

The Metaphysics of Mélusine: A tale of alchemy, and initiation, reclaiming the Goddess

Since their origins, fairy tales have always been the subject of analysis and interpretation. People have long speculated on the origins of these myths and the deeper meaning they may hold, especially where it folds into our realities. Research shows these stories have a profound impact on the subconscious, revealing symbolic layers that go far beyond their surface. Many of these tales are also much older than we might assume.

In 1393, Jean D'Arras was commissioned by Duke Jean de Berry to write a fairy tale called *Le Roman de Mélusine*, a story of a mermaid that would go on to inspire figures like the French alchemist Paracelsus and psychoanalyst Carl Jung. Paracelsus' concepts of the undine, a water elemental, inspired German writer Frederich de la Motte Foqué's 1811 novella *Undine*, which in turn influenced Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid*, written in 1837. Jean de Berry was the last of the Lusignan royal line at the time, having the story written as a political statement and to immortalise his family line.¹ The Lusignan line, a medieval and noble dynasty from Poitou², flourished for centuries, taking part in several Crusades and establishing dominion in key regions such as Jerusalem, Cyprus, and Cilician Armenia, while significantly influencing the politics of England and France. Written as an early Romance, this story spread throughout France and Europe, becoming a significant and influential work in the late 14th century. It draws on themes of chivalry and courtly love, weaving in history and mythology on its surface, while embedding ancient rites, religions, and symbolism at its deeper core. Understanding ancient mythology and symbolism allows readers to uncover the deeper meanings in the text by connecting it to esoteric traditions and ancient historical beliefs and cultural practices.

In this paper, the English translation of *Le Roman de Mélusine*, titled *Mélusine or The Noble History of Lusignan* by Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox, will be the version referenced. First will be explored basic talking points throughout history, cultures and mythology around the world. After, each section will be explored to show how these elements align in *Mélusine or The Noble History of Lusignan*.

Sacred Water

Since ancient times, there have been numerous legends about sacred land and bodies of water. Water, especially fresh springs and wells, have been attributed to healing, purity and sacred femininity. There are a multitude of tales surrounding water, such as in creation myths and voyages into the underworld. In Egypt, there is the celestial ferryman known as the "Sailor of the Dead" escorting the souls of the dead to the underworld and to Anubis over the "Winding Waterway" or cosmic waters. There is also the Egyptian sun god Ra who takes the boat on the Duat to the

underworld on the Mandjet (the boat of millions of years or morning boat), and the Meseket (evening boat).³ And similarly there is the Greek ferryman of the underworld Charon, escorting the dead over the Acheron. The creation myths, like those in Mesopotamia and Indigenous cultures often view water as a primordial source of life. Going as far back to Sumeria with Nammu and Sedna, an Inuit deity. The sea was a prominent element in Norse mythology, as well as all others around the world. Water is formless, it is dark and deep, sometimes attributed to the underworld. Jung calls it the 'collective unconscious'. The sea is an archetype that reflects the vast and primal depths of the psyche. It is sometimes attributed as the "cosmic womb". The Virgin Mary is often associated with the sea as her title *Stella Maris*, meaning "Star of the Sea"- a protector and guiding figure for sailors. This spiritual connection between the feminine and water recurs across various mythologies. Water deities- gods, goddesses, undines, nymphs- appear throughout countless pantheons. Even today, cultures in Brazil, India, and elsewhere continue to venerate them. Some civilisations have regarded the ocean as more vital than land itself. People have always flocked to holy wells and sacred springs for healing, drawn to their perceived purity and power.

During the Pilgrimage of Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, a town named "Our Lady of the Sea," believed to have been the landing place of Mary of Clopas, Mary Salome and Mary Magdalene (the three Maries of the Catholic Church)- men ride white stallions into the Mediterranean Sea in a ritual. The Temple of Delphi was built on an ancient spring, and was known as the navel of the earth or center of the world. In ancient times, people flocked there to receive divine knowledge and guidance.⁴

Water, like women, is life-giving. It is also dangerous, capable of taking life away just as quickly as it gives it. It is mysterious and vast. It is no wonder it appears in every religion, culture and spiritual practice around the world, venerated and often symbolising the divine feminine.

Mermaids have held a persistent presence in mythology across cultures. In Cornwall and across France, for example, mermaid statues can even be found in churches. Mermaids and mermen have long symbolised ancient goddesses and gods- figures such as Enki, Triton and Neptune, Atargatis and Sedna. There is a statue of Demeter, a chthonic goddess, depicted with a dolphin and dove. Apollo, too, is associated with the dolphin, having taken its form to guide Cretan sailors to the site where the temple of Delphi now stands. There, the priestesses known as the Pythia acted as oracles, delivering divine messages- hence the name *Delphi*. These manifestations of sea divinities are not random- they represent a sacred, divine aspect to water. Water has always been seen as a portal to another dimension: a gateway to the unseen, a spiritual realm deeply connected to the divine feminine, as previously stated and further explored later.

Sacred lands and natural elements hold deep significance across different cultures, often personified as deities. While sacred land is not being discussed, it must be noted that sacred land is

equally important to various cultures and ancient peoples as bodies of water were. Some even attribute the earth as man, and water as woman, or sky (as in the case of Nut in Egypt).⁵ These places were venerated alike and carefully named. Temples and altars were often built near these sacred sites, reflecting their cultural importance.

In fairy folklore, water spirits are believed to guard sacred streams and wells; when a water source is polluted, they are said to depart and inhabit a different body of water- such as in tales from Allier, France. These are known as ‘genius loci,’ guardian spirits of a place.

It is uncertain why the Lusignans chose specific sites in Poitou (modern Nouvelle-Aquitaine) for their castles, such as those near Châtelailon-Plage and La Rochelle, both key medieval ports. In folklore, the mythical figure Mélusine, associated with the Lusignans, is said to have built these fortifications. Some speculate that sites like Lusignan, founded on a Celtic oppidum, and Châtelailon-Plage, built on a Neolithic site, were chosen for their cultural or spiritual significance, such as proximity to sacred springs, such as la Font-de-Sé (‘fountain of thirst’) in Lusignan accompanied with a sacred grotte (cave). Surrounded by dense forests and built on top of multiple sacred springs, these sites may have been linked to pre-existing local myths, though direct evidence is scarce.

Perhaps the Lusignans, having led many major Crusades and becoming Kings of Jerusalem, Cyprus, and Armenia, had knowledge of the mermaid as a transcendental symbol and used it as such. It’s possible too that they were aware of ancient Celtic or pre-Christian customs rooted in the land. Both could be true, and that appears to be the case.

In the tale of Mélusine, while it is set on land, it focuses on a mermaid. Though she was born a human, she was cursed by her fairy mother, Pressyne, for imprisoning her father, King Elinas, in a mountain. As a result, she transforms into a serpent from the waist down or mermaid-like creature every Saturday. The sea, a recurring symbol of transformation and creation in mythology, underscores Mélusine’s supernatural essence. The choice of Mélusine as a matriarchal, supernatural figure is central to the tale, as it speaks not of just any fairytale. It is a defining point the author makes that this isn’t just about a mortal woman or a lineage. It is conveying to us that this is a story about a supernatural being who has come to create a noble line, build towns out of nothing, and uphold certain traditions. Mermaids come from the sea, and on a much deeper level, she is something more ancient than that. She is the divine mother, the force unknown but speculatively a higher world and a higher power. She is a descendent of ancient matriarchal cults and traditions of veneration- a mother of myths.

The Divine Feminine and Goddess Aspects

Cultures worldwide have always revered Divine Mother figures, such as Isis, Durga, or Demeter, often venerating them through statues, secret rites like the Eleusinian Mysteries, and myths. Each civilization had its own mother goddess, worshipped by its people since ancient times. The female form in these traditions represents spiritual and energetic qualities (fertility, wisdom, creation, regeneration) beyond mere physicality. While goddesses share similarities, each has unique attributes, like gods in their pantheons. Goddesses come in many forms and names, but they are the same power; some changing during different periods of time, all encompassing different aspects of the goddess. Goddesses are not monolithic but diverse, embodying unique attributes across cultures. Paradoxically, many are syncretized due to shared qualities, such as Minerva with Athena or Venus with Aphrodite, reflecting cultural exchange while retaining distinct identities. Regardless, all of these figures derive from the Divine Mother, the universal feminine principle. In Indian traditions, major goddesses and gods are manifestations of Shakti and her companion Shiva, the cosmic feminine and masculine energies. These goddesses are woven into ancient myths about the creation of the world and the divine forces that govern and protect us. They are sacred archetypes- each distinct, yet all mirroring the divine feminine in her many forms.

