

Article

Transcultural Experiences in the Late Middle Ages: The German Literary Discourse on the Mediterranean World—Mirrors, Reflections, and Responses

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Abstract: As recent scholarship has demonstrated, the world of the Mediterranean exerted a tremendous influence not only on the societies and cultures bordering the Mediterranean Sea during the late Middle Ages, but had a huge influence on the mentality and culture of the world north of the Alps as well because it was here where East and West met, exchanged ideas and products, and struggled to find, despite many military conflicts, some kind of transcultural. The highly complex conditions in the Mediterranean realm represented significant challenges and promises at the same time, and no traveler from Germany or England, for instance, whether a merchant or a pilgrim, a diplomat or an artist, could resist responding to the allure of the Mediterranean cultures. The corpus of travelogues and pilgrimage accounts is legion, as scholars have noted already for quite some time. But we can also observe literary reflections on the Mediterranean especially during the fifteenth century. The emergence of the late medieval and early modern prose novel is often predicated on transcultural experiences, whether they entailed military conflicts or peaceful encounters between Christians and Muslims. These literary texts did not necessarily respond to the historical events, such as the fall of Constantinople in 1453, but they document an intriguing opening up of German, English, French, and Flemish, *etc.*, society to the Mediterranean world. The prose novels discussed in this paper demonstrate that Germany, in particular, was a significant *hinterland* of the Mediterranean; somewhat farther apart, but still closely connected. The literary evidence will allow us to identify how those transcultural encounters were recognized and then dealt with.¹

¹ This article resulted from research that I could carry out within the framework of and subsequent to the National Endowment of the Humanities Summer Institute, “Negotiating Identities: Expression and Representation in the

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1. Mediterranean Culture and Transculturality in the Late Middle Ages

Mediterranean Studies have made big headway in the last few decades, beginning with Fernand Braudel's famous study on the *Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II* (1949), so it is pretty clear by now that we can only approach this entire world extending from the Straits of Gibraltar to Eastern Anatolia, from the southern slopes of the Alps to the northern Sahara if we recognize this as one, though highly complex geopolitical and culturally interacting entity [1]. Moreover, the Mediterranean world was not limited to the shore lines, but there were also countless hinterlands, so the connections to England, Germany, or even Poland and the Baltic Sea, and then to Niger, Mali, and the countries we call today Syria or Iraq are to be reckoned with all the time, and this in economic, religious, political, artistic, and literary terms [2]. Both the trade across the Mediterranean via shipping and transportation over land and the multilingual conditions prevalent in virtually all coastal areas facilitated the creation of a cultural unit throughout the ages irrespective of often changing political, religious, and military constellations, as Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcel have famously concluded their encyclopedic study:

The region is only loosely unified, distinguishable from its neighbours to degrees that vary with time, geographical direction and topic. Its boundaries are not of the sort to be drawn easily on a map. Its continuities are best thought of as continuities of form or pattern, within which all is mutability ([3], p. 523).

While the contributors to *Das Mittelmeer—die Wiege der europäischen Kultur* emphasize, above all, the significant impact of the Roman Empire on the Mediterranean, some of them also extend their investigations to the Middle Ages and highlight the surprisingly close relationships between Muslims, Jews, and Christians, at least in economic terms [4]. Many other scholars have followed their paths, probably because the topic of the Mediterranean world itself proves to be just too fascinating and irresistible since the countless connections between the various areas, cultures, political entities, religious groups, and economic markets open up many heretofore unexplored perspectives. We can certainly identify the Mediterranean as one of the most transcultural areas in the world, both in antiquity and ever since [5]. Travelers criss-crossed the sea and brought with them products and stories, experiences and impressions, and hence increased their knowledge and awareness of other cultures tremendously, which invited their audiences to respond in kind [6,7]. Once they left to return home, they

Christian-Jewish-Muslim Mediterranean,” Barcelona, Spain, July 2015, organized by Brian Catlos and Sharon Kinoshita. I am very grateful for this wonderful opportunity, which made it possible for me to combine my own investigations on late medieval German literature with the project presented and explored from many different perspectives, the medieval Mediterranean world.

carried much more with them in the vessels than material goods, so ultimately a Mediterranean culture emerged that continues to exist in many different ways until today held together in a productive equilibrium [8].

The intellectual transfer from the Arabic world to the north via Italy and Spain finds a curious but most striking example in the many cookbooks from the late Middle Ages which also pursued dietetic and medical purposes [9]. Arabic recipes and medical treatises, often in conjunction with each other, enjoyed a growing popularity first in Italy and then north of the Alps. Art-historical evidence has amply confirmed the extensive exchange among the Mediterranean cultures and between the Mediterranean world and its *hinterland* [10]. And we know already for a long time how much Arabic sciences, mathematics, astronomy, and philosophy, inherited from the Greeks, contributed to the rise of the so-called Renaissance of the Twelfth Century [11–13].

2. The Mediterranean World

There is hardly any other region in Europe that was as much determined by ancient and medieval influences as the Mediterranean world, as scholarship has consistently emphasized, pursuing ever new perspectives in this regard [14]. Some researchers have grounded their investigations in one country or region, such as medieval Iberia, and have examined how the Mediterranean at large impacted the culture and political conditions there [15]. But this does not change anything with regard the global interconnectedness predicated on the Mediterranean and its neighboring countries and cultures. Michel Mollat du Jourdin goes so far as to define Europe primarily by way of reference to the Mediterranean [16].

However, all this would only make sense if we do not draw too narrow limits and hence do not cut off the *hinterlands*. A vast number of travelers reaching the Mediterranean—pilgrims, merchants, diplomats, scholars, artists, rulers, preachers, medical doctors, *etc.*—came from the north or the east, and probably also from the south, that is, for instance, the Kingdom of Mali [17,18], and while the Mediterranean Sea was certainly the central meeting place, the mix of people in that region can only be identified as massive and highly complex. The number of travelogues and pilgrimage accounts, above all, is truly legion [19]. We would not go wrong, in other words, to speak of a Mediterranean cosmopolitanism, since the Mediterranean attracted individuals from every direction and proved to be the central hub of a global compass, as the contributors to *Cosmopolitanism and the Middle Ages* (2013) elucidate nicely by focusing on such well-known cases as Marco Polo, Ibn Battuta, then on the situation in the Iberian Peninsula, Mediterranean trade, but then also Langland's *Piers Plowman* and Chaucer's "Man of Law's Tale." Following Janet Abu-Lughod's observation or claim that the Middle Ages were a world still not yet dominated by a global hegemonic thinking [20], the editors suggest an approach to that past culture in which "international commerce and cross-cultural contacts can happen frequently and across great distances in the absence of a universally imposed system of exchange" ([7]; [21], p. 3).

Of course, with the "discovery" of the New World through Christopher Columbus in 1492 a paradigm shift occurred, since the perspectives then moved toward the Atlantic and also, in the wake of further discoveries (Vasco da Gama, 1498) toward Asia [22]. Nevertheless, in many respects the Mediterranean maintained its central magnetisms, which is reflected in political, economic, literary, and artistic history from the Middle Ages and far beyond.

