### The Lady with the Serpent’s Tail: Hybridity and the Dutch *Meluzine*

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ABSTRACT

This essay examines what happened to the Mélusine figure as her legend spread to the Low Countries. The starting point is a small statue on top of a former guild house in Ghent, which—unlike most contemporary fifteenth-century depictions—shows Mélusine as a hybrid figure rather than a serpent. To shed light on the mystery of this hybrid form, the discussion turns to clues found in the hitherto largely neglected Middle Dutch *Meluzine* translation, of which there are three surviving witnesses: the incunable printed by Gheraert Leeu in 1491, the edition printed by Henrick Eckert van Homberch in 1510, and Hieronymus Verdussen’s 1602 edition. Close examination reveals that the concept of hybridity is central to the Dutch *Meluzine.* It is the only version based on different French redactions, the translator greatly emphasizes Meluzine’s hybrid nature, and her half-serpent form is given a prominent position in the editions’ iconographies.

KEYWORDS: Art History – General, Literature – Prose; Low Countries; 15th century, 16th century; Translation, Hybridity, Meluzine, Early book illustration, Half-serpent statue

One of the most intriguing historic attractions of the Flemish city of Ghent is Het Toreken, a large stone house that once belonged to the medieval tanners’ guild. Although the building’s rich history alone is reason enough for a visit, most visitors are drawn not to the building itself but to the peculiar mermaid-shaped statue that stands atop its highest turret. The statue, which functions as a weather vane, represents the beautiful half-serpent Meluzine, who is seen holding a mirror and combing her long, flowing hair. The local guides tell of several legends that surround this statue. It is said, for instance, that Meluzine’s descendants carried it to the Holy Land, where it was lost and later recovered by Flemish crusaders, who took the statue to Ghent. It is also said that Meluzine was the protector of the tanners’ guild, and that the guild received the statue as a reward for their role in the city’s rebellion against the French during the Hundred Years’ War. Although such origin stories were undoubtedly embellished over the centuries, it is certain that a statue of Meluzine has been on Het Toreken since the late fifteenth century, when the turret was added to the main building.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Meluzine’s appearance on top of a guild house in the center of one of the most important cities of the southern Low Countries is a fitting testament to how, in the second half of the fifteenth century, her story was already transforming from its original incarnation as a local French legend into what would eventually become an early European bestseller. Not only had the *Mélusine* romance already been translated into German and Castilian, but the story travelled to the Low Countries as well.[[2]](#footnote-2) This move northwards is already attested by the number of fifteenth-century manuscripts of Jean d’Arras’s *Mélusine* or *La Noble Histoire de Lusignan* and Coudrette’s *Roman de Parthenay* that originate from, or were illustrated in, the Burgundian Low Countries.[[3]](#footnote-3) However, it was the romance’s translation into Middle Dutch, or ‘Diets,’ that contributed significantly to the spread of the Melusine legend in the late medieval Low Countries.

The earliest known witness to the anonymous Middle Dutch *Historie van* *Meluzine* is the incunable printed by Gheraert Leeu, dated to 9 February 1491.[[4]](#footnote-4) Two more editions appeared later: Hendrick Eckert van Homberch printed a *Meluzine* in January 1510, and the romance was printed again by Hieronymus I Verdussen in 1602.[[5]](#footnote-5) All three surviving editions were printed in Antwerp. Interestingly, the later Dutch editions do not represent separate translations but rather duplicate the text of Leeu’s incunable. Homberch and Verdussen reprint Leeu’s text with only some minor variation in spelling and abbreviations. This means that there is really only one Dutch translation, of which there are three surviving printed editions. The two later editions also copy Leeu’s iconography. The only surviving copy of Leeu’s edition has several missing folios and now features 46 woodcuts, but it is almost certain that the edition originally contained 50 woodcuts.[[6]](#footnote-6) Leeu’s iconography is reproduced in total in Homberch’s edition, while 17 of the 25 woodcuts that illustrate Verdussen’s edition are derived from Leeu’s set.

Although most *Melusine* scholars seem to be aware of the existence of at least one edition of the romance in Dutch, almost no one has examined this translation in detail. Moreover, those few scholarly works devoted to the Dutch translation rarely mention that there are three editions, as the 1602 edition by Verdussen has so far escaped scholarly attention.[[7]](#footnote-7) This is rather unfortunate, since the Dutch *Meluzine* represents a fascinating branch of the transcultural tradition, not least because it is the only version which translates parts of both Jean d’Arras’s prose and Coudrette’s verse redaction of the French *Mélusine*. In other words, much like Meluzine herself, the Dutch translation is a hybrid.