As mentioned earlier, many goddesses are born from and rule over bodies of water, reflecting a deep connection between femininity, water, and creation. Many major goddesses are linked to the sea or water in their tales. One of the most famous, Aphrodite, derives her name from the Greek *aphros* (ἀφρός, “foam”) linked to her epithet *Aphrodite Anadyomene* (Αφροδίτη Αναδυομένη)⁶ meaning “Aphrodite rising from the sea”. In this myth, she emerges from the sea foam following Kronos' castration of his father Ouranos, whose severed genitals are cast into the sea. In her epithet *Philommeidēs* (Φιλομειδής)⁷, from *phílos* (φίλος, “love”) and *meidiama* (μεῖδος, related to “smile”), she is celebrated for her charm and radiant beauty. Based on the more literal and perhaps original form *Philommeidēs*, it is said to directly mean “fond of genitals”, referring to her fertility and sexual aspect, as well as linking it to her birth story. Aphrodite embodies beauty, love, sexuality and fertility, and is often seen as a divine feminine archetype. She has inspired countless works of art across cultures, periods, and mediums, from ancient poetry to Renaissance paintings and sculptures.

In the Babylonian epic *Enuma Elish*, Tiamat is seen as a primordial goddess associated with the sea and chaos. After her defeat by Marduk, her body is divided to form the heavens and the earth, becoming the foundation of the physical world. This myth can be interpreted as linking the divine feminine with the origin of physical matter.

Mélusine herself is an eternal mother goddess. She exhibits the archetypal traits shared by many divine feminine figures- ranging from beauty and fertility to power and destruction. As a creatrix and protector, she embodies the essence of the primordial goddess. Like other goddesses who are

manifestations of the One, it is in this regard we can see Mélusine as being one among them and the totality itself- as much them as they are her.

Some regard Mélusine to have ties to the Black Madonnas found around France, Spain and Italy, which are said to represent Isis and other pre-Christian goddesses. Mermaids have been alluded to be a representation of Mary, but it also speculated Aphrodite. Goddesses come in many forms and names, but they are the same power.

“We said above that a stone of Isis, representing Isis, designated her as the mother of the gods. The same epithet was applied to Rhea or Cybele. The two divinities thus appear to be closely related, and we would tend to consider them only as different expressions of one and the same principle.”⁸

Black Madonnas and Black Sara

“The Black Goddess: what symbol of transformation could be more appropriate than the rich darkness, the black earth of Isis the alchemist.” -Peter Redgrove⁹

Vierges Noires, also known as Black Madonnas, are mysterious statues found throughout Central and Eastern Europe, in Brittany and notably around the Mediterranean basin- often in sacred sites such as caves or near underground springs. Among the most famous are the *Virgin of Montserrat* in Spain and Notre-Dame de Sous-Terre (*Our Lady under the Earth*) in France. Possibly reflecting pre-Christian traditions, some scholars suggest they blend Christian iconography with ancient goddess worship, such as Isis, Cybele or Ishtar. Do they depict the Virgin Mary and child, or did they influence the later iconography of the Virgin Mary? These figures are frequently located at Pre-Christian holy sites, suggesting older, perhaps syncretic origins. Some speculate they represent Saint Sara (a chthonic or underworld version of Mary), while others interpret them as depictions of Mary herself, or Sainte Anne (Mary’s mother) in a particular aspect. Black Sara, also known as *Sara-la-Kâli*, (translated to Sara the Black), is the Patron Saint of the Romani people in folk Catholicism. She is venerated alongside the Marys in the pilgrimage town of Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer in Southern France. Her name, ‘Kali,’ meaning ‘black’ in Sanskrit and also associated with the Hindu goddess of the same name, reflects the Indian origins of the Romani people, and may echo more ancient, underworld goddess archetypes.

“If we compare the ceremonies with those performed in France at the shrine of Sainte Sara (called Sara e Kali in Romani), we become aware that the worship of Kali/Durga/Sara has been transferred to a Christian figure... in France, to a non-existent "sainte" called Sara, who is actually part of the Kali/Durga/Sara worship among certain groups in India.” -Ronald Lee¹⁰

“Mary... became the sole inheritor of all the names and forms, sorrows, joys and consolations of the Goddess-Mother of the Western World: Seat of Wisdom, Vessel of Honour, Mystical Rose, House of Gold, Gate of Heaven, Morning Star, Refuge of Sinners, Queen of Angels Queen of Peace.” -Anne Baring¹¹

Marie-Louise von Franz states that archaeologists were unable to determine whether the statues depicted the goddess Isis and her child Horus- figures later adapted into representations of the Virgin Mary.¹²

Once again, we observe the conflation of distinct goddesses, each separate and individualised, yet simultaneously perceived as manifestations of a singular, eternal maternal archetype. This concept reflects the notion of a monolithic mother figure, evident across cultures and epochs, often referred to as a prehistoric mother cult. Its presence is detectable as far back as the Paleolithic era. Exemplified by figurines such as the Venus of Willendorf, discovered in Austria and dated to approximately 28,000-25,000 BCE.

One line of interpretation hypothesizes that, because many of these figurines have been unearthed in regions historically inhabited by populations with darker skin tones, their features might represent literal depictions. However, similar figures have been found in more northerly areas such as Poland, complicating this suggestion. An alternative hypothesis suggests that the dark colouration of some figurines may be symbolic rather than literal, perhaps an allusion to a metaphysical state such as the 'dark night of the soul,' a concept articulated by Saint John of the Cross to describe a period of spiritual desolation preceding transformation.

"Formerly, the subterranean chambers of the temples served as a home for the statues of Isis, which, upon the introduction of Christianity in Gaul, became those Black Virgins.. their symbolism is, moreover, identical; both show, on their base, the famous inscription: *Virgini parituræ*; to the Virgin who must give birth Ch Bigarne, tells us of several statues of Isis designated under the same name" -Fulcanelli¹³

In Chartres, the figure of the Black Virgin, often referred to as the *Virgin of the Underground*, was historically venerated in the now-destroyed crypt beneath the cathedral. Now stands Notre-Dame du Pilar (*Our Lady of the Pillar*), a 16th century statue that occupies a prominent position within the upper church.

The persistence of Marian devotion in Chartres has long been intertwined with legends of pre-Christian origins. As Bishop Roger Michon observes: "Legend is often the root of history as well as its poetry. The legends of the druidic or pagan origin of the cult of the *Virgo Parituræ* expresses in it's own way a profound truth: the deep roots of Marian devotion in the soil and in the hearts of the people of Chartres."¹⁴

This reference to the *Virgo Parituræ*, the Virgin who is to give birth, evokes not only Christian eschatology but also echoes the esoteric symbolism associated with the Black Virgins. In alchemical and hermetic traditions, such figures are often linked to the *prima materia*, the dark and fertile matrix from which spiritual transformation emerges.

In Paris, a statue known as the *Parisian Virgin* was discovered in an underground gallery in 1671. Father Jean du Breul claimed that a temple of Isis once stood where King Childebert later

built the *Church of Saint Vincent*. Similarly, the French urban planner De La Mare asserted that the *Abbey of Saint Germaine* was constructed atop an ancient temple dedicated to Isis. Other historians have explored the idea that Paris itself was founded around a veneration of the Egyptian goddess. In the 14th Century, Jacques le Grant wrote about a connection between Paris and Isis, tracing it back to the 8th Century CE.

Remarkably, during the anniversary celebrations of the French Revolution in 1793, Parisians erected a large statue of the Egyptian goddess Isis as a fountain, from which people drank water that flowed from her breasts.

Fulcanelli, the French alchemist and author, refers to actual statues of the goddess Isis that have been discovered in France. "As for the statuettes of Isis- we are speaking of those that escaped Christianization- they are even rarer than the Black Virgins..Witkowski mentions one housed in the Saint-Etienne Cathedral in Metz."¹⁵

Another version of the Black Virgin, Saint Anne, is venerated as the Patron Saint of Brittany. This figure may be linked to an ancient local cult that existed around the year 500, known as *Mamm Gozh ar Vretoned*, meaning 'Grandmother of the Bretons.' This title suggests a maternal, ancestral presence deeply rooted in the spiritual life of the region, possibly of an earlier Celtic or pre-Christian origin. Over time, such local cults may have been absorbed into the Christian framework, reinterpreting older deities as saints or holy figures.

Saint Anne's story is more closely related to that of the Virgin with her immaculate conception tale. And in the *Speculum Historiale of the Dominican Vincent of Beauvais* and the *Golden Legend* she is said to have been married three times, and the mother of Mary Salome and Mary Jacob. You can often see statues of her holding Mary who is holding her son Joseph.

It is said that the Black Madonna in Guingamp, Brittany, was brought from the East by a Crusader in 12th Century, passing through Marseille. Interestingly, both of the churches in Guingamp and Chartres feature a labyrinth.¹⁶ In Guingamp, the church is known as *Notre-Dame-du-Halgoët*, a name that some interpret as Celtic for 'underground'. There may very well have been a pagan shrine there. In Chartres, two Black Madonnas were found, one known as *Notre-Dame de Sous-Terre*, meaning 'Our Lady of the Underworld.' The Black Madonna found in the crypt, dated to about the 11th century or possibly earlier, is housed near the "Well of the Strong Saints"- a Gallo-Roman well believed to have pre-Christian significance. The site has been linked to Druidic worship.