For the subsequent investigations it is centrally critical to build on this broad base, since we can thus gain full support from social, religious, art-historical scholars when we investigate what we know about the literary documents from the late Middle Ages that reflect in one way or the other on the Mediterranean which Sharon Kinoshita calls, herself drawing from Peregrine Horden's and Nicholas Purcel's *The Corrupting Sea* [3] and from the research by Brian Catlos, a "zone of intelligibility" [23]. Although the tensions were often very high between the representatives of the three Abrahamic faiths, it would be only correct to assume an impressive degree of contact, exchange, and cohabitation [24]. This finds an intriguing expression particularly in late medieval literature, especially when composed in the Mediterranean *hinterland*, which is the topic of this paper.

The purpose does not consist of identifying direct influences or of situating literary texts from the north at the intersection of cultural contacts; instead the topic will focus on the question how northern European writers, here especially from German-speaking lands, responded to and interacted with the Mediterranean horizon and thus reflected, to some extent, transcultural experiences, such as we know from the South-Tyrolean poet Oswald von Wolkenstein (1376/77–1445) [25,26].

Sharon Kinoshita has already discussed this phenomenon in light of high and late medieval French and Italian literature, encouraging us to regard the Mediterranean not as a place of nations and religions, hence of origins, development, and expansion, but as a place of "contact, interaction, and circulation" ([27], p. 39). As she confirms, "Beneath the grand history of the crusades, specialists routinely document the multiple kinds of exchange that constituted business as usual in the medieval Mediterranean" ([26]; [27], p. 40). Neither religions nor languages were defining barriers because more often than not there was a shared sense of local identity, although we would now be best advised to recognize more a form of "conveniencia" than a form of "conviviencia" [28–31].

Consequently, it comes as no surprise to realize that the various social groups all over the Mediterranean entertained considerable contacts with each other and pursued extensive exchange since there were many areas of shared interests. The crucial question that I want to pursue, here, however, pertains to the issue how much northern Europeans participated in this Mediterranean world by way of the literary discourse. Concerning the high Middle Ages, Sharon Kinoshita has noted, for instance, the extent to which Chrétien de Troyes operated with numerous significant references to Mediterranean cities, which thus allowed him to create a kind of *translatio imperii* and hence a *translatio studii*, that is, transferring the glorious cultural past of Greece and Rome to medieval France, establishing a remarkable bridge between the south and the northwest of Europe [32]. For Chrétien this was the ideal opportunity to compete with the German claims on this famous tradition, but we can deduce much more from these few allusions, apart from the political implications since this phenomenon, both *translatio imperii* and *translatio studii*, was a universal concept intensively pursued by intellectuals and poets throughout the Middle Ages ([33], pp. 29–30; [34]). The Mediterranean world mattered significantly for this and many other authors of courtly romances, even if their world view was still pretty limited, at least compared to the early modern world. A significant German example would be the anonymous verse narrative *Mauritius von Craûn* from ca. 1220/1230 ([35], pp. 15–51), where the ideals of knighthood are described as residing in France, finally, after they could not be sustained any longer in Greece and Rome. Another good case in point, even more impressive with respect to the Mediterranean world, would be Rudolf von Ems's *Der guote Gerhard* (ca. 1230/1250), where the Cologne merchant experiences a warm welcome by the Count Stranmur, the leader of the Moroccan harbor of Castelgunt, after Gerhard had traversed

many countries to the east for the purpose of trade and after he had almost been shipwrecked in the Mediterranean [36,37]. The mutual respect shown between Gerhard and Stranmur signals what transculturality could mean in the literary context, that is, the acknowledgement of representatives of other cultures in their own terms, without imposing the own value on the foreign culture. I will discuss this issue further below.

The many allusions to the Mediterranean both here and in many other texts from the entire Middle Ages indicate a constant interest in transcultural experiences. A number of pan-European narratives, such as *Apollonius of Tyre*, *Flore and Blanscheflur*, and *Manekine* (also known in Middle High German as *Mai und Beaflor*), signal how much the literary discourse tended to veer off to the eastern Mediterranean as the most fascinating area for many poets because there the conflicts between Christians and Muslims could be functionalized for the exploration of unexpected transcultural love affairs, such as in the verse narrative *Diu Heidinne* (late thirteenth century) [38].

Boccaccio's *Decameron* from ca. 1351 contains numerous examples for this phenomenon, especially the story about the Muslim princess Alatiel (story seven of day two) ([39,40]). Another interesting example would be Konrad von Würzburg's *Partonopier und Meliur* (ca. 1280) where the major plot development happens in the Byzantine Empire and where the Christian protagonist Partonopier faces, as his most serious contender for the hand of the Byzantine Princess Meliur, the Persian prince. Despite the religious difference, there is little in the way for Meliur to marry this shining knight from the east, until Partonopier appears again and defeats him. Similarly, in the more or less contemporary anonymous crusading romance *Reinfried von Braunschweig* the Christian protagonist strikes friendship with the Persian prince and tours his vast empire in a most peaceful and touristic fashion, quickly forgetting all of his crusading ideals [41].

Even though we cannot determine fully to what extent the various poets pursued truly transcultural interests, our critical analysis clearly indicates that their choice of narrative material was undoubtedly predicated on the awareness that such transcultural experiences seem to have happened at a large scale and that the description of such events would hence appeal to their contemporary audiences [42,43]. Specifically, here I would like to examine how much the Mediterranean world mattered for the authors of fifteenth-century German prose novels and how this might have contributed to a transcultural experience, both in positive and in negative terms. After all, transculturality does not naively imply that the representatives of two different cultures simply embrace each other; very often the opposite is really the case. The choice of the genre of these prose novels ("Volksbücher") finds its justification in the facts that they were all composed at a critical juncture in the history of the late Middle Ages moving toward a major paradigm shift; that many of them were German translations of French sources; that they were written in prose, reflecting the rise of a new form of mercantile, urban readership; and that they reached out both to the urban elite and the aristocratic circles, and this at a time when the interest in pilgrimage and travel to the Holy Land increased tremendously.

3. Fifteenth-Century Prose Novels ("Volksbücher") and Transculturality

Even before the invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg in ca. 1450, numerous German authors appeared producing prose novels that were either based on Italian, French, Latin literature, or they drew their material from Middle High German heroic poems and courtly romances. Some of those

new novels present innovative creative material, such as *Alexander von Metz*, *Barbarossa*, *Brissonetus*, *Faustbuch*, *Fortunatus*, *Wagnerbuch*, *Ritter Galmy*, and *Gabriotto und Reinhart*. Others were didactic narratives, drawing from everyday experiences and from the learned tradition, such as *Claus Narr*, *Till Eulenspiegel*, *Der Finkenritter*, *Die Gartengesellschaft*, *Wendunmuth*, *Rastbüchlein*, *Katzipori*, or *Schimpf und Ernst* [44]. Recent scholarship has slowly discovered the significance of this large corpus of prose works, which is oddly situated between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, especially because most of the literary material derives from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and yet it suddenly appealed again to the new audiences in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, probably also because it was rendered into prose and adapted in style and outlook to the new tastes [45].