The concept of hybridity is central to the Dutch *Meluzine*. Not only is the translation an amalgam of different sources, but the translator also greatly emphasizes Meluzine’s role as a hybrid figure. Meluzine’s hybridity also plays a vital role in the iconography of the Dutch editions, to the extent that they open with a woodcut depicting Meluzine’s half-serpent form, drawing the reader’s attention to her unnatural combination of animal and human right from the start. This focus on Meluzine’s hybrid body often comes at the cost of her serpent form, but through it she also loses some of her associations with the fairy realm. As a result, for the reader of the Dutch editions Meluzine is not a serpent or a fairy but an alluring hybrid monster. As aptly illustrated by the statue on top of Het Toreken, this hybrid form was to become so emblematic that one can, even today, recognize the lady with the serpent’s tail as Meluzine.

The Dutch translation is written in prose and is based predominantly on one of the incunabula of Jean’s *Mélusine*, most likely Adam Steinschaber’s *editio princeps*, printed in Geneva in 1478.[[8]](#footnote-8) However, towards the end of the romance the translator also adds two episodes unique to Coudrette’s version: that of the English knight who tries to obtain the treasure guarded by Meluzine’s sister Palestine, and that detailing the death of Meluzine’s most famous son, Godefroy. These episodes are inserted between the episode of Melior and the king of Armenia at the Sparrowhawk Castle and the romance’s epilogue. So far, scholars discussing the Dutch translation have not noted that parts of this translation are based on Coudrette’s version, possibly because the change in sources is rather difficult to spot.[[9]](#footnote-9) This is because the Dutch translator carefully integrates the additional episodes within the structure of Jean’s version, creating a true hybrid narrative.

To give an example, the translator makes several modifications to the ending of the Melior episode, in order to facilitate a smooth transition to the first of the Coudrette episodes. In Jean’s version, the Melior episode is followed directly by the epilogue, and the narrator has already given several indications that the story is about to end. For instance, the narrator explains that “cy me tairay des roix d’Armenie et en est conclue l’istoire” [here I cease to speak of the kings of Armenia, and here my history is concluded], then gives the date when the romance was finished, and then commends Mélusine’s descendants to God, ending with an “amen”.[[10]](#footnote-10) These concluding passages are not repeated in the Dutch translation, where the narrator explains only that the kings of Armenia are descendants of Meluzine. The story then continues with a heading announcing the subject of the next episode: “hoe Palestine, die derde suster van Melusinen, haers vaders scat bewaert op eenen hooghen berch in Arragonien” [how Palestine, the third sister of Meluzine, guards her father’s treasure on a high mountain in Aragon].[[11]](#footnote-11) This heading matches the pattern of earlier headings introducing episodes translated from Jean’s version, which also tend to start with the word “hoe,” or how. This means that the shift from one French source to the other is not only made smoothly in the text, but is not discernible on the page, either.

The shift from the episode of Godefroy’s death back to the epilogue of Jean’s version also appears quite natural. After relating the details of Godefroy’s burial, the narrator explains that Diederic, one of Meluzine’s youngest sons, inherits the Lusignan lands, and that many great men are descended from him. In Coudrette’s version,the discussion on Thierry and his descendants forms a bridge to the narrator’s own time, as he then explains that the verse romance’s patron—Guillaume de Parthenay, another supposed descendant of Thierry—has died.[[12]](#footnote-12) The Dutch translator devotes only a few lines to Diederic, summarizing Coudrette’s lengthy discussion of the descendants by simply stating that Diederic is the ancestor of “noch vele heerlicker ridderen” [many more noble knights] (Z4vb). The episode then ends just before Coudrette’s narrator would have shifted to his own time and mention his patron, and the story returns to Jean’s version in the next paragraph. Since the translator again removes any tell-tale signs that he is working from a different source, any reader unfamiliar with the differences between the two French redactions would likely not have noted this shift.