Pierre Gordon suggests that the Black Virgins shared their dark colour with the ancient Black Mothers, who were revered in pagan traditions as the most powerful figures. He explains that these figures were dark not in a symbolic sense, but literally- because their rites were conducted in complete darkness, in subterranean initiatory caves. Such caves, some located hundreds of meters

underground, are still being rediscovered in France and Europe today. “The Black Mothers had this colour for the same reason that the masters of the Underworld (Hades, Pluto, the Dispaton, Balor, etc.) themselves possessed it because they dwelt in darkness, not figuratively, but in the full and literal sense of the word, the initiatory cavern being plunged into complete darkness: some of our French caves, which we are currently discovering the works of our ancestors, are located several hundred meters deep in the ground.”

Gordon states that “this ritual origin was the same in all countries: which spread thanks to Neolithic matriarchy.”¹⁷ He points to various examples, such as the disciples of India following the initiatory mother of Kali, the Great Mother of Pessinonte in the Orient, and the figure of Black Annis in Great Britain.¹⁸

Over time, the Black Virgins replaced the Black Mothers in cultural memory. Christian churches were often built atop these ancient initiatory caves- especially in their crypts- where effigies of these figures were found, often formless and located near sacred water sources.

He cites the example of Vichy, where “excavations have uncovered traces of Isis, Proserpina, Pallas, Thetis and Venus, and a local Goddess Vichiario (personified the mana of sacred water). Vichiario comes, according to archaeologists, from Vicus Calidus (hot town, town of boiling water).”¹⁹ According to local tradition, the sacred waters of Vichy originated in a place called Anal, near the confluence of dense rivers in the Allier- a site long associated with fairy lore.

Correspondingly, Pierre Gordon draws a suggestive parallel between the legendary figure of Mélusine and the Black Virgins. While he does not make an explicit identification, his treatment of Mélusine- a liminal, subterranean, and transformative figure- resonates with the deeper archetypal themes embodied by the Black Madonnas in his work titled *Vierges Noires - Origine et sens contes de fées – Mélusine*.

The figures that bear this name are known as “*Virgo Parituræ*, one of those Virgin Mothers who were to bring a superhuman child into the world, and whose origins were traced back to the druids.”²⁰

Fulcanelli suggests that the many cathedrals dedicated to the Virgin Mary are not just religious in the Christian sense, but are much more ancient and universal. “The cathedral of Paris, like most of the metropolitan basilicas, is placed under the invocation of the blessed Virgin Mary or Virgin-Mother.. They are therefore temples dedicated to the Mother (Latin *mater, matris*), to the Matron in the primitive sense, a word which , by corruption, became the Madonna, (Italian *ma donna*) my Lady, and, by extension, Our Lady.”²¹

Daniel Castille, a French author, claims that “Each department or region has its procession of virgin mothers, goddesses, fairies, or other sirens and Mélusine.”²²

Neolithic Sites and Initiations

“For Begg, the Black Virgin ‘plays the leading role in the mysteries of death, rebirth, and the underworld.’ -Peter Redgrove²³

Whilst the Black Madonnas were often discovered in caves, related statues symbolising a feminine protective guardian spirit were found in households. Across the world, and predominantly in Europe, caves contain Neolithic art, vulva-shaped carvings, and altars, indicating that these sites were used for sacred ceremonies and initiatory rites- often exclusively by men. These caves were not dwelling but sanctuaries of transformation.

In France, for instance, there are Troglodyte churches- carved directly into rock. One notable example in Aubterre-Sur-Dronne has been linked to the *Cult of the Minotaur*, which can be traced to the Eleusinian Mysteries. In this view, the concept of the church evolved from the primordial sacred place: the church of the Mother Earth. Even in Paleolithic times, women were associated as guardian of the hearth and the sacred center- guardians of life and death, the threshold between worlds.

Men entered these subterranean spaces to undergo symbolic death and rebirth- descending into the dark womb of Mother Earth and returning to the Mother source, emerging transformed. These rites, sometimes rites of passage, were marking the passage into adulthood. In mystery traditions, such as the Eleusinian Mysteries, in which initiates drank a sacred potion and experienced an event that they were sworn to never reveal, and that would forever change their lives. Scholars like Joseph Campbell have speculated that these ceremonies were dedicated to Demeter and Persephone, and enacted the eternal spiral of descent, death, and return.

Most of these sacred rites centered on the worship of the mother goddess. In regions like Poitou, France, archaeologists have discovered cave sanctuaries with gynomorphic altars²⁴, further emphasizing the symbolic role of the cave as the cosmic womb, and to enter is an initiated rebirth by the creatrix herself, the great mother. From these statues and altars found, you can see that women have been worshipped since ancient times, and seen as a portal to the higher and unseen realms.

Peter Redgrove relates Mélusine to the Black Goddesses and references Whitney Chadwick’s quote, “Mélusine concentrates the telluric forces of nature in herself... her transformation into a serpent that must remain hidden relates her to female Earth... Endowed with supernatural powers, Mélusine holds the key to the mysteries forbidden to men...”²⁵ Chadwick is stating the role of Mélusine as a keeper of mysteries inaccessible to men, and her connection to the primal aspects of femininity. Peter Redgrove explores the idea of Mélusine as a Black Goddess, in her chthonic nature and seen as an expression of the divine feminine bridging the world between the conscious and unconscious in his book *The Black Goddess and the Unseen Real*.

Fairy Tales and Initiation

Whilst Mélusine's story narrative doesn't explicitly describe an initiation, it has often been interpreted that way. As mentioned earlier, she is considered an epiphany of the mother goddess. Based on what we know about what the deeper meanings of fairy tales and their origins, her story- like many others- can be seen as a narrative about initiation. These tales are speculated to be far older than their written forms suggest.

One of the most profound myths, deeply tied to ancient ritual practices, is the myth of Psyche and Eros. Likely linked to the Eleusinian Mysteries, as suggested by Pierre Gordon, this myth was formalized into a "liturgical drama" over time. He proposes that these rituals trace back to Neolithic matrimonial or initiatory rites, and involve "liturgical nudity."²⁶

As for the principle of initiation in fairy tales: most were likely created and written to pass down this knowledge of ancient rites. As society became increasingly disconnected from these spiritual traditions, such stories lost their original meanings and were relegated to fiction. As Gordon states in *Mélusine et la Vierges Noires*, fables are "never invented for pleasure," and that they are "very old initiatory traditions, dating back to the Neolithic period."²⁷ If this is true- if these stories preserve the memory of sacred unions between the human and the divine- then Mélusine must be counted among them.

Fairy tales are different from sagas: they do not focus on a human ego. Instead Lüthi says, they are abstractions where "archetypal images of the unconscious deal with each other."²⁸ The hero in a fairy tale is non human, but also an archetype and is not scared of the unknown, moving through a symbolic world. In him we see an archetypal figure.²⁹ Von-Franz states that they hold a healing element.

According to Jung, archetypal experiences are essential to understanding oneself. Through them, healing becomes possible.³⁰ In Mélusine, this archetypal figure might well be the *Vierge Noire*- a veiled goddess embedded within the tale. Mélusine herself can be seen as a mermaid, serpentine, half-human-Venus mother archetype.

Her physical form echoes ancient symbolism, particularly the Venus statues found in caves: prominent breasts and often depicted as pregnant, these figures symbolise fertility and the life-giving aspect of the goddess. Mélusine's tail represents several layers of meaning: the underworld, the connection between earthly and celestial realms, and in some depictions with two tails, the *axis mundi*- a visual metaphor for the cosmic center or world axis.

Over time, the symbolism of the snake became distorted. Originally empowering (such as the rising of the kundalini, deities represented by serpents, the rod of Asclepius, and Hermes' caduceus), serpentine imagery came to be associated with the demonisation of women. In this light,

Mélusine's serpent tail also reflects the cultural shift from revering the divine feminine to suppressing it.

Mélusine is the Black Goddess- she is the Vierge Noire, she is fairy, undine, presented in the form of a siren. She is that primordial divine feminine energy presiding over the unseen realms, and initiating those who come into her protection.

Myth, in one aspect, encodes spiritual initiation through bodily symbolism. Most fairy tales include a non human figure, or a mortal cursed to take an animal or non human form until the curse is broken (such as the curse of the Frog Prince). Mélusine is cursed by her mother for trapping her father, King Elinas, in a cave as a punishment for disobeying her mother.³¹ As punishment, Mélusine must live as a human, but every Saturday she transforms into a serpent-tailed mermaid from the waist down.

She is allowed to marry and bear children, but on the condition that her husband never sees her in this form. If he does, she must leave him forever. In the tale, her husband, Raymondin, is eventually persuaded by his brother to spy on her. One Saturday, he does while she is bathing- and though he hides it at first, he later reveals what he saw. This happens after one of their sons commits a gruesome act- burning down a monastery with monks inside, including his own brother.