Even though the focus never really rests on the Mediterranean exclusively, we constantly come across significant references to that world, and these allow us to probe more deeply the transcultural experiences which are reflected in a variety of those prose novels insofar as many of the protagonists have to leave home, traverse the world, cope with foreign cultures, and then also must realize that that foreignness is actually hidden in their own cultural core, their identity. Previously, in her broad survey, Xenia von Ertzdorff had isolated only a few major themes, such as (marital) love and heroic accomplishments ([46]; cf. also [47]), and then she also examined the specific nature of the novella type narrative within the European context, which was also the focus of Klaus Grubmüller's study [48]. By contrast, the employment of the Mediterranean chronotope in those novels, a concept developed by Bakhtin, has not been fully recognized until today.²

The purpose of this paper cannot be to revisit the entire genre and to introduce and discuss the individual novels, which would amount to a whole monograph by itself [45]. Instead, following the precepts as outlined by recent Mediterranean Studies and buttressed by the theoretical insights of Transcultural Studies, I will examine only specific elements that appear sprinkled throughout the various texts explicitly signaling a concrete interest in the exotic and foreign, normally situated in the Mediterranean, which thus promises us to explain the astounding success of those novels on the early modern book markets [51]. Scholars such as Jan-Dirk Müller have rightly underscored the importance of the adventurous elements in these texts, since the male protagonists tend to travel far and wide and thus set the narrative markers characteristic of these popular novels ([52], pp. 997–99).

Transculturality in the Late Middle Ages?

Altogether, as we will observe, both crusading topics and mercantile interests matter the most, emphasizing the extent to which the authors were keen on connecting their own world and culture with the globally conceived Mediterranean. This automatically implied transcultural experiences, though not quite in the way as Johann Gottfried Herder was to define it in his famous *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit* (1774) and in his equally significant *Philosophie der Menschheit* (1784–1791) [53]. In a rather curious opposition to Herder, Wolfgang Welsch has recently suggested that culture is a phenomenon that “passes through classical cultural boundaries” ([54], p. 197), which constructively problematizes the issue. Hence, Bernd Fischer has rightly raised some doubt about the

² There is much research on how to understand and apply Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope, such as the study by Vice [49]; but I found the online article at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chronotope> to be the most concise and pragmatic; see also note [50].

idealizing concept of transculturality since it normally requires a “Verstehensorientierung” (an orientation based on mutual understanding) ([55], p. 88; see also his previous reflections on this topic, note [56]). But culture constantly undergoes change and experiences transformations. Xenophobia, for instance, tends to arise out of the encounters between two or more cultures, which suggests that the earlier stage was certainly less dominated by this kind of hostility, perhaps out of ignorance, or as the result of the absence of direct contact points.

Transculturality begins when representatives of one culture react to elements of another culture, even when this happens in negative terms at first. The concept of Mediterranean Studies will facilitate our investigation of pre-modern phenotypes of transcultural contacts and exchanges. Most helpfully, hence, Rolf-Peter Janz now emphasizes, “Im Fremden war immer schon die Projektion eigener Wünsche oder Befürchtungen zu erkennen...statt von dem Fremden zu reden, ist es geboten, von der komplexen Vielfalt fremder Kulturen auszugehen; was als fremd wahrgenommen und bezeichnet wird, wird in der jeweiligen Epoche innerhalb verschiedener Gesellschaften ‘ausgehandelt’, es wird ‘erfunden’ oder ‘konstruiert’” (The projection of one’s own wishes or fears have always been recognizable in the foreign itself...instead of talking about the foreign, it would be appropriate to accept first of all the complexity of foreign cultures; what we recognize as foreign and call as such, is being “negotiated”, “invented”, or “constructed”) ([57], p. 19). Transculturality consists, as Steven Martinson avers, in the “wechselwirkenden Interaktion verschiedener kultureller Elemente *und*, zweitens, in der Transformation von zwei oder mehr Kulturen in ausgeweiteten Identitäten, während diese Kulturen ihre authentischen Grundformen behalten” ([58], p. 75; the mutually influential interaction of diverse cultural elements *and*, secondly, in the transformation of one or more cultures in expanded identities, while these cultures hold on to their authentic basic forms). In order to explore this issue further, and particularly in order to recognize its historical dimension and problematic nature, next I will turn to fifteenth-century prose novels where we discover intriguing, though only nascent elements both of transculturality and Mediterraneanism.

Understandably, most scholars working on transculturality are primarily concerned with the traditional concept of nationhood, political identity, and the breaking up of those boundaries in the present world of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries where transcultural phenomena begin to emerge globally [59]. But transculturality developed much earlier, particularly in the late Middle Ages, when writers and poets already explored the encounters of representatives of different cultures, religions, and languages by presenting their protagonists as traversing many lands and large bodies of water, meeting foreigners, engaging with them constructively, and reflecting on the commonalities connecting all people with each other irrespective of political or ideological oppositions.

We have always to keep in mind the strong workings of the Christian paradigm throughout the pre-modern world, and beyond, which, however, is quite often almost undermined by the writers of those prose novels and of their predecessors, who often composed verse narratives where Christians and Muslims successfully operated together in disregard of their religious differences. Transculturality hence here implies, in the medieval context, an opening up of the protagonist’s mind-set through travel experiences and meetings with foreigners, who soon enough lose their foreignness and demonstrate that all tensions and conflicts in life are really human-made and could be taken care of by way of communications across cultural barriers. A surprisingly large number of literary examples, especially from the late Middle Ages, here the German prose novels, indicate already what transculturality could have meant in the pre-modern world.

4. Elisabeth von Nassau-Saarbrücken's *Königin Sibille*—The Suffering Female Protagonist in a Transcultural Context

I will first study the novel *Königin Sibille*, which Elisabeth von Nassau-Saarbrücken had translated from French into German in 1437 [60,61], where representatives of the East (Byzantium) and the West (the Frankish kingdom) find ways of close cooperation and cohabitation (marriage). *Mutatis mutandi* we could also claim that early forms of transculturality occurred in the source text (as is also the case with most other examples in this article), but this would only add more confirmation to the fundamental epistemological process that I want to describe in this and other German novels. At the beginning we learn that King Charles has married Sibille, the daughter of the Emperor of Constantinople, Richart ([60], p. 149), but their marriage breaks up even before she can deliver their first child (Ludwig) because sinister accusations against her make him believe, quite absurdly, that she had an affair with an ugly dwarf who had suddenly arrived at the court and had pushed his way into the inner circle around the king.

At first Charles, also known as Charlemagne, intends to have her burned at the stake as a punishment for her allegedly egregious adultery, but he later agrees to exile her instead. This then triggers a long series of events that take Sibille back to her father in Constantinople, from there to the pope in Rome, and then, ultimately, to France again. By then her son, Louis, has grown up and leads the army against his own father, who finally has to accept the truth that he had been misled by evil members of his court. The union of husband and wife concludes this novel, but her enormous suffering as an innocent victim, and this for many years, highlights the author's major narrative thrust.

The cultural background, however, harkens back to ancient political contacts between the Byzantine Empire and the Holy Roman Empire. Of course, by the mid-1400s Constantinople was already dramatically decimated through the constant onslaught by the Ottoman, who eventually captured that city in 1453, bringing about a traumatic paradigm shift for all of Europe since this meant the complete and final disappearance of the Roman Empire [62]. But poets did not compose their works in direct correlation with the historical conditions, and it would take a long time until the total loss of Constantinople fully sank into the European consciousness, as reflected, for instance, by the anonymous *Fortunatus*, first printed in 1509 (see below). Elisabeth von Nassau-Saarbrücken was likewise not concerned with specific historical details; instead in her novel she highlights the suffering of the female protagonist who has to travel for a very long time until she can finally reach her father's court again, from where she then endeavors slowly but surely to regain her husband's support and love.