Of course, one question which immediately springs to mind is why the translator added these episodes. Since Coudrette’s version largely follows the same narrative as Jean’s version—and since the translator clearly had access to a copy of Coudrette’s version—it seems odd that the verse account was not simply translated in its entirety. If the translator specifically wanted to include the episodes of Palestine and Godefroy, then why not opt for Coudrette’s version? The likely answer is that the translator did not just want to include episodes unique to Coudrette’s account but also the episodes unique to Jean’s. If the translator had followed the structure of Coudrette’s version, then the Dutch translation would not have featured, for instance, the episodes describing the meeting of Meluzine’s parents, Raymondijn’s reclaiming of his inheritance, Meluzine giving advice to her sons before they go abroad, Godefroy’s adventures in Ireland, and Godefroy’s meeting with the knight of the Poitevin tower. By supplementing Jean’s detailed prose account with the Coudrette episodes, the translator presents us with a more complete version of the Melusine story than found in either French redaction.

Because the translator heavily abbreviates the Coudrette episodes and introduces some significant modifications, it is difficult to determine exactly which source he used based on philological grounds alone. In fact, to add a little intrigue, it is even possible that the episodes were not derived directly from Coudrette’s version at all. Although the translator may have worked from a Coudrette manuscript, one may wonder whether, as with the episode based on Jean’s version, he was not working from a printed source instead. As Coudrette’s version was not published until 1854, the only printed accounts available when the first Dutch edition was printed were those of Thüring von Ringoltingen’s German *Melusine*, of which at least ten editions were published before 1491.

It is tempting to suppose that the Coudrette episodes were mediated through the German version, especially since the iconography of Leeu’s edition is almost certainly based on that of one of the early German incunabula.[[13]](#footnote-13) Most of Leeu’s woodcuts match the setting of woodcuts depicting the same scenes in the German incunabula. Moreover, the three images that illustrate the Coudrette episodes must have been copied from a German exemplar, as these same scenes do not appear in the incunabula of Jean’s version or the illuminated manuscripts of Coudrette’s version.[[14]](#footnote-14) If the Coudrette episodes were indeed mediated through a German edition, along with the images, then the Dutch translation is even more of a hybrid than first thought, as it not only combines episodes from different redactions, but was also influenced by more than one branch of the multilingual *Melusine* tradition.

Turning to the romance itself, it is apparent that the translator makes a number of significant modifications to its main character, so that the Dutch Meluzine is not quite the same figure as the Mélusine of the French versions. One of the most important differences is that Meluzine’s weekly hybrid form becomes an even more important focal point than in the source material. Oddly, part of the reason why Meluzine’s hybridity emerges much more strongly in this translation is because the translator intervenes mostly at the beginning and end of the romance, in scenes where Meluzine does not appear in hybrid form at all. This is because the translator creates a greater contrast between Meluzine’s initial humanity and her eventual transformation into an animal, thereby highlighting the abnormal mixture of Meluzine’s hybrid form even more.

At the start of the narrative, the translator suppresses Meluzine’s associations with the fairy realm, so that she appears more human than fairy. In Jean’s version, from which the translator is working at this point, the prologue and the romance’s opening episodes are vital in setting up Mélusine’s supernatural background and her origins as a half-fairy. Although the translator largely follows Jean’s narrative in that Meluzine is still the daughter of king Elinas and queen Presine, he removes several crucial links between Meluzine and the fairy realm.

It would be excessive to list all of the translator’s modifications here, but there are a few interesting examples which are worth mentioning. For instance, while a large section of Jean’s prologue is devoted to stories about unions between fairy women and mortal men, which function as analogues to the main narrative, the Dutch prologue contains only one such story. The translator completely removes Jean’s detailed discussion on supernatural women, in which he pays special attention to the benevolent “faees” [fairies] (2v) who, like Mélusine, are betrayed by their mortal lovers and forced to disappear or transform into serpents. Instead, the translator includes only the story of Rocher van Roussel Casteele, who one day meets a beautiful “alvinne” [fairy] (A2rb) who marries him on the condition that he never sees her naked. When Rocher later breaks his promise and sees her as she is bathing, the lady disappears under the water and “terstont wart sy verwandelt in een serpent/ ende en was noyt sindert gesien” [she immediately turned into a serpent, and was never seen since] (A2rb). Although this story still forms an obvious parallel to that of Raymondijn and Meluzine, it is the prologue’s only fairy story. Whereas in Steinschaber’s edition, two-thirds of the prologue is devoted to listing various stories that set up Mélusine’s fairy origins and shape the reader’s expectations of the main narrative, these fairy elements are a far less significant component in the Dutch prologue.