Raymondin confronts Mélusine about it, blaming her nature for their son's evil. Devastated, she reveals the truth and tells him she must leave. In the end, she transforms into a dragon and flies away, even as Raymondin begs her to stay. Though he forgives her, she has no choice but to go.³²

This storyline is a common theme in fairy tales- taboo. Gordon notes, "taboos have an initiatory and religion source."³³ In the tale of Urvaçi, the wife is forbidden from seeing her husband naked, for to do so would desecrate his sacred form. As Gordon notes: "Nudity sanctified the husband in the eyes of the wife and made him a divine being."³⁴ Fairy tales often feature a recurring taboo of nudity. Keeping nudity to a sacred presence preserves its supernatural aspect.

The act of unveiling and disrobing, both literal and symbolic, is a recurring theme in ancient initiation rites across cultures. We see it in the Sumerian myth of Ishtar, who descends into the underworld shedding seven garments, each a layer of worldly identity. A similar motif appears in the dance of the seven veils and in the tamzig, the ritualistic tearing of clothes during ecstasy. Ritual nudity, far from being profane, becomes a symbol of spiritual transformation and sacred exposure.³⁵

Another popular example is a man forbidden to see his wife after childbirth- commonly three days. This motif appears in the story of Mélusine, where the violation of the same taboo leads to her punishing her father.

These stories suggest that the revelation of the divine is not for the uninitiated. To see the sacred unveiled without proper preparation is to risk desecration- not only of the divine, but of the self.

Mélusine's sudden departure is precipitated by her husband's profane curiosity. By uncovering her true form, he violates a sacred boundary. Once exposed to the uninitiated, Mélusine's divine nature is desecrated. Her sanctity, once hidden and protected, is compromised, and she can no longer remain in the mortal world.

As Pierre Gordon writes: "This vision of the divine in the aspect of a being of flesh would have led men to belittle the transcendence of immortal energy and to misunderstand God. Only great initiates are capable of venerating an angel in a being of bone and blood."³⁶

When Mélusine is bathing, it is a sacred ritual. When she enters the water, she is "being consecrated to the holy water, put on her sacralisante garb when she entered the water. She was then in her proper ritual domain and was not to be seen by profane eyes." Pierre Gordon says.³⁷ Her nudity, like in many fairy tales, becomes sacralized- imbued with ritual and mystery.

An additional aspect of taboo and nudity in fairy tales include a sacrilization of a body part and a ritualized disguise of it. This includes Mélusine too, since she is forced to keep her tail hidden.

Traditionally, these tales follow a three part structure: 1. A violation of a taboo, 2. A series of trials undergone by the transgressor, often the other spouse, who become an initiate, 3. A lasting reunion in the domain of immortality or spiritual harmony. However, most modern retellings or surviving versions of these tales omit the latter two stages, focusing only on the initial rupture and loss.³⁸

A sacred day is another element commonly found in fairy tales, which conveys initiatory themes: in Mélusine case, Saturday is the day reserved for her rites. Violating these sacred times or spaces triggers a deeper mythic consequence- a "matrimonial taboo with a taboo of descent into hell."³⁹ They lead to her fall: the divine feminine retreats, goes into hiding, and balance is lost.

As stated earlier, fairy tales almost always feature an animal character or hybrid-human character, usually cursed and forced to undergo personal trials. This is no coincidence: in many European initiation rituals, especially in earlier periods, the idea of returning to one's true animal form was central. Ritual practices included wearing animal skins or depicting animals in sacred spaces, such as the famous cave painting of *Les Trois Frères* in France. An animal disguise is sanctifying in itself, and in antiquity, animals were seen as divine beings in their own right. It should be added that when done in a ritual setting, it was not just symbolic. One did not merely pretend to be "a tiger"; one *was* all tigers. They become the animal in totality.⁴⁰ Marie-Louise von Franz states that, although little is known about them, ancient initiation rituals often required men to endure great suffering and go naked into a large animal skin in order to be reborn.

The use of animal disguises in fairy tales was equivalent to the taboo surrounding nudity in these stories. Later on, the animal mask motif derived from the taboo of nudity. According to von-Franz, "nakedness has also to do with rebirth, with being reduced to the state in which one was born."⁴¹

Although Mélusine deviates from the typical animal-initiation pattern, the narrative still follows an initiatory arc. The search for a missing spouse itself becomes a form of initiation, echoing a descent into the underworld. Along the journey, the seeker undergoes trials, often encountering helpful spirits in the depiction of fairies, giants (sometimes fighting them)⁴², and animals—whose sacredness is marked by their ritualized disguises. These figures serve as guides, helping the seeker ascend to a higher spiritual state.⁴³

After Mélusine departs, Raymondin himself undergoes a kind of spiritual transformation. He embarks on a pilgrimage and ultimately withdraws into a hermitage for the rest of his life, dedicating the rest of his life to God and seeking salvation for his misdeeds.

She would only return after a death or a change in the castle's ownership. It is said that her appearance signified an initiation. Her cries have been compared to an initiatory whistle- similar to the riddling voice of the Theban sphinx or the barking of Hecate.

Another thing that comes to mind is her fairy origins, which might be of Celtic origin. Mélusine is said to be from Albania, a name once used for a region now known as Scotland. The word 'Albania' means 'white country' and was associated with ancient Celtic initiatory traditions. Her mother later went to Avalon, the 'land of sacred apples,' also known as the Holy Island- the mythical home of fairies. And in the beginning of Mélusine and Raymondin's companionship, they meet at a sacred fountain, which is attributed to fairies.

In the story of Mélusine, elements of courtly love, chivalry, wedlock, and fertility rites are incorporated. Marriage itself becomes a sort of initiation. At one point, the hero is granted as much land as he can enclose using an animal hide- another initiatory founding rite that was used in ancient times.

It is often said that the journey to a distant land, especially in the context of battle or a heroic quest, is itself a form of initiation. This theme is central to the tale of Mélusine, whose story can be read as a spiritual passage through transformation, concealment, and revelation.

The scholar Léo Desvre speculated that *Mélusine* derives from "Mother Lusine" (Mère Lusine in French).⁴⁴ Pierre Gordon calls her as such: "She is a fountain lady, a mermaid and a Mater Lucina, a light bearer- a source of radiance... But what dominates everything in her, what accounts for all her characteristics, is her quality as an initiatrix."⁴⁵ Gordon also describes her as "an animal woman, that is sanctified by wearing the skin of a beast."⁴⁶

She is sometimes seen as an Ogress or wyvern. The wyvern is an amalgamation of a winged creature and a serpent- able to reach upwards (initiatory liberators) and underworldly (divining digesters),⁴⁷ dual aspects that are reflected in her nature.

The choice of a fish is neither coincidental or arbitrary, it represents a very early depiction of the Neolithic Mother. As Pierre Gordon described it, the fish was “the most frequent liturgical auxiliary in the Matriarchy.”⁴⁸

It is said that in her mermaid form, on that particular day of the week, she resides in another realm, inaccessible to the uninitiated. To witness her in this form would be considered a sacrilege.

Marriage and birthing is an initiation in itself, and Jung even places on emphasis on childbirth on death and rebirth. Pregnant women often have nightmares of death, and in another aspect the idea of birth is a death and rebirth for the mother themselves. For them and their life are never the same that moment forward.⁴⁹

Mélusine goes on to help her husband build his empire, and it is through the divine feminine that he is able to realise his power and establish his lineage. She is the divine force behind it all. It is said that under sacred conditions it is possible to arouse the higher rank of man. It is a hierogamic union.

She has ten sons- a testament to her fertility and to her generative power, which also enables her to establish towns from thin air. Her sons go on to lead Crusades, become Kings of distant lands, and fight to defend her lineage. Mélusine is the mother of a highly noble and successful dynasty. She is a supernatural goddess, a supra personal being. She is the Shakti to his Shiva, the convergence of spiritual and material planes. She bestows riches selflessly, acts with honour, and embodies grace. She is the incarnation of Venus herself.

But she also destroys, when she is deceived. The towns she once built, she tears down. She is Kali. She embodies both creation and destruction, love and wrath. She is a force to be reckoned with.

Mélusine’s children are also affected by her supernatural lineage. They are born with striking physical characteristics- one has a third red eye, another a lion’s paw on his face, and another an asymmetrical ear, as well as the others having similar. It has been speculated that, as fairy-born children, their unusual features symbolised initiatory rites or spiritual selection. In certain ancient cultures, including among some Neolithic peoples, physical alterations such as cranial modification or intentional deformities were practiced, perhaps as markers of divine favour or sacred initiation. In this context, bodily “mutilation” became a means of integrating the divine into the human form. Examples include removing a piece of bone in the skull, or deforming a foot. Echoes of this idea can still be found in some religious traditions, for example, in Judaism, where circumcision serves as a physical sign of covenant from birth.

Her story is not merely folklore; it is a ritual myth, a sacred drama of union, fertility, power and transcendence. Gordon argues that such myths emphasise that these lineages or traditions are grounded in supernatural forces. Their authority stems from the sacred, not the mundane.

