Spotlight:
Heroes and Heroines
Romances - Volksbücher

DR. JÖRN GÜNThER · RARE BOOKS AG
Manuscripts & Rare Books
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Many of the earliest English and German printed romances derived from French examples, which first were handed down in handwritten form. Some were prose versions of medieval German verse romances; others contained tales of foreign origin. Whatever their sources, they satisfied a need for light literature that persists until today.
Our most recent Catalogue 13: *Heroes and Heroines* offers a very fine selection of medieval early printed Romances. These early printed books rarely come to the market. They bring us folklore that continues to be inspiring, as seen in some of today’s most popular films and TV series.
Six popular illustrated stories
in one book


2. Francesco Petrarca, Griseldis. Translated by Heinrich Steinhöwel. [Strasbourg: Heinrich Knoblochtzer], 1478 - 12 leaves, 10 woodcut illustrations

3. Jacobus de Theramo, Das buch Bellial genant. Strasbourg: Heinrich Knoblochtzer, 10 August 1477 - 70 leaves, 55 woodcut illustrations

4. Das buch der geschicht des grossen Allexanders. Translated by Johann Hartlieb. Strasbourg: Martin Schott, 10 December 1488 - 108 leaves, 29 woodcut illustrations

5. Guido de Columna, Ein hübsche histori von der künnglichenn stat troy wie si zerstörett wartt. Translated by Hans Mair. Strasbourg: Martin Schott, 13 March 1489 - 128 leaves, 107 woodcut illustrations

Melusine: The famous legend of the union between the fairy Melusine, who transforms into a mermaid every Saturday, and the knight Raymond has its origin in the French Poitou (c. 1200). Since Antiquity sirens and mermaids have inspired authors’ and artists’ fantasies in many countries and in various media.

All German editions of *Melusine* follow the translation of Thüring von Ringoltingen (1465), first printed c. 1474, even earlier than the first French edition. Numerous woodcuts illustrate the adventurous tale. Based on the text and illustrations from the edition by Bernhard Richel, Knoblochtzer produced three editions of the story – the copy at hand being the first.


*Patient Griselda* is based on the last novella of the *Decameron* by Giovanni Boccaccio, telling the story of the farmer’s daughter, whose noble husband tests her obedience and patience with dramatic challenges, all of which she overcomes. Petrarch translated the Italian text into Latin and that version spread throughout Europe. The humanist Heinrich Steinhöwel (1411/12–1479) translated it into German (Augsburg, 1471). Knoblochtzer next used these fine woodcuts as model for his edition. Copies of this - the most often printed novel of the Renaissance - are extremely rare today.
Griseldis is banished from her home and is forced to hand over her children to be killed, yet she still endorses her husband’s behavior. The heroine’s willing submission made her a role model for many ages.
In her 1961 novel, Hedwig Courts-Mahler turned the story of Griseldis into an interesting example of ‘Trivialliteratur’.

After the novel’s original popular reception, a 1974 film version (produced by Süddeutscher Rundfunk), an audio book version read by renowned actress Christiane Hörbiger, and various recent dramatic readings by Leipzig author Henner Kotte followed, all of which are evidence of the continuing productive power of late medieval Griselda on contemporary readers, listeners, and viewers.
Damsels and dragons do not fail to get the public’s attention, then as well as now.... (stills of Daenerys Targaryen from Game of Thrones).

3. Jacobus de Theramo, *Das buch Bellial genant.* Strasbourg: Heinrich Knoblochtzer, 10 August 1477 – 70 leaves, 55 woodcut illustrations
Alexander the Great’s history has enthralled the public since Antiquity. Oliver Stone’s film of 2004 is an epic historical drama, of which four versions exist sold in millions of copies and viewed by many more.
Alexander and King Porus in India, at the battle of Hydaspes (Pakistan; 326 BC) as narrated by Hartlieb.
Jason battling the dragon that guards the Golden Fleece (film 1963, Columbia Pictures; the remake: dd. 2000 was less succesful).

The Trojan War: Homer versus Hollywood

5. Guido de Columna, Ein hübsche histori von der künnglichenn stat troy wie si zerstörett wartt. Translated by Hans Mair. Printed by Martin Schott at Strasbourg, 13 March 1489 - 128 leaves, 107 woodcut illustrations
Troy inspired: modern diagram; Peter Akroyd novel; Heinrich Schlieman; Agamemnon mask.

Homer versus Hollywood: In the 2004 film by Wolfgang Petersen, the Sack of Troy is not taken from Homer’s Iliad, but from Virgil’s Aeneid.

King Priam: Peter O’Toole’s award winning performance.

Mandeville’s *Travels* was first quite popular in manuscript form, but after the invention of printing the book became available to a much larger public. Mandeville’s (possibly apocryphal) adventures around the Arabian peninsula, Palestine, India, Tibet, China, Egypt, etc. set the stage for all published travel literature. Otto von Diemeringen’s version in German was first published in Basel by Bernhard Richel (c. 1481). Prüss used that book as a model for his Strasbourg editions. The woodcuts present the whole range of the wonders described by Mandeville.
Giles Milton’s *The Riddle and the Knight* (1996), is a fascinating account of the legend of Sir John Mandeville, a knight who was once the most famous writer in medieval Europe. He wrote about his voyage around the world that became a source of inspiration for the great expeditions of the Renaissance. Mandeville’s exploits and adventures also provided inspiration for writers such as Shakespeare, Milton, and Keats.
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Heroes and Heroines
"Volksbücher" - prose novels in late medieval society
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