fortune, but now it imposes a great curse on you). The narrator goes even one step further and associates Gyot's lustfulness and lack of self-control with the famous story of Susanna and the two old judges in the Book of Daniel (here 162; *Book of Daniel* 13), contained only in the Vulgate, but not in Luther's Old Testament.³⁵

The narrator adds further details to this scene, compared to Mandeville and Jean d'Arras, insofar as Gyot suddenly tries to rape the fairy, although he had been severely warned about this both by the old guide and by Meliur herself. However, the fairy quickly disappears, and the narrator comments that the king should have understood in the first place about her ghostly character, just as in the case of her sister and also her own mother, Presine, all of whom were "merwunder / vnd von dem gespenst zuo Awelon bekommen. vnd mit vil wonders begobet werden" (162; mermaids who descended from the fairy/ghost of Avalon and who commanded many miraculous powers).

In the case of Jean d'Arras's version, the king of Armenia is then badly beaten by many invisible hands, whereas Thüring changes this to one ghost that carries out the punishment, as is also demonstrated in the accompanying woodcut (163). Gyot

³⁵ Casey, *The Susanna*. This theme was enormously popular in sixteenth-century Reformation drama, although this chapter was excised from Luther's bible. The actual problem in Daniel 13, with the two old judges trying to blackmail Susanna into having sex with them, is not adequately reflected on by Jan-Dirk Müller in his commentary to *Melusine*, 1083.

feels his death approaching, begs and appeals to the ghost to let him live, whereupon he is mercilessly thrown out of the castle. Thüring elaborates all this much further than Jean, explaining, for instance, how the king reaches his camp again, how his servants help him, return to the coast and travel back to Armenia (164). Most interestingly, the narrator subsequently offers comments about his French source, Jean d'Arras, who had learned about all those events and the subsequent development in the kingdom of Armenia from an Armenian chronicler in Paris, who had been expelled from his own country, by his brother, although both held the rank of king. This chronicler was, as we have learned already above, Hayton of Corycus, but Thüring does not seem to know that name.³⁶ And he can also not explain the background of this mysterious episode of the Sparrow-Hawk Mountain, although he specifically remarks only on the curious funeral customs observed by the servants of the deceased Armenian king, with everyone dressed in white, which was completely contrary to the French traditions (165). We can, however, accept his final comment as valid for the entire episode: "warumb aber das geschehe wuste der tichter diß puoches nit" (165; why that happened the poet of that book did not know). In other words, Thüring frankly admits he relied exclusively on his French source and did not do any other research into the *Melusine*-story. In other words, he obviously did not draw from Mandeville's *Travels*.

VI. Conclusion

To conclude, even though we have no firm idea where Mandeville might have learned about this motif of the 'Sparrow-Hawk Mountain', he was the first European writer, as far as I can tell, to introduce it into the western narrative tradition. Drawing extensively from Mandeville's *Travels*, Jean d'Arras and then Johann Schiltensberger closely followed his model, each on his own. Subsequently, Thüring von Ringoltingen relied on the French prose version by Jean to create his own *Melusine* in Early Modern German. Considering the extensive popularity of Mandeville's account and then also of *La*

³⁶ Jan-Dirk Müller, in his commentary, is also ignorant about this famous chronicle, 1083; he only refers to the reference by Roach, ed., *Le Roman de Mélusine*, 60.

Flor des estoires de la terre d'Orient, it makes good sense that the history of the kingdom of Armenia exerted such an interest among European readers throughout the last Middle Ages and beyond.

VII. Coda

This does not yet answer where Mandeville truly learned about this episode with the sparrow-hawk. I do not have a final solution either, but I would like to make at least an informed suggestion. The episode as told by this English author consists of several key motifs, a. the sparrow-hawk, b. the challenge to stay awake for three or seven days and nights, c. the promise that any request would be fulfilled as long as it was honorable, and d. the great danger for the contestant. The Armenian chronicler Hayton of Corycus would not have had any reason to offer such fabulous material about a mysterious sparrow hawk and a fairy watching over that castle.

But another writer already had invented a similar motif involving such a bird of prey. There might not be any possibility at least at this point to produce clear evidence that Mandeville could have learned about that earlier source, but it would be worth introducing it for the purpose of outlining the parallels.