More importantly, it is never made clear that Meluzine is a fairy, too. While in Steinschaber’s edition the long list of stories of various fairy women ends with the narrator’s announcement that he will now turn to another fairy, the one who founded the castle of Lusignan, in the Dutch translation the link between Meluzine and the only other fairy mentioned in the prologue is tenuous at best. This is because the sentence that links Meluzine to other fairy women in Steinschaber’s edition has been moved forward in the translation, so that it appears before the story about Rocher and his fairy lover. The Dutch narrator first says that his story is about how Lusignan “ghesticht is by eenre alvinnen” [was founded by a fairy] (A2ra-b) and then tells us about Rocher and his lady, which almost gives the impression that it is this fairy who founded the castle. Even more confusing is the statement that follows this story, when the narrator explains that he will tell “vanden edelen geslachte dat van deser alvinnen ghecomen is” [of the noble lineage that came from this fairy] (A2rb). In Steinschaber’s edition, this sentence clearly refers to Mélusine, but the only fairy the Dutch narrator could possibly be referring to at this point is Rocher’s wife. To make matters even more confusing, in the last lines of the prologue the narrator finally introduces Meluzine by name, and explains that his story is about “Meluzinen, der selve alvinnen dochtere” [Meluzine, the daughter of this same fairy] (A2rb). At this point, it is no longer clear which fairy is which at all. Is Meluzine the daughter of Rocher’s wife, who is also the fairy who built Castle Lusignan? Although the confusion is later resolved, its most important result is that Meluzine is here never directly referred to as a fairy.

This avoidance of any direct links between Meluzine and other fairies continues in the rest of the translation. For a start, while Jean occasionally calls Mélusine a “faee,” the Dutch narrator never refers to Meluzine as a fairy. In fact, the narrator generally avoids using this term altogether; whereas in Steinschaber’s edition the words “fae,” “faeez,” or “faees” occur sixteen times, the term appears only twice in the translation. Both times, the French word is not replaced by a Dutch equivalent, but the translator uses the term as if it were a name.[[15]](#footnote-15) The only term the translator sometimes uses to refer to characters described as fairies in Jean’s version is the word “alvinne,” a word commonly used to refer to a female elf or fairy.[[16]](#footnote-16) The word is found almost exclusively in the prologue, with one notable exception: just before Meluzine transforms into a serpent, she tells the members of her court that her children were not born “van eenre alvinnen” [of a fairy] (T6ra). In other words, the only time the term “alvinne” is used in connection to Meluzine is when she emphatically denies being one. Moreover, not only is Meluzine never referred to as an alvinne by the authoritative voice of the narrator, but her mother and sisters are never referred to as such either, so that Meluzine’s familial link with the fairy race is gone, too.[[17]](#footnote-17)

The overall effect of the removal of Meluzine’s associations with fairies is that she consistently appears far more human at the beginning of the romance than she does in Jean’s version. After all, without Jean’s not-so-subtle hints at Mélusine’s fairy nature, the reader of the translation is never led to suspect that Meluzine is anything other than human. However, towards the end of the romance the translator suddenly changes tactics and begins to suppress Meluzine’s human qualities. This shift occurs around the moment when Raymondijn publicly reveals his wife’s secret half-serpent form, after which Meluzine is forced to transform into a serpent completely. While in Jean’s version Mélusine remains an ambiguous, hybrid figure even after she transforms, the Dutch Meluzine undergoes a more definitive metamorphosis into an animal, as virtually all hints at her remaining humanity disappear.

One of the clearest ways in which the translator dehumanizes Meluzine is through a reduction of her emotional displays. The translator already reduces the intensity of Meluzine’s emotions in the scenes leading up to her transformation, but the most rigorous reductions occur after Meluzine becomes an animal. In Jean’s version, Mélusine the serpent utters countless cries of despair. Jean’s narrator also details that the serpent flies to Lusignan with “si grant effroy en sa furieusete qu’il sambloit par tout en terre que la fouldre et tempeste y deut cheoir du ciel” [such great terror in her ferocity that it seemed to all on the ground as if storm and lightning came out of the sky] and that she later begins to “menant telle douleur et faisant si grant effroy que cestoit grant douleur a veoir” [express such sadness and make such great terror that it was very sad to see] (156v). In the translation, the serpent’s emotional turmoil is reduced to just one, rather meagre statement, which states only that Meluzine flies off while making “groten gecrijsende ende tempeeste” [great screaming and tempest] (T6rb). Jean’s narrator tries to elicit sympathy from the reader by explaining repeatedly how much Mélusine’s forced departure pains her, but there is no such sympathy for the Dutch Meluzine.