“If they did not refer to a profound, eternally living reality, truer than the world of sensations, they would have been forgotten long ago, or rather they would of never have been born.” Pierre Gordon⁵⁰

Courtly love and Chivalry

Courtly love and chivalry were popular tropes in medieval art, particularly in the concept of romance that emerged from the 12th-century troubadour tradition and poetry. Mélusine is considered one of the earliest romances in the world and in France- published in 1394. Courtly love was especially prevalent in France, particularly in the region of Poitou, where English kings once reigned and the where Eleanor of Aquitaine’s court flourished. Mélusine incorporates themes of courtly love and chivalry.

The first clear marker of courtly love is Mélusine herself, depicted as an otherworldly, idealised woman: the epitome of beauty, wealth, knowledge and power. This reflects the tradition of a knight or man devoting himself wholly to an unattainable or high-status woman, sometimes married, who embodies a near-divine ideal. Mélusine is held in extraordinarily high regard, with her supernatural qualities, elevating her to a saintly, even worshipped, status. Knights in courtly love narratives often exalt such women through poetry, acts of love, noble deeds, and intense spiritual devotion, rather than physical desire or lust.

Raymondin is instantly captivated by Mélusine and pledges his loyalty without hesitation, even agreeing to her mysterious condition: never see her on Saturdays. Mélusine, in turn, exhibits a kind of selfless devotion and obedience that aligns with the ideals of courtly love. He seeks her devotion on more of a spiritual level than physical, a higher spiritual longing. He asks for nothing in return, and it is only through this devotion that Mélusine reciprocates- with love, loyalty and prosperity. This mirrors another aspect of courtly love: the noble lady’s role in elevating the status of her devoted knight. In such narratives, the woman holds the power, and the knights role is to serve her.

Sometimes, courtly love involves secrecy- often due to marital constraints, forbidden relationships across social classes, or extramarital affairs. These unions could result in illegitimate children, or involve men courting already married women. While Mélusine’s tale doesn’t include these exact elements, her secret transformation can be a symbolic parallel. Her need for discretion echoes the veiled nature of many courtly love affairs. When he husband breaks his vow and spies on her, leading to her forced departure, it introduces another aspect of courtly love: unattainable love. Mélusine becomes divine and unreachable, even to her mortal husband. In her final speech, she expresses themes of Christian salvation and laments in her inability to achieve full humanity- illustrating her noble but unattainable aspirations.

Chivalry, although related to courtly love, is distinct. It is a broader code of conduct expected of knights, emphasizing moral virtues such as bravery, justice, loyalty and protection- whether in battle, within society, or in marriage. Unlike courtly love, which focuses on romantic devotion and emotional refinement, chivalry is about upholding honour through virtuous and heroic action. It is a broader ethical code covering how a knight must conduct himself. It includes feudal duties and Christian ideals. Courtly love seeks to refine the lover through romance and companionship; chivalry refines the knight through valour and moral discipline.

We see this chivalric ideal clearly Mélusine's sons. They conduct themselves honourably in battle and society: defending their kingdom, protecting the weak, giving generously, offering sanctuary, and fighting for the spread of Christianity in the East. They also form political and romantic alliances by marrying women from other kingdoms they aided, reinforcing both Christian and chivalric ideals.

It's also worth noting that the idea of love- and even sex- is a form spiritual attainment. Many believe love is a longing for something greater than oneself. When one is in love, they aspire to be a better person. It is viewed as a kind of divinity in itself. In love, one is able to drop their ego and develop themselves through their companion. In medieval Europe, before the Church redirected knights' devotion toward the Virgin Mary⁵¹, courtly love filled that spiritual and emotional space. This shift was, in part, an attempt to control the individualising effects of courtly love- seen as disruptive to dynastic and social order. Yet the idea persisted: through love- whether a romantic or spiritual- one is able to learn about themselves and develop their personhood, and even elevate spiritually and prosperously.

The Alchemical Mélusine

“The transformations of the original substance, of elementary Matter (Latin *materea*, root *matr*, mother). For the Virgin-mother, stripped of her symbolic veil, is nothing other than the personification of the primitive substance used to realise his designs by the creative principle of all that is.”- Fulcanelli⁵²

Alchemy is an ancient science, though its exact origins and age remain unclear. It is generally believed to have originated in the East, with roots encapsulated in several ancient cultures. The word ‘alchemy’ comes from the Arabic *al kīmiyā*, which in turn derives from the Greek *chēmeía*, likely rooted in the Egyptian *khem* or *khemia*, referring to the black soil of the Nile. It has many roots in Egyptian spiritual and metallurgical practices, later absorbed by Greek and Arabic scholars. Alchemy later spread to Europe and was becoming increasingly popular at the time Mélusine was crafted. Jean de Berry was a noted patron of the arts, which may have included alchemy, as was common among many nobles of the period. Alchemy frequently uses archetypal imagery- such as animals, plants and zodiac signs- to represent spiritual processes. While early alchemy focused on

metallurgy and the transmutation of metals, it later evolved into a symbolic system used for psychological and spiritual exploration.

Mélusine can be interpreted as an alchemical symbol through her very invocation. As a siren, she represents a physical embodiment of transformation and temptation in alchemical symbolism. This includes the potential danger of being led astray from the true alchemical path, such as in siren lore.

It is common to see the zodiacal signs in alchemy as a cosmic map, and Virgo is a particularly rich symbol of the feminine. Typically depicted as a maiden and associated with mother goddesses, Virgo is also connected to the figure of the siren. While sirens were originally imagined as bird-women before evolving into mermaid figures, this symbolism still applies to Mélusine. In *Du Bestiaire des Alchimistes*, Henri La Croix-Haute states that “the Virgo of the zodiac is a bird-woman since she has wings and was long interpreted as the representation of the siren whose wings, according to Ovid, expressed prayer; it would have been presumptuous to insert the mother goddess, the Mother of God, into the zodiac when the most solemn homage has always been paid to her as the matrix of human life.” Haute argues that in Christian alchemy, the Virgin Mary is too sacred to be equated with zodiac signs rooted in pagan astrology. Still, the symbolic overlap between the Virgin, the siren, and the mother goddess remains significant in alchemical thought. All three figures- Virgo, the siren’s wings, and the mother goddess- represent purity and wisdom. Haute’s discussion moves from astrology into the realm of the divine feminine, while cautioning against conflating Christian icons with pagan symbols. Yet he still suggests that Virgo’s maiden form and the siren’s winged form each reflect aspects of the mother goddess- as the source of life and overseer of spiritual transcendence.⁵³

Haute also discusses Mélusine’s link to alchemy through the Lusignan-Rochefoucauld lineage and their alchemical practices. “In the 16th century, the fairy Mélusine, for having lived in their castle, was presented as a mermaid with a fish tail on the crest of the coat of arms of the Lusignan-Rouchefoucauld family; the Mélusine and the salamander represented the mercurial spirit in the tree of life. C.G. Jung admitted the sirens with Mélusine, the Nereids and the nymphs of Poliphile in his pantheon of dreams to confirm the feminine character of the unconscious linked to the water and the sea.”⁵⁴

Mélusine certainly exudes Mercurial qualities. The zodiac sign Virgo is ruled by the planet Mercury, which governs communication, music, both of which are central to the myth of the siren, whether in bird or mermaid form. Haute writes: “her presence warned the initiate not to deviate from frugality for illusory pleasures. Then, she became the virgin with long hair (mercury) and a fish tail (sulphur) of the *Mutus Liber*.”⁵⁵ and “the feminine, volatile, aquatic, attractive and dissolving qualities, opposed and complementary to the mercury of the wise (siren).”⁵⁶

Carl Jung discusses the idea of Mélusine as a Mercurial figure in *Alchemical Studies (Collected Works, Vol. 13)*, specifically in the essay *Paracelsus as a Spiritual Phenomenon*. He describes her as a mercurial serpent, a symbol of the alchemical *Mercurius*, representing the dual nature of the psyche. Jung interprets Mélusine as a psychic vision- a “glamorous apparition” tied to the unconscious and the individuation process- stimulated by the Paracelsian *Scaiolae*, spiritual forces that correspond to psychic functions such as thinking, feeling, sensation, and intuition.⁵⁷

Mercury is one of the *tria prima*- the alchemical trinity- alongside sulphur and salt. It is fluid, volatile, transformative, and adaptable. Mercury represents the unifying force that connects to the *prima materia*, the raw substance to be refined into the Philosopher’s Stone. On a metaphysical level, the element of Mercury is named after the planet Mercury, which in turn was named after the Roman God Mercury, the swift messenger of the Gods. The planet Mercury is also associated with the Greek God Hermes, symbolising communication, intellect, and the transmission of knowledge. Revisiting the idea of the *Vierges Noires*, Fulcanelli refers to the Black Virgins of Paris as a personification of the mysterious Hermes,⁵⁸ stating “This little known Parisian Virgin, who personifies the mysterious subject of Hermes..”⁵⁹ The Virgin represents both the substance in its pure, uncorrupted, and receptive state, and the alchemical vessel that holds it.