Basically, the king has to be forced to let go of his foolish grudge against his wife and his deep misogynist distrust, but the outcome is a happy one. All this entails collective efforts on the part of many individuals and powers, which situates this novel, also extant in a French and a Spanish version, in a global context. At Charlemagne's court, which is located in Paris, the major princes come from Bavaria (Nymo), Denmark (Otger), Narbonne (Emmerich), and Brabant (Bernhart). The king sends his wife away, ordering the knight Abrye von Mondidyre to accompany her through the forest and to set her on the way to Rome where she is supposed to repent her alleged sins ([60], p. 127). Yet, she turns to Constantinople, accompanied, or rather guided, by the good and loyal peasant Warakir, since she knows that her father would help her to gain justice ([60], p. 130). On the way they make a stop in Hungary where the king has her child baptized and agrees to be the godfather ([60], p. 144).

From there the small company, which has by then grown into a group of several people, they reach Rome and inform the pope about the tragic development in France at King Charles's court ([60], p. 154). The pope is immediately ready to accompany them on their way to Constantinople, where the emperor welcomes his daughter, though with great surprise, and is soon informed about all the terrible details. In a curious, almost hilarious turn of events, upon the begard's recommendation—a holy hermit whom they had met during their journey—the emperor assembles his army and marches toward France ([60], p. 155), thus reversing the traditional military campaigns of the Crusades that had come to a complete stop in 1291 with the fall of Acre to the Muslims. Elisabeth apparently did not care particularly about geographic details and abandoned historical veracity in favor of dramatizing the tragic development in Queen Sibille's life. The narrative focuses rests on France, however, since that is the location where the subsequent battles take place and where, in the end, the royal couple finds together after all.

Irrespective of historical conditions, the author has the Byzantine emperor and the French nobles cooperate closely, besieging King Charles in Troyes ([60], p. 156). King Louis, Charles's own son and his successor (Louis the Pious) strategizes with his uncle, the emperor how best to overcome the hostile forces, and both are supported by the pope, which creates a highly unusual mix of political entities far removed from historical reality. But the author projects this conjunction of the most important individuals with the intention of casting Charles as a highly irrational and confused ruler who must be brought to reason by means of a close alliance of the Eastern and the Western Church, as if the Great Schism of 1054 never had happened [63].

However, while the geographical and historical accuracy might be lacking considerably, the novel itself signals how much the events described here take place within the larger Mediterranean world and that the history of western Europe really has to be located within the Mediterranean framework, irrespective of how much the author and her audience really understood about it. The origins of the Carolingian empire are thus closely tied in with the Byzantine Empire and the papacy, and thus the Frankish *hinterland* suddenly emerges as a critical component of transcultural Mediterranean reflections. According to the narrator, once Charles and Sibille have renewed their marriage, they conceive of another son, Lohir, who was later to become the emperor of Rome ([60], p. 173), which again does not agree with the historical conditions as reflected by the relevant chronicles. However, Elisabeth thereby managed to create a transcultural map of Europe according to which all the relevant power players at that time could get together and join hands in order to overcome the traitors, liars, and deceivers who endangered the well-being of the royal court and especially of the queen.

Why does the author conceive of such a huge geographical framework, combining Paris with Constantinople and Rome? The narrative focus clearly rests on the innocent queen's suffering and the astounding support which she receives from a wide range of forces both east and west. There is no reference to the Muslim world or the Jewish culture here, but the old conflict between the Greek Orthodox and the Catholic Church has also disappeared from view because the only concern addressed in this novel pertains to ethical values within the political context.

Transculturality is, what is noteworthy in our context, simply assumed as the basis of all actions, such as the marriage between the Byzantine princess and the Frankish king, and later the close cooperation of various people from different countries and societies with the same goal of restoring Sibille's honor and status as Charles's wife, while the true evil forces rest within the western Carolingian court. Once those traitors are eliminated, King Charles finally realizes how much he had been misled by those evil courtiers

and how terribly he had treated his own wife. All this is possible, however, only because the Byzantine emperor and the pope join hands and form a military and political alliance together with Charles's own son Louis and a whole array of simple people such as Warakir, the true hero behind Sibille's rescue. The novel aggressively targets the failures of courtly society and heavily relies on a transcultural background without which those traitors could not be defeated [64].

Even though the geographical map outlined here is nothing but highly spotty, and the very absence of more specific details confirms how much the author and her audience simply assumed a generic understanding of the Mediterranean world and how little they cared about actual cultural or religious differences. While the marriage of Theophano with Emperor Otto II in 972 was apparently a major deviation from the political norm even at that time [65], within fifteenth-century literary discourse this was suddenly regarded and treated as a regular and very positive development [66]. For Elisabeth, to be sure, it seemed to be a very ordinary move by King Charles to find his bride in the Byzantine empire, probably because by the fifteenth century the connections between East and West had become intensive enough both in economic and political terms to allow such a marriage to be treated as quite ordinary within the literary context ([8], pp. 137–53).

5. Thüring von Ringoltingen's *Melusine*: The Uncanny in a Transcultural Context

While Elisabeth's *Königin Sibille* has survived in only one manuscript and was never printed, the situation with Thüring von Ringoltingen's *Melusine* (1456) was a very different one, since this quickly turned into a true bestseller far beyond the Middle Ages ([44], pp. 141–62; [52], pp. 1012–87). There are many reasons for this enormous success story, but one of them does not seem to have been discussed much so far at least within the German literary context, that is, the transcultural experience within the Mediterranean context (for previous approaches to this issue in the French version, see Burns [67]). The female protagonist Melusine proves to be a hybrid creature, half human and half snake, which her husband Reymund only finds out many years after their marriage and after most of their children have already grown up. But behind this poeto-mythical dimension we can also discover numerous comments on cultural aspects of great importance for our argument here.

His own brother instigates him to investigate his wife's whereabouts on Saturdays when she regularly hides in a bath, preventing anyone from seeing her, which arouses Reymund's suspicion that she might have an extramarital affair. To his horror he has to realize her true nature, which he at first keeps a secret, but which he later makes known to the public in an emotional outburst after he has learned that his son Geoffroy had killed his brother Freymund because the latter had joined a monastery. Violence hence rests within the family, and this leads to Reymund's public accusation, and hence to Melusine being forced to depart home and hearth and to leave mankind behind for good until the Day of Judgment has come. Mythical elements combine here with narrative features drawn from a variety of literary sources, and the success which this novel experienced has certainly to do with the many different themes brought together by the original French author Couldrette (ca. 1400, verse romance) and his predecessor, Jean d'Arras (1393).

On the one hand the intriguing aspect of a man marrying a hybrid creature has mattered greatly in the novels' extraordinary popularity far into the eighteenth and even nineteenth century. On the other, *Melusine* is action-packed, with war, murder, and other conflicts dominating many sections, especially

after Melusine's disappearance. But already in the first half of the text, where we learn much about her sons' adventures in the distant world, major conflicts emerge that must have fascinated the contemporary audience. Those accounts apparently draw from a variety of sources and are partly historically accurate, partly imaginary. All of them, specifically underscore the great interest in projecting foreign worlds and cultures with which the protagonists have to interact.

After Melusine's son Anthoni has married the Princess Cristina of Lützelburg, war breaks out in Bohemia because, as the King of Alsace is informed by his brother, the king of Bohemia, the Turkish emperor has attacked his land and is besieging the city of Prague ([52], p. 74). Of course, Anthoni and his brother Reynhart get immediately involved and rush east, where they succeed, after an intensive battle to overcome the enemies and destroy them altogether. While the Turks had first burned the king of Bohemia to death ([52], p. 79), now the king of Alsace does the same to the Turkish emperor and all of his troops whom they had captured in the fight ([52], pp. 82–83).