This reduction in Meluzine’s human-like emotions is not the only sign that she is presented more clearly as an animal after she transforms. The translator also removes several of Jean’s other reminders that, although Mélusine takes on the form of an animal, she is really still human inside her serpent suit. Each time Jean’s narrator mentions the serpent, he explains that it is actually Mélusine “transmuee *en guise* de serpent” [transformed into *the guise* of a serpent] (156v; emphasis added). Similar reminders are not found in the translation. For instance, Jean’s narrator explains that, immediately after her metamorphosis, “se’n ala Melusine, *samblant de serpent*, vollant par l’air vers Lusignen” [Mélusine, *in the guise of a serpent*, flies through the air to Lusignan] (156v; emphasis added). The Dutch narrator, however, comments only that “doen nam sy haren wech na Lusignen toe” [then she went on her way to Lusignan] (T6rb), without noting her appearance or how she travels. Another important sign of Mélusine’s residual humanity—that the people who witness her departure “veoient la figure d’une serpente et oyoient la voix d’une dame” [saw the figure of a serpent and heard the voice of a lady] (156v)—has similarly been removed. Although the Dutch Meluzine still leaves behind a footprint when she jumps from the windowsill, this is but a rare reminder that she was once human. From the moment Meluzine leaves the window and transforms, any lingering traces of her humanity disappear.

The changes introduced at the beginning and end of the romance have the effect of highlighting Meluzine’s hybrid form even more clearly than in the source material. Because the translator suppresses Meluzine’s fairy nature in favour of her human side at the start, and later subdues this same humanity when she turns into an animal, Meluzine’s animal-human hybrid form becomes a clear middle point in her overall transition from human to animal. The increased contrast between the two sides of Meluzine’s character also emphasizes that her bodily combination of human and animal is an unnatural, monstrous mixing, the problematic tension of which must be resolved.

Another reason why Meluzine’s hybridity emerges more clearly in the translation is because the episode in which her half-serpent form is described for the first time—that fateful Saturday when Raymondijn spies on his wife as she is taking a bath—is translated almost word for word. Considering that the translator regularly intervenes at the beginning and end of the romance, it is striking that he introduces no substantial changes to the episode of Meluzine in the bath. In particular, the passage describing Meluzine’s hybrid body closely follows that of Steinschaber’s edition:

Melusine . . . estoit en la cuve, jusques au nombril en signe de femme, et peignoit ses cheveulx, et du nombril en bas en signe de la queue d’une serpente, grosse comme ung quaque a harenc et moult longuement, debatoit sa queue en l’eaue tellement qu’elle le faisoit bondir jusques a la voulte de la chambre.

[Mélusine . . . was in the tub, in the form of a lady down to the navel and she was combing her hair, and from the navel down she had the form of a serpent’s tail, as large as a barrel of herring, and very long, and with her tail she hit the water so hard that she made it bound up to reach the ceiling of the chamber.] (141v)

sij sat in de cuype, tot haren navele toe inder figueren van eenre schoonder vrouwen, hair haer kemmende, ende vanden navele voerts neder waert so was sy inder formen van een groot serpents steert, ende dien steert sloech seer lanc ende herdelic in ’t water alsoe dattet dwater boventegens ’t gehemelte vander cameren spranc.

[she sat in the tub, and she was in the figure of a beautiful woman down to her navel, combing her hair, and from her navel downwards she was in the form of a large serpent’s tail. And her tail beat very long and fervently in the water, so that the water jumped up against the ceiling of the chamber.] (S2vb)

The only detail not repeated is that Mélusine’s tail is as fat as a barrel of herring. The rest of the episode is also remarkably similar to Jean’s version: Raymondijn gives the same angry speech to his brother, the count of Forette, who convinced Raymondijn to spy on his wife, and he gives the same lengthy monologue to express his sorrow at having betrayed Meluzine. The narrator also details that Meluzine later joins her husband in bed, and that she comforts him even though she knows that he saw her half-serpent form. That the translator here follows Jean’s descriptions in detail suggests that, contrary to the passages altered at the beginning and end of the romance, this episode was considered such a key part of the narrative that it had to remain intact. The translator may have no qualms adjusting Meluzine’s degree of humanity or animality, but her hybrid form remains an immutable feature.