In alchemical terms, Mélusine is serpentine in nature- a symbol connected to the underworld and to duality. Goddesses and fairies are often said to embody esoteric wisdom, and Mélusine possesses hidden knowledge essential for transcendence and the achievement of the Great Work. As one source notes: “Irish legends have retained the fertilizing dragon-serpent and possessor of a mythical woman; it was omnipresent in the Mediterranean, accompanying the mother goddess, Isis in Egypt, Cybele in Phrygia, Rhea in Crete.”⁶⁰ In *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious (Collected Works, Vol. 9, Part 1)* Carl Jung compares Mélusine to the *anima*, noting that “the anima... can appear as a snake.”,⁶¹ linking her to archetypal imagery of metamorphosis, transformation, and the unconscious- aligning with her mythological role as a shape-shifter.

Haute also writes that the serpent is “the guardian of secured or sacred places.”⁶², further reinforcing Mélusine’s role as a liminal and esoteric figure. Like her, serpents are often associated with water, suggesting their aquatic, transformative, and mystical nature.

She is human, and yet fish-like below the waist- a primal force. Water, as *prima materia*, symbolises the subconscious, dissolution, intuition, and the feminine principle. It is linked to the *anima* (soul) or *anima mundi* (world soul). “Water symbolises rebirth through baptismal grace,” and fish as a symbol of “spiritual nourishment.”⁶³ “Divine water, Living water, Water of Life, Water of the Abyss are synonyms for the mercury of the wise, as well as the womb, the mother, the goddess, the woman, the chalice, the fountain, the cave, the tree of life.”⁶⁴ She is the manifestation of the *anima mundi*, the underlying force that bridges the material and the divine realms. Haute makes an

interesting point in the context of the alchemical bestiary: “Of all the fabulous animals, the mermaid is the only one with exclusively feminine connotations.”⁶⁵ The siren’s serpentine nature reflects the need to integrate and transcend the lower, instinctual self in order to achieve spiritual purification. As a half-human creature, she represents the *anima*- the soul.

Later, she turns into a dragon- a symbol of fire: raw, chaotic and undefined *prima materia*. The dragon embodies the base, untamed forces of the unconscious that must be confronted to be purified. It is also symbolic of regeneration and renewal, as seen in the representation of the *ouroboros*. Known in Pharaonic Egypt, the *ouroboros*- a serpent biting its tail- is the oldest pictorial symbol in alchemy, signifying “eternity without beginning or end, and the round inescapable cycles because creation, which is continuous, leaves God to return to God, corresponding to the seal of the Hermetic secret.”⁶⁶ The fire essence is truly purifying and destructive: “the circulation of the matter which never ceases to turn in the alchemical matrix; its action is double by the fire of its mouth and the venom of its tail.”⁶⁷ Sometimes known as the “guardian of the threshold”⁶⁸, the dragon in this context becomes a protective figure- one who watches over her descendents. Her final state as a dragon signifies transcendence over her earlier form, even though she once wished to become human. Metamorphosis is another alchemical process. The dragon also represents the union of opposites- spirit and matter, masculine and feminine- often symbolised by sulphur and mercury. In one depiction, Nicholas Flamel painted the winged dragon (female) as the volatile of mercury.⁶⁹

If Mélusine is Mercury, then she embodies the perfect balance of both female and male, like Hermes the hermaphrodite. She can be seen as the *rebis* in alchemy: the integration of masculine and feminine principles into a perfected whole. She is the epitome of the ultimate healer and transformer. In alchemical terms, Mercury- also known as quicksilver- is comparable, both as a fluid substance and as a metaphor for consciousness. Mercury is both liquid and solid, adaptable and mutable. It is essential to the process of transmutation.

She is the Virgin, the goddess, the mother, and Hermes. Hermes holds in his hand the caduceus, a golden rod entwined with two serpents representing dualities such as good and evil, poison and remedy.⁷⁰ Serpents themselves are symbolic of the underworld and hidden knowledge, much like the energy awakened in kundalini practice. Some have speculated that she is androgynous, embodying both masculine and feminine qualities, akin to Hermes the hermaphrodite. In alchemy, the perfect balance of male and female- in both a spiritual and soul sense- is the ultimate goal. This sacred duality, known as *hieros gamos*, represents the union of opposites: *logos* and *eros*, spirit and matter. The alchemical marriage of sulphur (male, fiery) and mercury (female, fluid) represents a divine synthesis- the union that completes the work. Jung viewed alchemy primarily as a spiritual endeavour- a path toward enlightenment and higher consciousness. In contrast, medieval alchemy focused more on material transmutation, most famously the attempt to transform base metals into

gold. Whether literal or spiritual, this process involved purification, separation, and dissolution- and was ultimately a metaphor for death and rebirth, particularly the death of the ego. Mélusine herself undergoes a cyclical transformation: each week she changes form, returning again to her human form, until her final metamorphosis into a dragon before her departure. The *ouroboros*, an alchemical symbol depicting a serpent eating its own tail, represents this idea of cyclical renewal and the unity of opposites- once again reinforcing the merging of the human and divine.

It is worth noting that the apse of the Church of Lusignan is decorated with a sculpture of a chimera- a dragon with a serpent's tail, its head biting its own body. The dragon's body resembles that of a bird, with wings, and it has a lion's head, which is shown biting one of its wings. This composite creature could symbolise the dual nature of humanity; the spiritual aspect (wings) and the material or instinctual nature (serpent's tail), as well as the inner tension between these opposing forces.

She is transformative, shrouded in mystery, overflowing with fertility. Mélusine is able to transform into her hybrid form and conjure matter seemingly from thin air, fortifying towns. In alchemy, one often hears of the concept of the *homunculus*- an artificial being- and alchemists themselves are regarded as magicians or creators, mediators between the spiritual and material realms. This idea could also be observed throughout Mélusine's story. Her ability to forge the Lusignan line can itself be viewed as an alchemical act, akin to the creation of the Philosopher's Stone: a source of enduring value and prosperity. She also commands her children to go forth and conquer foreign lands.

Her sons' physical mutations, previously described as divine, could also be interpreted symbolically- as representations of alchemy's attempt to perfect the imperfect through refinement. Despite their unusual physical characteristics, they lead armies and conquer lands, living fulfilling and honourable lives.

Her association with springs and water further links her to Mercury and its fluidity, symbolising the flow of spirit. The fountain can symbolise a source of continuous renewal, wisdom, or even the elixir of life.⁷¹ It represents the feminine, fluid, mercurial, life-giving, and receptive substance that the masculine, sulphuric principle seeks to unite with in order to achieve the Philosopher's Stone or spiritual enlightenment.

Mélusine's true nature is veiled; only the initiated can perceive her in her authentic form and comprehend her essence and the laws of nature- a concept reminiscent of ancient alchemical teachings. Raymondin's transgression and Mélusine's forced departure may serve as a symbolic reminder that alchemical knowledge is only accessible to those approach it with respect. Revealing or misusing such esoteric knowledge disrupts the transformative process. By breaking his vow, Raymondin interferes with the *opus magnum*- the Great Work- and drives her away.

Mélusine reveals the divine connection between the feminine and matter. She reigns over the sea- formless waters- and the moon. In alchemy, women are represented by the moon and men by the sun. Her divine counterpart, Raymondin, is depicted as a gallant and righteous king- a common alchemical symbol. Carl Jung also discusses the king archetype in alchemy, associating it with the process of individualisation, transformation and the Self. The king symbolises the ego, and Jung's concept of the *rex moriens*- the death of the king- represents the symbolic death necessary for psychological rebirth and integration.

In alchemical texts, the king is often paired with the queen, and together they embody the *coniunctio*-the sacred union of opposites. Raymondin's name reflects solar energy ('Ray' referring to Sol), while Mélusine's name- Mère Lucina-⁷² suggests lunar qualities (Luna). Their integration symbolises the alchemical marriage, or *hieros gamos*. The *Coniunctio oppositorum*- union of opposites, such as the sun and moon, masculine and feminine- must also occur within the individual. Achieving the *hieros gamos* requires balancing one's internal masculine and feminine energies. Through the union of spirit and form, of Logos and matter, we complete the Great Work.

"This singular Virgin, Virgo singularis, as the Church expressly designates her, is, moreover, glorified under epithets which sufficiently denote her positive origin. Is she not also called the Palm of Patience (Palma patientia); the Lily among the thorns (Lillium inter spinas); the symbolic Honey of Samson; the Fleece of Gideon; the mystical Rose; the Gate of Heaven; the House of Gold, etc.? The same texts also call Mary the Seat of Wisdom, in other words the Subject of Hermetic Science, of universal wisdom. In the symbolism of the planetary metals, it is the moon which receives the rays of the sun and secretly preserves them in its womb. It is the dispenser of the passive substance, which the solar spirit comes to animate. Mary, Virgin, and Mother, therefore represents form; Elijah, the sun, God, the Father, is the emblem of the vital spirit. From the union of these two principles results living matter, subject to the vicissitudes of the laws of mutation and progression." -Fulcanelli⁷³

In general, Mélusine's transformation and secrecy reflect the inner journey of integrating the shadow self- a key theme in alchemy. Alchemy is not only about transforming physical substances but also the self. The alchemist, through hidden knowledge, can shape reality- just as Mélusine does. In alchemical tradition, the divine feminine, embodied by figures such as Sophia or Mary, serves as the vessel of transformation. Mélusine, too, fulfils this role.