There is no good explanation why the author would have reconfigured historical factors, distorting them so egregiously, unless we assume, as is often the case in this genre, that references to foreign locations, cultures, and people are freely combined in order to set the stage for the protagonists who thus can demonstrate their prowess and military accomplishments on behalf of the entire European knighthood and Christianity. Relocating these religious wars at the edge of northern European kingdoms brings the traditional Mediterranean military conflicts closer to home and make them thus more dramatic and scary for the contemporary audiences.

Moreover, Thüring makes it thus possible for the Alsatian and Rhenish knights and their friends and families to imagine that they as well could accomplish triumphs on the battlefield against the Ottomans, who by that time were still far away and "only" moving north through the Balkans [68]. These military endeavors are regularly associated with experiences of love and marriage, since Anthoni has already married the Princess of Alsace—certainly another historical fiction, which serves the author well, however, because his account thus does not conflict with historical facts.

At the same time, the military operations outside of the city of Prague are described in very similar terms as those in countless courtly romances, except that here the Ottomans have replaced the Saracens, and the battle does not take place in some mysterious location in the east, but on familiar grounds, Bohemia, which yet still seems somewhat far away from western Europe, that is, Switzerland. For Thüring the battle itself proves to be an ideal occasion to reflect upon the rise and fall of fortune in such military operations because at first the Ottomans seem to be very successful, especially because the king of Bohemia, Friedrich, is killed by the arrow shot from a cross-bow ([52], p. 78), which strongly encourages them to pursue their enemies more energetically, thus almost gaining the upper hand and so the victory. But then Anthoni and Reymund arrive with their large army and can turn everything around, killing the Ottoman emperor and many of his soldiers, thus triumphing altogether and crushing the Muslim attack thoroughly.

Naturally, the foreign culture could only be perceived in military terms, since the audience expected to hear about the Christian victory, especially brought about by Melusine's sons. But this is not the only encounter with the Mediterranean world, since the other sons also gain significant victories far away, setting up their own kingdoms much further east. Uriens and his brother Gyot fight successfully in Cyprus and rise to highest honors there ([52], pp. 51ff.), which does not come as real surprises because Cyprus represented, especially in late medieval literature, a geographical trope commonly referred to as

a marker of the eastern Mediterranean, a half-way stepping stone, so to speak, to the exotic Orient, a place of wealth, power, and also peace ([23,24,69]).

While the entire story of Melusine is located in the vicinity of Poitiers ([52], p. 13), the monstrous and fair-like nature of this female figure evokes distant lands and strange realms where only few humans ever set foot [70]. Hence the narrative takes a natural turn toward those far-away countries in central Europe and then particularly in the eastern Mediterranean where Melusine's sons hope to gain fame and power through military victories.

As is very common in fifteenth-century, in Famagusta (here: Famagrossa) they come to the local king's rescue who is attacked by the Muslim Sultan who is besieging the city "mit hundert tausent heyden" ([52], p. 51; with hundred thousand heathens). The king is already deeply worried that they would not be able to resist the siege much longer and might have to capitulate, which would force them to abandon their Christian faith and to be converted to Islam ([52], p. 52). When the king notices the arrival of the foreigners, which makes the Muslims turn away from the city toward the new enemies, he believes that they are in flight, so he opens the city gate and launches a sortie, but they are badly beaten back and the king himself is mortally wounded through a poisoned projectile ([52], p. 52). In the meantime the two brothers engage with the Sultan's troops and can quickly overcome them despite the huge difference in numbers. Uriens even succeeds in overcoming the Sultan and killing him, which soon brings about their victory over the enemies. We learn only then that this Sultan is the ruler of Babylon ([52], p. 54), who thus emerges as an icon of everything foreign to late medieval Europeans.

Ironically, however, while the Sultan and his soldiers represent religious otherness, Uriens himself, being Melusine's son and hence marked in his face as a descendent of a monstrous race, represents an internal, or genetic otherness, as we would say today:

Doch was sein angesicht nit schoen/sunder einer selczamer form vnd gestalt/wann er was gar kurcz vnd vast breyt vnd flach vnder seinen augen Vnd was jm das ein aug rott vnd das ander gruen Er haett auch einen grossen weyten mund/vnd lange vnd grosse oren ([52], p. 47).

[But his face was not beautiful but of strange form and shape since he was very short and very wide and flat underneath his eyes. One of his eyes was red and the other was green. He had a large wide mouth and long and large ears.].

The Cypriots marvel at his appearance, but they can only express puzzlement since he has rescued them through his manly and powerful fighting against their existential threat. They make the sign of the cross when they catch sight of him out of precaution and yet admire him because he appears to them as an individual who would be able to conquer many countries ([52], p. 55). The mortally wounded king enquires about his name and then expresses his great respect for the dynasty of Lusignan, which is mentioned really only here for the first time, whereas before Melusine had not divulged anything about her own background and origin. The narrator had only signaled before that the name of "Lusinia" for one of the castles which Melusine had ordered to be built on her behalf ([52], p. 1053) would later gain in global esteem.

Jean d'Arras in his earlier version (1393) had given slightly more information about Lusignan [71], embedding the entire account in the mythical past of the noble lineage of Lusignan in Poitou ([52], p. 21). Thüring associates the entire story to that dynasty only in his epilogue in which he confirms that the fairy figure Melusine had the original castles and towers built.

Whereas Uriens is thus characterized by his inheritance and descendance from an archaic, autochtone, that is, monstrous race and thus represents the internal foreignness, the Muslims appear on the stage as external foreigners who are quickly defeated and eliminated. Even though this proves to be a traditional trope in medieval literature, which is here carried over to the fifteenth century in slightly changed configurations because of the Mediterranean setting (Cyprus), Thüring successfully translated the exotic dimension into a narrative context which here becomes digestible and understandable also for a northern European audience. There could hardly be a better example of what the *hinterland* of the Mediterranean world implied, as Melusine and Reymund establish their dynasty in France, but their sons conquer or gain kingdoms in Cyprus and neighboring countries. As concrete as those areas might be, for the poet and his audience they represented probably something what Henrie Lefebvre had called “abstract space”, the product of imagination based on some elements of concrete knowledge through personal experience on travels [72].

At any rate, Uriens assumes the throne after the mortally wounded king has asked him to marry his daughter and to replace him because he can no longer defend his country and his people ([52], p. 57). After the marriage has been completed, the king addresses Uriens and identifies him as “Vriens von Lusinyen” ([52], p. 57) who is now supposed to assume the crown and continue with his successful fighting against the Muslims after he had already killed the Sultan. Immediately after the marriage the king succumbs to his wound and passes away. We only learn that Uriens and Hermyne live a happy life and have a son called Greyffe, who later accomplished many heroic deeds and conquered his own kingdom somewhere in the Asian east, called Premye ([52], p. 60). This surprisingly extends the Mediterranean far into a mythical Middle East, characterized by fictional names of those places which then belong to Premye—a narrative strategy which already Wolfram von Eschenbach had pursued at the end of his *Parzival* (ca. 1205) by relating the history, even if only in fragmentary form, of Parzival’s half-brother Feirefiz and his wife, Repansche de Schoye, one of the maids serving the Grail, whose son was to turn into the fabled Prester John.