Finally, Meluzine’s hybridity also takes center stage in the iconographies of the Dutch editions. For a start, none of the editions contain an image depicting Meluzine as a complete serpent; she is only ever depicted as a serpent from the waist down. Even in the woodcuts illustrating Meluzine’s transformation, she is not an animal but a hybrid figure. Although this is due to the influence of the iconography of the early German editions—as the German version is the only translation in which Melusine becomes a half-serpent after her final transformation—its result is that, in the iconographical side of the Dutch translation, Meluzine’s hybrid form trumps her serpent form.[[18]](#footnote-18)

Furthermore, unlike in Steinschaber’s edition, the manuscripts of Coudrette’s version, and most German incunabula, the Dutch editions feature an image of Meluzine in hybrid form on their opening pages.[[19]](#footnote-19) In all three editions, this woodcut is the same as that used to later illustrate the episode of Raymondijn’s discovery of Meluzine’s half-serpent form.[[20]](#footnote-20) The image shows Meluzine in the bathhouse on the left and Raymondijn in the middle, who is looking at the count of Forette riding away on his horse on the right. The moment of discovery has passed for Raymondijn, but the reader directly observes Meluzine’s naked hybrid body. She is human from the waist up but she also has a long serpent’s tail, which rises from the bath as if it is about to come down and splash water up to the ceiling.

**[INSERT ZELDENRUST ILLUSTRATION HERE]**

By opening with an image of Meluzine in the bath, the Dutch editions highlight Meluzine’s hybridity from the start, marking the bathing episode as a, if not *the*, key moment in the romance. When the reader later comes across the same image at the start of this episode, just before the description of Meluzine’s hybrid body, they know that they are about to come across a crucial scene. The appearance of Meluzine’s hybrid body on the front page further suggests that her problematic half-serpent form becomes the romance’s main selling point. Since most early printed editions were sold unbound, the title page was the best place for a printer to highlight a book’s contents. Placing Meluzine’s emblematic hybrid form on the front page was a very effective marketing tool, especially when trying to get an already familiar story to appeal to readers from a different linguistic or socio-cultural background. After all, even if a potential buyer had not yet heard of this particular story, surely the visual spectacle of Meluzine’s monstrous body would have piqued their interest.

That Meluzine’s hybrid figure could function as a selling point is supported by the appearance of the same bathing woodcut in a contemporary sales prospectus advertising Leeu’s 1491 edition. In fact, this prospectus—which proudly announces that the edition is decorated “met schoonen personagen ende figueren” [with beautiful characters and figures]—uses the depiction of Meluzine’s hybrid body not only to convince the buyer to pick up Leeu’s *Meluzine* but also to get them interested in “vele meer andere niewe boecken” [many other new books] published by the same printer.[[21]](#footnote-21)

As if to make absolutely certain that the significance of Meluzine’s hybrid form is not overlooked, the bathing woodcut in Verdussen’s edition is repeated again at the end, as the edition’s final image. Although this later edition only contains half the number of woodcuts of Leeu’s and Homberch’s editions, there are nonetheless four illustrations of Meluzine’s hybrid body: one at the start, two in the middle, and another at its closing point.[[22]](#footnote-22) This repetition and careful framing of the visual narrative stresses yet again that Meluzine’s hybridity is a vital and representative part of the romance.