Her darkness, connection to underworld, and possible association with the Black Virgins and Isis reflect the alchemical stage of *nigredo*. "In Hermetic symbolism, they represent the primitive earth, that one that the artist must choose as the subject of his great work. It is the raw material in its ore state, as it emerges from the metalliferous deposits, deeply buried beneath the rock mass. It is, the texts tell us, a black, heavy, brittle, crumbly substance, which has the appearance of a stone and can be crushed into small pieces like a stone."⁷⁴ writes Fulcanelli in *They Mystery of the Cathedrals*. *Nigredo* is the initiator of the process, bringing the *prima materia* to a state of death or decay-

breaking down the original matter or ego into its raw, unrefined state. It represents putrefaction and a dark night of the soul.

Some might interpret Mélusine's quest for a "soul"- such as in *The Little Mermaid*- as analogous to the philosopher's stone, a substance believed to enable transformation and spiritual perfection. In the story, Ariel must die to obtain a soul, echoing alchemy's quest for transcendence. Her journey could also be seen as a metaphorical quest for the *elixir vitae*, the elixir of life.

Christian values are evident in Mélusine's desire for salvation, especially as a form of repentance for wronging her father. At the same time, the Christian tradition often viewed alchemy as heretical, casting suspicion on the very transformative process she seeks. In the end, her ultimate goal- to redeem herself and obtain a soul, her *magnum opus*- remains unfulfilled.

In his work, *On Nymphs, Sylphs, Pygmies, and Salamanders, and on Other Spirits* (published posthumously in 1566), Paracelsus discusses elemental beings being classified into four classical elements— earth, water, air, and fire. He calls Mélusine a type of water nymph, known as an 'undine'.⁷⁵ Ondines are water spirits that inhabit rivers, pools, and waterfalls. He portrays her more as an alchemical principle, and emphasises her quest to become human, noting that undines do not possess a soul but can obtain one through marriage to a human. This will shorten their earthly life, but gives them spiritual immortality. This shows his philosophy of connecting the natural and spiritual realms, viewing these spirits as part of the "astral plane" or "chaos," and capable of interacting with humans in specific conditions. Mélusine does exactly this, by marrying a mortal man and birthing his children.

Her overall journey can be seen as a reflection of the alchemical process of *solve et coagula*- the breaking down and rebuilding of form and essence. Her curse, which forces her to transform every Saturday, can be interpreted as an act of *solve*: the dissolution of her human appearance and the revelation of her supernatural nature. This resembles a return to chaos or an unformed state, akin to the reduction of matter to its *prima materia*- the original, formless substance in alchemy. Her ability to reassemble these dissolved elements into a new, human-like form corresponds to the *coagula* phase- recombination and integration into a more stable, elevated form. Not only is she able to pass as human, but she also thrives, living prosperously and contributing to the growth of Poitou- a metaphorical transformation of base matter into gold. Her desire to integrate her dual nature- fairy and human, spirit and matter, light and dark- mirrors the alchemical goal of unifying opposites. Ultimately, Mélusine's continual transformation from cursed fairy to noblewoman and back again reflects the cyclical nature of alchemical work, where each turn of the cycle brings a shift to a higher state of being, even if it appears to return to the beginning. True transformation, as alchemy teaches, requires both dissolution and renewal.

André Breton conceived his own version of Mélusine in his book *Arcane 17*, the title of which refers to the 17th Tarot card- The Star.⁷⁷ He associates this card with the “Magnesium Mother” or “milk of magnesia”. Breton interprets the central star on the card as the Morning Star- Venus, also known as Lucifer, the “Light Bearer”- and further connects it to Sirius the Dog Star, which is traditionally linked to the Egyptian goddess Isis. In *Arcane 17*, Breton presents woman as the source of life, referring to her as “the Star, Eternal Youth, Isis, the myth of the resurrection”.⁷⁶ Mélusine is cast in this archetypal role- as *la verseuse* (the vase).⁷⁸ The nude woman depicted on the card, shown pouring water from two urns, becomes a symbol of mystical regeneration and feminine power.

Fulcanelli tells us that, “the litanies teach us that the Virgin is the Vase which contains the spirit of things: *Vas spirituale*,... and the secret, the mystery was therefor in the vase.”.⁷⁹ Breton’s association of Mélusine with the Star Card and his naming of her as the “Magnesium Mother,” aligns her with an archetype of the primal feminine as a vessel for transformation, closely tied to the alchemical concept of Magnesia.

Fulcanelli further describes a symbolic image of a mermaid, which represents Magnesia- “In the treatise on Azoth, we notice a wooden figure representing a crowned nymph or siren, swimming on the sea and causing two jets of milk to gush from her plump breasts, which mix with the waves.”⁸⁰

An oceanic woman, a representation of this archetype can be found in a plate from J.D. Mylius’s *Philosophia Reformata* (1622), showing the Magnesia squirting her sacred milk into the sea (a symbol of the soul).

Mark Hedsel elaborates on the idea of the “Magnesium Mother,” describing her as a manifestation of the *Anima Mundi*- the Soul of the World. “This soul is usually visualised in arcane literature as a naked woman. In a famous engraving which appeared in Fludd’s *Utriusque Cosmi Historia*... as in the Maier plate, this Fludd woman is discharging a stellar milk from her breast, over which is a seven-pointed star. This ‘milk’, which looks more like a stellar dust, merges with the influence rays of all the planets to fructify the Earth. No doubt this portrayal of milk is intended to show that the *Anima Mundi* is discharging Magnesia.”⁸¹

He continues: “Magnesia is one of the words for the higher realm of the Etheric: it is of ‘such a celestial and transcendent brightness that nothing on earth can compare to it’. The word is clearly intended to evoke the magnet (*magnes*) with it’s invisible yet dramatic influence.”⁸²

“*Magnesia*, says Paracelsus, is incorruptible, and all things are nourished by her. She is everywhere and always, yet not all men may see her. She may be seen only by those who are ready for this birth into a new world of sight and hearing. As Maier himself admits, the seeing of Magnesia, the vision of this virgin, demands special eyes, like the innocent eyes of the unicorn. If

we read between the pictorial lines, we see that Maier is dealing with Archetypes, the Ideas which lie behind manifest form.”⁸³

He references Fulcanelli, who states that “in the Green Language of alchemy, Ariadne is a form of *araignée*, the spider. Is not the spider the soul, weaving our own body? But the Greek verb *airo* means to seize, or draw *magnes*. This invisible magnetic virtue, shut up hermetically in the web of the body, is what the Philosophers call Magnesia.”⁸⁴

Hedsel writes, “The manuscripts and books of the alchemists tell us that the blood and water of the virgin *mater* are purified, and that one of the names for this purified alchemical woman is Magnesia. She is the magnet-woman who draws to her for nourishment those Sons of Man who do not find the material world sufficient, and wish to be Sons of God, or initiates.

Everything will change for the neophyte who suckles at the breast of this *Alba Mater* who is Magnesia, for the vision she offers is the vision the neophyte seeks- the first insight into the Spiritual world. When that vision is revealed, and the first part of his or her journey comes to an end, everything will change. Everything will change in a twinkling of an eye, just as, in the pre-Christian Mysteries, everything changed after the dance to Eleusis, to witness the Great Mystery of the Earth-goddess, Demeter, who was the Magnesia of the ancient world.”⁸⁵

Citations and notes

1 It was common in ancient times for royal bloodlines to compose such myths- basing their lineage on a supernatural beast or creature, such as the Merovingians stating they came from a Quinotaur.

2 Poitou is a historical region that is now within modern day France, primarily located in the Nouvelle-Aquitaine region.

3 In one case he goes with Set to defeat Apep- the serpent of chaos.

4 According to *the Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, the god transformed himself into a dolphin, took control of a Cretan ship, and commanded the sailors aboard to become the first priests at Delphi. This occurred after he slew the Python- the serpent guardian of the original oracle of Gaia- and sought to establish his own oracle at the site, which became the Delphic Oracle.

5 Other cultures anthropomorphise the Earth as feminine, such as Gaia in Greek mythology, and Pachamama in Andean traditions, and the Sky as masculine, such as Zeus or Ouranos in Greek mythology. Across these cultures, land and water are often seen as divine.