In *Melusine*, however, the narrative interest lingers on the Mediterranean, as imaginative as it might be presented here. We learn at the end of the chapter that shortly thereafter the King of Armenia also passes away, which makes the inheritance decision to a critical issue for the entire country. But since the king had been Hermyne’s uncle and since the fame of the two Lusignan brothers has spread far and wide, the nobles of that country request that Uriens’s brother Gyot be designated as the new king by marrying the Princess Florye ([52], p. 61). This happens, and the next chapter quickly informs us about the subsequent events, since the two brothers rule mightily over their lands in the eastern Mediterranean, fight with great success against the Muslims, and support the Knights of St. John, or Knights Hospitallers, on the island of Rhodes ([52], p. 62).³ We are then only informed about the next generations who all continue successfully with the war against the Muslims and can thus maintain their own honor and reputation. Back home, Reymund resigns from the throne and travels to Rome to ask the pope for his redemption and absolution of his sins. From there he retires to the monastery of Montserrat in Aragon, which finally integrates also the Iberian Peninsula into this family history, extending another, though rather thin line of transcultural experience, but now in the western Mediterranean. This does not mean,

³ For fastest and concise information. Available online: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knights_Hospitaller (accessed on 18 August 2015).

however, that Melusine would hence be completely out of the picture because of her husband's religious conversion. Instead, briefly before his death in the monastery, she appears for three days in the air around the castle Lusignan, thus prophesying his passing away as she had foretold before her own departure from mankind ([52], p. 154).

The remainder of the novel deals with attempts by various of the sons to meet the challenge posed by their ghost-like aunts, in which they fail, and then with Geoffrey's death. The narrator only emphasizes at the end how much the dynasty of the Lusignans is connected with virtually all countries in then known Europe through marriage and military conquest: "vnd ist diser stamme also weytt vnd verr zerbreyttet jn waelsch vnd teütsche lannd" ([52], p. 174; and this dynasty is widely disseminated in French/Italian and German lands).

All this does not necessarily constitute transculturality, insofar as both Reymund and his sons operate only in Christian lands and tend to fight against Muslim opponents. But the narrative is definitely anchored not only in France, but also in Bohemia, Cyprus, Armenia, and Spain, apart from the imaginary territories where Melusine and her sisters operate. This geographic network does not evoke much confidence about the author's concrete knowledge of the various countries on the European map, but the deliberate strategy to have her protagonists commonly operate in those distant lands clearly reflect an interest in foreignness by itself and especially in the Mediterranean world where Melusine's sons can gain might and political status.

6. The Scottish Princess at the Austrian Court Reflects on the Transcultural in Her *Pontus und Sidonia*

The situation concerning the transcultural experience is somewhat different and yet quite similar in the novel *Pontus und Sidonia* by Elisabeth's contemporary, the Scottish Princess Eleonor, which she completed sometime between 1440 and 1460. Eleonor had been the daughter of the Scottish King James I (murdered in 1437) and had briefly stayed at the royal court of in France between 1445 and 1448, when she was married to the Tyrolean Duke Sigmund [73]. Sometime thereafter she translated the French novel *Ponthus et la belle Sidoyne*, probably originally composed by Geoffrey de la Tour Landry (before 1330–1402/1406), into German, parallel to two other German intellectuals, but her novel was the only one that made it into early modern print (first printed in 1483) ([44], pp. 144–54, 44–47), from when on it turned into a true bestseller far into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

In essence, Pontus is the son of the King of Galicia who is killed by his Muslim enemies, but he is secretly helped and can escape to the Kingdom of Brittany, where he soon emerges as a superior knight. He and the king's daughter Sidonia secretly fall in love, but they maintain strictest modesty and chastity, fighting any effort by a jealous courtier to malign them and accuse Pontus, above all, of pursuing the princess with prurient interests. To avoid any scandal, Pontus goes into a voluntary exile and travels to England where he stays for seven years. Already back in Brittany he had decisively defeated one of the Sultan's three sons, killing his opponent and scores of his fighters. In England he faces the same threat, this time by the third of the Sultan's sons, and also overcomes and kills him. At the very end Pontus returns to Galicia and accomplishes the same heroic deed there, thus eliminating all threats to western Christianity by any Muslim forces [74].

The theme of this novel focuses on the love relationship between Pontus and Sidonia, although both have to struggle long and hard to fend for their honor and freedom to choose their own marriage partner. Even though they quickly fall in love with each other, the barriers barring them from experiencing their happiness and joy are steep and require resolute and arduous actions. Pontus has to defend himself repeatedly in public against the charge of lusting after Sidonia, so he withdraws several times from the court. He returns from England only after a messenger has alerted him to the danger that Sidonia might be forced to marry the old and ugly duke of Burgundy. As soon as Pontus has arrived at the court, he joins a tournament and kills the opponent more or less by accident, thus removing this danger for their private happiness. Next, nothing seems to be in the way between the two lovers to join hands in marriage, but Pontus first has to liberate his own country, Galicia, and to regain the title of king by defeating the Muslims there.

During his absence, the jealous courtier Gendelet, has fake letters written in which Pontus alleges makes known that he would prefer if Sidonia married Gendelet, and her father strongly pushes for that marriage. However, Sidonia withdraws into a strong and well-provisioned tower and can resist the siege for a long time. At the end her father joins their company and thus has to endure famine as well. Only because he is then about to die from hunger, does Sidonia finally agree to marry the hated man, but Pontus returns just in time from Galicia and kills his opponent.

The novel has the protagonist operate in many different countries, which reflects the aristocratic culture in the fifteenth century internationally connected through marriages and military alliances. Pontus originates from Galicia in the northwestern part of the Iberian Peninsula. He finds refuge in Brittany, and later he goes into “exile” in England. There he helps solve a military conflict with the king of Ireland and sets up peace between both sides through a marriage contract. The King of England and the King of Scotland are also connected through marital bonds. Once Pontus has returned from England, he confronts the Duke of Burgundy and kills him. During his first absence from the royal court in Brittany people assume that he might have gone to Poland, Hungary, or Germany.

After Pontus has liberated Sidonia from the persecutions by the courtier Gendelet, he returns to Galicia and defeats the Muslims there. The Mediterranean world does not exactly arise at the narrative horizon, but the connection with Spain is clearly visible. Moreover, the Sultan’s three sons arrive from the eastern Mediterranean and attack first Galicia (victory), then Brittany (defeat), and finally England (defeat). Even though it remains unclear whether Eleonore of Austria was aware of the catastrophic fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453, her novel specifically outlines how Christianity can rally enough strength to resist and overcome this Muslim danger. Actually, all of Europe was abuzz with the terrible news about this catastrophic development in the Eastern Mediterranean, which rang in a new age of Ottoman threats to the Balkans and then to the Habsburg Empire [75–77]. However, neither Eleonore nor Elisabeth, not to mention Thüring, bothered to engage with those events specifically, and instead only project general military conflicts, conquests, and battles pitting Christians against Muslims. Each time we observe the same narrative pattern because at first the latter are very successful and take over the targeted country completely. They then rely on the traditional administrative structure, as long as the officers convert to Islam, as is the case in Galicia, and nothing seems to be in their way until the hero emerges and defeats them entirely.