It is perhaps no wonder, then, that the statue on top of Het Toreken in Ghent shows Meluzine in that hybrid form which became her most crucial and defining characteristic. While in many other fifteenth-century reincarnations of the Melusine figure outside the boundaries of her romance she typically appears as a serpent—think only of Philippe le Bon’s Feast of the Pheasant in 1454, which featured a *tableau vivant* of Castle Lusignan with Melusine the serpent on top of one of its towers, or of the miniature of the month March in the *Très Riches Heures du duc de Berry*, which also depicts a serpentine Melusine flying over Lusignan—the Dutch Meluzine is known more for her complicated hybridity than her eventual transformation into an animal.[[23]](#footnote-23)

Unfortunately, as so often happens, the Meluzine now gracing Het Toreken is not the original, as the fifteenth-century statue was removed when the building had become so ruinous that it had to be partly broken down in the 1830s. After about a century and a half of neglect, the building eventually came into the hands of the city council and was finally restored in the early 1980s. When the restoration work had finished, Het Toreken was again crowned with a statue of Meluzine. Almost five hundred years after the original statue was put in place, Meluzine the half-serpent was given back her rightfully prominent position. One can only hope that the Dutch *Meluzine* editions will similarly be brought back from neglect, so that more scholars may discover their unique position within the Melusine tradition.