6 Hesiod's *Theogony*

7 *Ibid.*

8 Fulcanelli, 'Le Mystère des Cathédrales', p. 80

9 Redgrove, 'The Black Goddess', p. 137

10 Lee, 'Gypsy Law: Romani Legal Traditions and Culture' chapter 'The Rom-Vlach Gypsies and the Kris-Romani', p. 210

11 Baring, 'The Myth of the Goddess, Evolution of an Image'

12 von-Franz, 'The Cat: A Tale of Feminine Redemption (Studies in Jungian Psychology)', p. 39

13 Fulcanelli, 'Le Mystère des Cathédrales', p. 75

14 Michon, 'Chartres et le Monde Catholique'

15 Fulcanelli, 'Le Mystère des Cathédrales', p. 79

16 Both Jung and Campbell have talked about the labyrinth as a symbol of the inward journey in mythic narratives and in the individuation process. The complex, non-linear journey inward. And likewise in alchemy as a symbol.

17 Gordon, 'Vierges Noires – Origine et sens contes de fées – Mélusine', p. 21

18 *Ibid.*, p. 22

19 *Ibid.*, p. 32

20 *Ibid.*, p. 35

21 Fulcanelli, 'Le Mystère des Cathédrales', p. 89

22 Castille, 'Le Mystère des Vierges Noires', p. 52

23 Redgrove. 'The Black Goddess', p. 138

24 In Noisy-sur-École, France- researchers found carvings of the female form, including water collecting in a vulva-like depression in a cave near Paris, dating 18,000 BC. "The natural geomorphological features of the Ségognole 3 shelter provided an ideal setting to imprint this fragmented representation of femininity, a theme that was evidently significant during the Upper Paleolithic." Another cave was found in the Bruant valley of France, called "The Sorcerer's cave" with a gynomorphic altar dating from the Magdalenian, which could have been used for fertility rites.

25 Redgrove. 'The Black Goddess', p. 162

26 Gordon, 'Vierges Noires – Origine et sens contes de fées – Mélusine', pp. 60-1

27 Gordon, 'Vierges Noires – Origine et sens contes de fées – Mélusine', p. 39

28 von-Franz, 'The Cat: A Tale of Feminine Redemption (Studies in Jungian Psychology)', pp. 10-1

29 Max Lüthi stated that fairy tales are different from sagas, in that a saga is "the tale of a conscious human being who has a numinous experience of the unconscious," often involving mythological creatures. In such tales, the ego confronts the unknown, and has to escape, returning home.

30 von-Franz, 'The Cat: A Tale of Feminine Redemption (Studies in Jungian Psychology)', p. 9

31 The cave itself a symbolic space- an initiatory underworld. By imprisoning her father there, she casts him into that symbolic descent.

32 She returns occasionally to nurse her newborns, and to appear when the castle is to change hands.

33 Gordon, 'Vierges Noires – Origine et sens contes de fées – Mélusine' p. 87

34 *Ibid.*, p. 41

35 In Ishtar's descent, the Babylonian goddess of love and war descends to rescue her lover, Tammuz. At each of the seven gates, she is required to remove an object of clothing or jewellery. This symbolises a

progressive shedding of her divine power and identity until she stands naked before Ereshkigal, the underworld's queen. It's a powerful metaphor for vulnerability, transformation, and the loss of worldly attributes. The dance of the seven veils, most famously associated with the Biblical story of Salome. In her seductive dance for King Herod, she removes seven veils to reveal herself, which parallels the gradual disrobing in Ishtar's myth.

36 Gordon, 'Vierges Noires – Origine et sens contes de fées – Mélusine', p. 52

37 *Ibid.*, p. 57

38 *Ibid.*, p. 58

39 *Ibid.*, p. 57

40 *Ibid.*, p. 85

41 von-Franz, 'The Cat: A Tale of Feminine Redemption (Studies in Jungian Psychology)', p. 90

42 Although briefly, in Jean D'Arras' version, Mélusine's son Geoffroy à la Grand Dent, (Geoffroy with the Great Tooth) is associated with fighting giants in two cases.

43 Gordon, 'Vierges Noires – Origine et sens contes de fées – Mélusine', p. 59

44 The name *Lusignan* is attested as early as the year 929, in reference to a tower called *Vicareia Liciniacensis*, located where the routes from Poitiers to Niort and Poitiers to Saintes converge. According to tradition, the Lusignan family was of Gallo-Roman origin, possibly descended from a figure named *Lucinius*.

45 Gordon, 'Vierges Noires – Origine et sens contes de fées – Mélusine', p. 94

46 *Ibid.*, p. 98

47 *Ibid.*, p. 98

48 *Ibid.*, p. 98

49 von-Franz, 'The Cat: A Tale of Feminine Redemption (Studies in Jungian Psychology)', p. 53

50 Gordon, 'Vierges Noires – Origine et sens contes de fées – Mélusine' p. 82

51 von-Franz, 'The Cat: A Tale of Feminine Redemption (Studies in Jungian Psychology)', p. 60

52 Fulcanelli, 'Le Mystère des Cathédrales', p. 90

53 Croix-Haute, 'Du Bestiaire des Alchimistes', p. 159

54 *Ibid.*, p. 161, The Rochefoucauld family were known alchemists, and in Dampierre-sur-Butonne, one can still find a château filled with alchemical reliefs.

55 *Mutus Liber*, or Silent Book (Altus, likely a pseudonym) is a famous alchemical text first published in 1677 in La Rochelle, France. It is entirely wordless and consists of symbolic illustrations which convey alchemical processes. It is a work that Jung found to be profound and deeply influential.

56 *Ibid.*, p. 160

57 Jung, CW 13, para 180

58 Fulcanelli is referring here to Hermes Trismegistus, the mythical founder of Hermeticism, a syncretic blend of alchemy, astronomy, and theurgy

59 Fulcanelli, 'Le Mystère des Cathédrales', p. 78

60 Croix-Haute, 'Du Bestiaire des Alchimistes', p. 153

61 Jung, CW 9i para 358

62 Croix-Haute, 'Du Bestiaire des Alchimistes', p. 153

63 *Ibid.*, p. 137

64 *Ibid.*, p. 138

65 *Ibid.*, p. 161

66 *Ibid.*, pp. 153-4

67 *Ibid.*, p. 100

68 *Ibid.*, p. 99

69 *Ibid.*, p. 100

70 *Ibid.*, p. 154

71 "Finally, let us say that the esoteric tradition of the Fountain of Life or Fountain of Youth is found materialised in the sacred wells that most Gothic churches possessed in the Middle Ages. The water drawn from them was most often believed to have curative properties, and it was used in the treatment of certain illnesses." (Fulcanelli page 98)

72 While *Lucina* does not directly mean 'moon,' it derives from the Latin word *Lucina*, meaning 'she who brings to light,' which can be interpreted as a reference to the moon's reflective nature. Lucina was also a title given to Juno, who is sometimes conflated with lunar goddesses and associated with the moon.

73 Fulcanelli, 'Le Mystère des Cathédrales', pp. 91-2

74 *Ibid.*, pp. 75-6

75 Paracelsus, 'On Nymphs, Sylphs, Pygmies, and Salamanders, and on Other Spirits'

76 Breton reimagine the Star Card from Oswald Wirth's *Le Tarot des imagiers du Moyen Âge* (1927) star card, which itself was influenced by the symbolism of Éliphas Lévi, Papus's *Tarot Bohémiens* (1889), and a 1930 tarot deck produced by the Marseilles cardmaker Grimaud.

77 XVII: The Star, Now that the being has awakened the inner fire, the sky of the last arcana will be inhabited, studded with stars: henceforth, the being lives in direct inspiration with the celestial worlds. The capacity to use matter in a sacred way arrives.

The young woman of the Star is naked, as will be all the characters of the last arcana. The being can stand in his nudity, without a mask, without the negative charge of the ego. He no longer needs to protect himself: he seems himself as others see him. The moment has come when he can work with the totality of his possibilities. Without disturbing anything, he can add his own water on to the collective water. He has become capable of a useful and lasting contribution.

Teaching is now possible. The being of the Star can contribute his stone to the edifice of the sacred without disturbing it. This is why the young woman is androgynous: she combines her purity with the masculine realising power. Temperance was the beginning of "living with energy." The being has now entered into mastery. He participates in the sacred operation on the plane of physical matter.

The Star is the master's first rank; it is the time of the masterpiece. The large star and the seven small ones allude to the seven inner centers that the Hindus call chakras. *They remind us that, from now on, the being is permanently open to inspiration from above.*" (pg 54-55) from the *Tarot de Marseille*

78 *verseuse* is a French word that means "pouurer" or "female pouurer"

79 Fulcanelli, 'Le Mystère des Cathédrales', p. 91

80 *Ibid.*, p. 96

81 Hedsel, 'Zelator', p. 393, 59.

82 *Ibid.*, Waite, *The Hermetic and Alchemical Writings of... Paracelsus the Great*, vol II, p. 372ff.

83 *Ibid.*, p. 393, 61.

84 *Ibid.*, p. 393, 61.

85 *Ibid.*, p. 113 *Alba Mater*, is a term coined by Hedsel which may mean White Mother, or perhaps White Matter