In *Pontus und Sidonia* we learn, for instance, of a formerly Christian knight who now serves Sultan Produs and can do so because he has assumed the appearance of a Muslim, although in his heart he has

remained a Christian ([74], p. 46). Throughout the entire Mediterranean world we hear of similar problems because many times representatives of other religions served their lords, which caused deep frictions at time and could result in direct persecutions [78,79]. In Eleonore's novel this counselor is never exposed, but he certainly operates secretly supporting the Christian cause. Every time the Sultan has a nightmare which foretells him his own tragic ending at the hand of young Pontus, this knight calms his fears and dismisses this dream vision as irrelevant and deceptive ([74], pp. 49, 138), although the very opposite will take place.

What does have to do with transculturality? At first, superficial, sight the very opposite seems to be the case insofar as the representatives of these two cultures and religions fight each other most bitterly; and the Christians do not rest until they have achieved the ultimate triumph. But the author integrated these motifs not simply for religious reasons, especially since there is no clear sense of a crusading mentality. But this and other novels clearly reflect on deep-seated fear of a Muslim take-over when the own military defense might not stand up to the danger by the Arabic or rather by then Turkish forces.

The Sultan, who resides in famous, almost mythic Babylon ([74], p. 60), has four sons, and only one, the oldest, is designated to inherit his father's empire in the east. The three others must fend for themselves and thus they extend their power to western European countries, each trying to achieve the greatest glory in winning the most lands and in converting a maximum of Christians to Islam—a standard narrative theme which we commonly find, with only slight variations, in numerous courtly romances. The Sultan's sons operate, in other words, just like any other Arthurian knight, except that they adhere to another faith. Both Eleonore and Elisabeth, among others, imagine a world where Christians and Muslims might ultimately share an interest in and with each other, competing for the control over various lands and kingdoms without much concern regarding the religious orientation, although at the present, in the time of the literary texts, the relationships are determined by military conflicts. This non-religious, and in a way also much more transcultural perspective will be increasingly noticeable soon in such texts as the anonymous *Fortunatus*.

7. The Ultimate Departure toward the Transcultural in the Mediterranean Context: *Fortunatus*

We notice a very different constellation in a later prose novel, the anonymous *Fortunatus* (1509) (here quoted from Müller, note [52], which also enjoyed tremendous popularity and was even translated or adapted into English by Thomas Dekker as *The Pleasant Comedie of Old Fortunatus* (1599) [80]. *Fortunatus* at first travels throughout western Europe and concludes his life after he has also toured the eastern Mediterranean, including Egypt and the Middle East. But he embarks on his adventurous life not at all as a wealthy person because his father, a wealthy citizen of Cyprus, has proven to be a spend-thrift who wastes all of his extensive inheritance and later also his wife's dowry. Facing poverty and misery, *Fortunatus* leaves home, and is lucky enough to be hired by the Count of Flanders who at that point is just about to depart from Cyprus and to return home ([52], p. 192).

Cyprus quickly disappears from our view since *Fortunatus* undergoes many difficult and challenging life-experiences, but once he has acquired many riches and has become an independently wealthy individual, he returns home and settles there, rising to the highest possible position within that society based on his money, which emerges as a critical new theme in early modern German literature [81]. The novel is based on the fundamental experience of the wheel of fortune, that is, very much in the sense of

Boethius's teachings in his *De consolazione philosophiae* from 525 C.E., insofar as Fortunatus has to struggle hard to survive most dangerous situations. At first he loses all his money he had earned in the service of the Count of Flanders, then he works for a merchant of Florence in London ([74], p. 408), who is, however, later accused of having stolen the king's jewels, which only turns out to be wrong, but by then too late for the innocent victims. Both the merchant and his men are executed, only Fortunatus is spared by luck. Before that process is set in motion, the mob is threatening all Florentine and Lombard merchants, suspecting them of nefarious actions, which confirms the extent to which by the early sixteenth century cosmopolitan conditions dominated in such large cities as London, which are directly connected with their trading partners in the Mediterranean ([74], pp. 419–20).

The jewels are discovered later, but by that time Fortunatus has been escorted out of the country and ends up in a large forest where he finally encounters, after a life-threatening fight against a bear, a mysterious lady who offers him, as in a fairy tale, the choice among wisdom, wealth, physical strength, health, beauty, and a long life ([74], p. 430). Without much consideration, Fortunatus chooses wealth and receives a money purse that will never be empty wherever he might be. Of course, as to be expected, this new wealth makes Fortunatus rather suspicious to others, and his life from then on proves to be rather precarious, although he handles the endless amount of money quite carefully, which ultimately allows him to go on extensive travels throughout Europe and later also to Egypt and the Near East. The first part of the novel concludes with him marrying the daughter of an impoverished count in Cyprus and thus setting up his own dynasty, and this with the help of his infinite money supply. He can even win a magical cap from the Egyptian Sultan by deceiving him. This cap allows him to fly to any location in the world within seconds according to his own wishes.

Subsequently Fortunatus dies and passes his wealth and these two magical objects on to his sons, Ampedo and Andolosia. The latter quickly abuses them in order to rise in social rank, and is thus finally murdered because others begrudge his wealth and presumptuousness, while the former dies out of grief because of the disappearance of his brother. With their death the money purse and the travel cap lose their properties as well, which concludes the novel. In the epilogue the narrator offers his reflections, warning against the temptation of money and urging his readers to choose wisdom instead, especially because the biblical King Solomon had done the same ([74], p. 580; [82]).

Let us return to the first half dealing with Fortunatus's life. After all those preliminary events leading up to the scene with the magical maid in the forest, the narrative is determined for a long time by Fortunatus's travels that take him all over Europe ([74], pp. 441ff.). The narrator is fairly specific about the individual stations, but limits himself to name dropping and giving distances. Fortunatus, together with his servant Lüpoldus, embark on their trip in Nuremberg, although they had met in Nantis, or Nantes, the capital of Brittany ([74], p. 436). The German author, however, closely followed the usual outline of many contemporary travelogues, which commonly began in Nuremberg, and has the two travelers reach, in sequence, Augsburg, Nörtlingen, Ulm, Constance, Basel, Strasbourg, Mainz, Cologne, Bruges, then London, from where they turn to Scotland and then Ireland ([74], pp. 441–42; [83,84]). Subsequently they visit the so-called "St. Patrick's Purgatory" ([74], p. 443), where it would be possible to enter a cave and to get a view into the actual purgatory. In reality, there is only darkness, and the two men would almost have died in the labyrinth of the cave system, if not at the end an old monk would have rescued them ([74], pp. 445–47).

Their travel then takes them to Calais, Paris, then Bayonne, Pamplona, Burgos, Santiago de Compostela, Lisbon, Sevilla, Granada, Cordoba, and Barcelona, from where they visit the Monastery of Montserrat. The following stations simply follow the usual pilgrimage routes to Jerusalem, Alexandria, and the St. Catherine monastery in Sinai ([74], p. 449). They also reach Constantinople, which is not yet conquered by the Ottomans ([74], p. 450), which could indicate that the original text was composed before 1453 ([52], pp. 1163–64).

From here I would like to jump to a later section in the novel in order to move beyond the global Mediterranean scope, without leaving that perspective out of sight, and reflect on the aspect of transculturality once again. First, once they all have arrived at the court of the Turkish emperor, they feel safe again because in Constantinople they were attacked by their inn-keeper who tried to steal their goods, whereupon Lüpoldus killed him and then deposited off the body in the latrine. However, Fortunatus expressed his great disappointment over the many Christians who had converted to Islam in order to serve at the Ottoman court (“verlogneten christen” [74], p. 463; deceptive Christians). This finds a good parallel in Eleonore’s *Pontus und Sidonia*, but there the narrator’s explanation underscores the existential fear those individuals felt once the Muslims had taken over their country. Next we learn of Fortunatus’s visits of the Scandinavian countries, then of Bohemia, from where he returns to Venice, and then to Cyprus. Once having established a residence on this island, and once his wife has delivered two boys, Fortunatus embarks on his next journey, which takes him, however, this time to Egypt, and from there further east.