1. Leen Charles and Marie Christine Laleman, *Het Gent Boek* (Zwolle, 2006), 362. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Thüring von Ringoltingen’s German *Melusine* is dated to 1456. The earliest witness to the anonymous Castilian *La historia de la linda Melosina* is the edition printed by Juan Parix and Estevan Cleblat in Toulouse in 1489. See Anna Casas Aguilar’s contribution to this volume for a study of how *La linda Melosina* related particularly to her Castilian and Argonese audience. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See, for instance, the examples listed in Jean d’Arras, *Mélusine ou La Noble Histoire de Lusignan*, ed. and trans. Jean-Jacques Vincensini (Paris, 2003), 44-46, 50-52; Eleanor Roach, “La tradition manuscrite du *Roman de Mélusine* par Coudrette,” *Revue d’histoire des textes* 7 (1977): 192-94, 207-208. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Incunabula Short Title Catalogue* (hereafter ISTC): ij00218420, *Universal Short Title Catalogue* (hereafter USTC): 436129. The only surviving exemplar is found in Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium, INC B 1.369. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Homberch: USTC 436815. The USTC has a separate entry for a *Meluzine* printed in 1510 by Govaert Bac (no. 441997). This edition does not exist; the 1510 *Meluzine* was printed by Homberch, not Bac. The only surviving copy of Homberch’s edition is now in the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, in the Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection no. 1118, shelfmark PQ1486 J25 M413. There is no catalogue listing for Verdussen’s edition. Its only surviving copy is now in Göttingen, Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, 8 FAB III, 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Since Homberch is known to have copied Leeu’s iconography and his edition contains 50 woodcuts, it is likely that Leeu’s edition originally featured the same number. This hypothesis is supported by Ina Kok’s conclusion, based on a reconstruction of the woodcuts that could have appeared on the missing folios of the Brussels exemplar, that Leeu’s edition would have contained 49 to 51 woodcuts. Kok, *Woodcuts in Incunabula Printed in the Low Countries* (Houten, 2013), 268. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Verdussen’s edition is mentioned by Karl Schorbach and Luc Debaene, but neither scholar examines the edition in any detail. Schorbach, “Eine Buchanzeige des Antwerpener Druckers Geraert Leeu in niederländischer Sprache (1491),” *Zeitschrift für Bücherfreunde* 9 (1905): 147; Debaene, *De Nederlandse volksboeken. Ontstaan en geschiedenis van de Nederlandse prozaromans, gedrukt tussen 1475 en 1540* (Antwerp: 1951; repr. Hulst, 1977), 121. I have recently discovered another *Meluzine* edition, which was likely printed in the eighteenth century by a printer known only as van Soest. This edition also goes back to Leeu’s *editio princeps*, but the text undergoes several changes. As not much is known about this edition yet – even the printer and the date are uncertain, as the first and last pages are missing – it is not included in my current discussion. However, I hope to determine its place within the Dutch *Meluzine* tradition in more detail in future. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Bob Duijvestein, “Der niederländische Prosaroman von Meluzine; eine Orienterung,” in *Melusine. Actes du Colloque du Centre d’Études Médiévales de l’Université de Picardie, 13-14 janvier 1996*, eds. Danielle Buschinger and Wolfgang Spiewok (Greifswald, 1996), 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Only Debaene notes that the translation contains an episode about Palestine and one where Godefroy dies, but he does not observe that they are unique to Coudrette’s version: Debaene, *De Nederlandse Volksboeken*, 119. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Jean d’Arras, “Histoire de la belle Mélusine (Geneva: Steinschaber, 1478),” in *Incunabula: the Printing Revolution in Europe. Unit 64 - Romances Part II*, ed. Lotte Hellinga (Reading, 2011), RM 125: folio 189r-v. Subsequent references to this microfiche copy are given in parentheses. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. “Meluzine: Leeu 1491,” ed. Willem Kuiper, *Bibliotheek van Middelnederlandse Letterkunde*, Leerstoelgroep Historische Nederlandse Letterkunde UvA (Amsterdam 2008-2016), folio Z2rb. Subsequent references to this diplomatic edition will follow in parenthesis in the main text. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Compare Coudrette, *Le roman de Mélusine ou histoire de Lusignan*, ed. Roach (Paris, 1982), lines 6671-6786. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. On the relationship between Leeu’s woodcuts and those of the German *Melusine* incunabula, and on Leeu’s connections to various German printers, see Lydia Zeldenrust, “Serpent or Half-Serpent? Bernhard Richel’s *Melusine* and the Making of a Western European Icon,” *Neophilologus* 100.1 (2016): 33-37. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. These woodcuts depict Palestine with the monsters that guard her treasure, the English knight being eaten by one of Palestine’s monsters (missing from Leeu’s but in place in Homberch’s edition), and Godefroy on his deathbed. There is one Coudrette manuscript that contains an image depicting one of these scenes; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, ms. fr. 12575 features an image of Palestine and her monsters on folio 123v. However, only the German incunabula contain images of all three scenes. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. For instance, the fountain where Raymondijn meets Meluzine is known as “die fonteine Faeeze” [the fountain Faeeze] (B3va). Because it is not translated, “faeeze” becomes the name of the fountain rather than an indication of its links with the fairy realm, as in Jean’s version. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. See the entry ‘alvinne’ – which redirects to ‘alf II’ – in *De Geïntegreerde Taalbank. Instituut voor de Nederlandse Lexicologie* <http://gtb.inl.nl> (accessed 5 Jan. 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. The translator also does not mention the name Avalon, famously associated with fairies, when referring to the place where Meluzine and her sisters grow up; cf. Steinschaber (5v) and Leeu (A5ra). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Zeldenrust, “Serpent or Half-Serpent?”, 22, 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. The only other incunable printed before 1491 that features an image of Meluzine’s hybrid body on its title page is Johann Bämler’s 1480 German *Melusine* edition. However, Bämler’s opening woodcut is very different from that of the Dutch editions, as it does not depict Raymondijn or the count, but Mélusine is surrounded by a family tree. On Bämler’s opening woodcut, see Christian Vöhringer, “Monster, Bilder und Beweise: Die Bedeutung der Holzschnitte in Johannes Bämlers ,Melusine‘ von 1474 und 1480,” in *550 Jahre deutsche Melusine - Coudrette und Thüring von Ringoltingen. Beiträge der wissenschaftlichen Tagung der Universitäten Bern und Lausanne vom August 2006. 550 ans de Mélusine allemande - Coudrette et Thüring von Ringoltingen. Actes du colloque organisé par les Universités de Berne et Lausanne en août 2006*, eds. André Schnyder and Jean-Claude Mühlethaler (Bern, 2008), 340-42. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Because the title page of the Brussels exemplar is missing, it is not entirely certain that Leeu’s edition featured an opening image of Meluzine in the bath. However, since the opening page of Homberch’s edition features the bathing woodcut—and since Homberch copied Leeu’s iconography—it is highly likely that Leeu’s title page also featured this woodcut. For a possible reconstruction of Leeu’s title page, see Schorbach, “Eine Buchanzeige,” 146. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. The quotations are from the reproduction in Schorbach, “Eine Buchanzeige.” [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Verdussen’s iconography is another example of mixing and hybridity, as its woodcuts are derived from various sources. For example, the woodcuts on folios A6v, B3r, and E5v are copies of cuts originally created by Hans Brosamer for an edition of the German *Melusine*, printed by Herman Gülfferich in Frankfurt in 1549. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. On Melusine’s presence at the Feast of the Pheasant, see Tania M. Colwell, “Reading Mélusine: Romance Manuscripts and their Audiences c.1380-c.1530” (doctoral dissertation, Australian National University, 2008), 310. For a reproduction of the miniature depicting the month March, see Jean Longnon, Raymond Cazelles, and Millard Meiss, *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* (London, 1969), plate 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)