Sometime around 1180 or 1190, the Parisian cleric Andreas Capellanus composed his famous treatise, *De amore*, in which he drew considerably from Ovid's books on love, the *Ars amatoria* from ca. 2 C.E. It was fairly popular, considering the surviving twenty-three manuscripts containing the complete work, eight manuscripts containing selections, and several other manuscripts embedding sections of Andreas's work into their own texts.³⁷ While the first two books engage with the strategies, rules, and warnings about men's efforts to win a woman's love, the third book entirely turns against the whole notion of courtly love, especially outside of the bounds of marriage.³⁸

Scholars have long grappled with the question how to come to terms with this deliberate dialectics, but for our purposes here it will suffice to consider a brief narrative at the end of book two

³⁷ For a summary of the text tradition, see Andreas aulæ regiae capellanus, *De amore*, 593-95. Here I will draw, for convenience's sake, from Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*.

³⁸ Allen, *The Art of Love*; Monson, *Andreas Capellanus*.

where the author suddenly resorts to the traditional genre of the Arthurian romance and describes how a young knight from Britain is approached by a mysterious lady (fairy?) whom he encounters in the middle of the forest and is instructed by her how to win the fabled sparrow hawk from King Arthur at his court. This sparrow hawk (“accipiter”) “is on a golden perch in Arthur’s court” (177), and once he would have won that bird of prey, he would have proven to everyone that his lady love is the most beautiful maiden of them all (178). He receives the fairy’s horse and soon encounters several dangerous adventures, but he remains victorious and can thus reach the inner part of Arthur’s palace where the sparrow hawk is resting on its perch. After having defeated another knight, the Briton gets hold of the sparrow hawk and also a parchment on which the rules of love are recorded. He takes that manuscript with him as well and hands it over to his beloved lady. Andreas then lists the thirty-one rules, which completely favor the ideals of courtly love outside of marriage, which the Briton’s lady then has copied and disseminated in the world (186).

The outcome of this little Arthurian tale is happy and glorious, both for the knight and his lady, and thus also for love itself. However, the third book then contradicts everything, but this does not have any bearing on the tale itself, a most delightful literary glorification of courtly love by itself. All the essential elements outlined here demonstrate a strong resemblance with the ‘Sparrow Hawk Mountain,’ except that Mandeville and all of his successors/imitators conclude that the knight’s attempt to win the fairy as his wife miserably failed. Otherwise, everything is the same: the mysterious castle difficult to reach, the sparrow hawk, the precious perch, the fairy figure (in Andreas’s text she lives in the forest), and the great challenge.

The young protagonist in *De amore* accomplishes his task successfully and thus helps courtly love to thrive in this world. In the late medieval adaptations of this episode, the opposite is the case since the protagonists only try to force the fairy to become their wives, which is impossible and brings about their own demise. Could it hence be that Mandeville drew inspiration from Andreas

Capellanus's *De amore*? Final evidence is lacking, of course, but the similarities prove to be striking and deserve to be pursued further when investigating Mandeville's wide range of sources. Considering the enormous intellectual appeal of this intricate treatise on courtly love with all of its paradoxical element, and thus the deep influence which Andreas exerted on subsequent theorists dealing with the same topic,³⁹ it would make good sense to recognize a direct line of reception taking us first to John Mandeville, then to Jean d'Arras, finally to Johann Schiltberger and Thuring von Ringoltingen.⁴⁰ Alfred Karnein has already identified a highly complex network of textual disseminations of Andreas's text in the Latin, French, and German tradition, but he has not noted the literary narratives assembled here, especially because they are interconnected primarily via this special motif and do not share anything beyond that one aspect with *De amore*.

Schiltberger might have learned about the mysterious sparrow hawk mountain while traveling through Armenia, but when he composed his treatise, he certainly was deeply influenced by Mandeville (Velser) and saw himself coerced to adapt to it in order to have such a huge authority support his own claim.⁴¹ After thirty years of enslavement, he was certainly not the kind of person to insist on his own observations and personal accomplishments.

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39 Classen, "Dialectics and Courtly Love," 161-83.

40 Karnein, *De amore in volkssprachiger Literatur*.

41 Hellmuth, "Hans Schiltbergers Besuch bei der Spergerburg" (see note 4), 142-43. He assumes that Schiltberger must have been somewhat familiar with local Armenian legends pertaining to the King Guy of Lusignan as King of Armenia and of his nephew Leo VI (since 1363 and again since 1372). Cf. Mekerdich, *The Kingdom of Armenia; Khorenats'i, History of the Armenians*.

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