Operating like an ordinary merchant, the protagonist arrives in Alexandria and receives a friendly welcome, as any other merchant originating from Venice or other parts of the western Mediterranean would be given. He is even allowed to see the Sultan, whom he offers a huge gift of jewels, which stuns the Sultan and makes the Italian merchants very jealous ([74], pp. 486–87), particularly because Fortunatus had never set foot in that part of the world before and does not really operate like a traditional merchant, and yet immediately outdoes them in every respect. The Sultan returns the gift with an equally valuable amount of pepper, and the two develop, irrespective of the anger by the other merchants, a good working relationship. The same happens with the Sultan’s Admiral, whom the Italian and other merchants—now also including those from Catalunya or Catalonia—try to bribe hoping that he would treat Fortunatus badly, but they are simply outdone by the latter who can always pay much more money than anyone else. The Admiral simply takes the money from both sides, and ultimately privileges Fortunatus after all ([74], p. 488).

By means of his money the protagonist receives the Admiral’s full support for his plans to tour the countries further east, perhaps even up to China, and is well equipped ([74], p. 489), and this without running into any problems or conflicts because of their religious differences. In fact, money makes it possible in the first place to establish this good relationship, but there is no real problem anyway between the European merchants and the Sultan’s court. In fact, we could identify this situation as the most transcultural one in all of the fifteenth-century German prose novels. But we know also from numerous pilgrimage accounts, such as by Felix Fabri or Arnold von Harff, how much traffic and commerce had brought together the representatives of the two world religions by the end of the fifteenth century ([85], see also note 7, “Introduction”, pp. 93–120).

While Elisabeth and Eleonore had still elaborated their novels on the continuous military conflict between Islamic and Christian forces, which then allowed their protagonist to demonstrate their fighting

skills, manly prowess, and leadership qualities, the anonymous author of *Fortunatus* pursued very different concepts, though he also located his text to a considerable extent within the framework of the Mediterranean world. However, here we observe a clear case of transculturality, as materialistic as it might be, since money proves to be a shared value on both sides of the religious divide. On his way home from the East, Fortunatus feels a great desire to stop first in Cairo to see the Sultan again and to thank him for all his help ([74], p. 492). He meets him, however, in Alexandria, and so also the Admiral, who is identified as his “guoten freund” ([74], p. 492; his good friend). After his own ship has returned to take him back home, and after all the merchandise has been sold quickly at low prices, the Sultan desires to invite Fortunatus to dine with him and to relate how he had fared in the Orient. As we learn, because of the letters of recommendation issued by the Sultan, the protagonist had been able to traverse all those foreign countries without any difficulties: “gar eerlich vnd schon von allen herren entpfangen waer worden / vnd wie ym all ander herren für vnnd für so grosse fördernus hetten gethon” ([74], p. 493; he had been received honorably and pleasantly by all lords, who then provided him with much support). Fortunatus himself emphasizes that his journey would not have been possible without those letters, thus underscoring how much the Sultan’s authority and hence his personal sponsorship had mattered all over the eastern world ([74], p. 494).

After the dinner Fortunatus asks for the privilege to give a monetary gift to all the Mamluks and all other servants employed at court, which impresses the Sultan considerably. He praises the protagonist for his honorable behavior and then wants to demonstrate his own wealth, so he leads him to his treasury. But irrespective of all the gold and jewels, the true treasure consists of a magical cap that allows the person who puts it on his head to be transported magically to the location of his desire ([74], p. 496)—clearly another fairy-tale object and motif.

Fortunatus quickly realizes the enormous value of this object, and tricks the Sultan to place the hat himself on the visitor’s head. He immediately wishes to be on his ship and can thus escape with the greatest treasure possible, and later adamantly refuses to return it despite various diplomatic efforts on the Sultan’s part ([74], pp. 500–3). When his emissary Marcholando tries to negotiate with him regarding the hat, Fortunatus suddenly insists that there could never be any friendship between a Christian and a Muslim, and that the Sultan himself would never return the hat if he had stolen it from Fortunatus ([74], p. 503). Fortunatus treats the messenger very well, but he does not give in, which concludes this part of the narrative since the protagonist has no longer any interest to travel to the Holy Land or Egypt (*ibid.*). But the new conflict between Fortunatus and the Sultan is not based on any religious causes, but simply on their competition for this most valuable hat.

8. Conclusions

To conclude, we can observe how much *Fortunatus* was predicated on the global travel experience, on the localization of the central events in Cyprus and the eastern Mediterranean, and on the exchange between and contacts with the representatives of Christian societies in England, Italy, and Cyprus and the Near East. Fortunatus does not face any conflicts when he reaches Egypt, and with the Sultan’s letters all political doors in the various Asian countries open up to him. Travel and mercantile activities, apart from tourism (already then) and diplomatic service made it fairly easy to traverse throughout the entire region and to reach even India. But Fortunatus returns to Cyprus, his real home, which the narrator

projects as a most hospitable, welcoming, and international location in the eastern Mediterranean. For Fortunatus, both London and Constantinople could have been places where he might have faced, as an innocent victim, the death penalty. Alexandria and Cairo are important intermediate sites for further explorations, and Spain, Germany, Scandinavia, Flanders, the Balkans, Bohemia, and Poland are simply sites to be visited on the grand tour through Europe. Cyprus, by contrast, stands out as Fortunatus's country of origin and the desired place to settle. It is there where the Mediterranean and the transcultural meet and form a significant union.

In the other fifteenth-century examples, serious conflicts between Christians and Muslims dominate, but the appearance of large Islamic armies in Spain, Brittany, England, signify that the war between both cultures and religions was omnipresent. At the same time, despite the disappearance of Byzantium after the fall of Constantinople in 1453, German authors continued to refer to that political unit long after that monumental event and regarded it as a major reference point in the imperial politics relevant for the German-speaking lands. Considering that we are dealing here with premodern novels, all examples demonstrate a fascinating openness toward the Mediterranean as a significant *locus operandi*, and they reflect on a phenotype of transculturality that was to develop considerably further in the following centuries. Even when the novelists project the foreign world, here mostly the Muslim-ruled countries, they consistently indicate their considerable interest in and awareness of the other cultures that by that time simply had to be reckoned with. Byzantium mattered just as much for western European authors and readers as Alexandria, Cairo, and Cyprus. While the historical chronicles might focus mostly on hostile relationships between the Arabic and the European world, the literary evidence, especially from the late Middle Ages, begins to paint quite a different picture [72,86].

By the same token, northwestern Spain, with Galicia, was suddenly just as important for German audiences as Armenia and Persia because major events crucial in the protagonists' lives take place there. Even if we were to claim that the degree of transculturality was still very low in late medieval German literature, these novels signal how much the foundations for a transcultural world view was increasingly established or already present in an early manifestation, and this in the *hinterlands* of the Mediterranean. The protagonists roam over much larger and much more concretely identifiable space, reflecting hence a significant "spatial turn" insofar as both Europe in specific geographic terms and the entire Mediterranean are now fully accessible irrespective of any religious or ethnic conflicts [87].

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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