The naming of Byzantium and the Old French *Partonopeus de Blois*

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This paper draws attention to the twelfth-century French romance Partonopeus de Blois *and its author's original use of the name 'Byzantium' instead of conventional 'Greek' or 'Constantinopolitan Empire'. It investigates roots of the modern-day belief that the term has been applied as a designation of the medieval state only since the sixteenth century. A linguistic and literary analysis challenges the premise and explores possible scenarios of the name's introduction into the Old French text. A suggested interpretation de-emphasizes the popular east-west ideological context in favour of simpler story-telling concerns.*

Keywords: Western representations of Byzantium; onomastics; French literature; Byzantine studies; terminology

Not a few Byzantinists and Crusade scholars have at some point in their careers addressed the question of Byzantine otherness as seen by its contemporaries in Western Europe and the Latin East.[1] Within this topic one aspect is of crucial importance and that is a *name*. A name is an essential step in identification of self and the other. A name often reflects a complex of social and cultural beliefs that a society has about itself in opposition to other communities and groups.[2] This article examines Byzantine-related nomenclature and its colouring in an anonymous Old French romance *Partonopeus de Blois* composed in the second half of the twelfth century. As will be argued, the romance contains the earliest known occurrence of the terms 'Byzantium' and 'Byzantine empire' in the sense in which they are used nowadays and which has been generally considered a

2   As stated by A. Nicolaou-Konnari in 'Strategies of distinction: the construction of the ethnic name Griffon in the Western perception of the Greeks (12th-14th centuries)', *Byzantinistica* 4 (2002) 182.

post-medieval invention. As such it is potentially very valuable for our understanding of how the present definition and underlying attitudes towards the entity that we identify as Byzantium emerged.

Despite the potential of the romance, the onomastic evidence of *Partonopeus de Blois* has been so far ignored by Romanists unaware of its implications for the field of Byzantine studies. The few historians, Angel Nicolaou-Konnari, Robert Lee Wolff and Clément Wingler, who integrated vernacular fiction in their studies of proper names associated with Byzantium, have concentrated on other directions.[3] To do justice to the attention the text deserves but has not yet received, I wish to take up several tasks: i) to prove that linguistically and contextually the nomenclature of *Partonopeus de Blois* cannot be interpreted in the restricted sense of 'Constantinople', also known as Latin *Byzantium* or Greek *Βυζάντιον*; ii) to propose a possible explanation as to why a twelfth-century poet might have used such nomenclature; iii) and to stress the contribution of medieval fiction to the debate on Western views of the Byzantine East.

This plan cannot be comprehensibly pursued without touching on several basic concepts, and sources of those concepts, about Byzantium's historical names. Long before the time when vernacular fiction appeared on the scene of onomastic discourse, various authors had been acknowledging that, in order to find Byzantium in Greek and Latin sources of the greater part of the Middle Ages, one had to look for *Romania* (*Ῥωμανία*), *Graecia*, *imperium Constantinopolitanum* or their derivates.[4] In the ensuing debate about the appropriateness of modern-day terminology, some scholars

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3   Nicolaou-Konnari, 'Strategies of distinction'; R. L. Wolff, 'Romania: The Latin Empire of Constantinople', *Speculum* 23 (1948) 1–34 [repr. in idem, *Studies in the Latin Empire of Constantinople* (London 1976)]; C. Wingler, *Construire pour soumettre: L'image du basileus dans la littérature française et allemande des croisades* [Autour de Byzance 4] (Paris 2016). Wingler's monograph tackles Western naming patterns from several angles, but passes over the occurrence of 'Byzantium' in the romance in silence. A small gloss on the subject can be found in the author's PhD. thesis *Un passeport pour le prince de Byzance: Territoire, nom et appartenance ethnique du dignitaire grec dans la littérature de croisade française et allemande (fin du XIe–fin du XIIIe siècle)*, PhD. thesis (Paris 2013) 317.

4   Apart from the ones cited above, the most pertinent studies that turn the spotlight on the evolution of terminology are: G. Paris, 'Romani, Romania, lingua romana, romancium', *Romania* 1 (1872) 1–22; B. A. Mystakides, *Αἱ λέξεις Ἕλλην, Γραικός (Γραικύλος), Βυζαντινός, Ῥωμαῖος (Γραικορρωμαῖος), Ὀθωμανός (Ἑλληνοθωμανός), Μωαμεθανός, Τοῦρκος, Ὀσμανλῆς* (Tübingen 1920); J. Zeiller, 'L'apparition du mot "Romania" chez les écrivains latins', *Revue des études latines* 7 (1929) 194–8; K. Amantos, 'Ῥωμανία', *Ἑλληνικά* 6 (1933) 231–6; G. Moravcsik, 'Byzantinologie, Byzantiologie oder Byzantologie?' *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinischen Gesellschaft* 6 (1957) 1–4 [repr. in idem, *Studia Byzantina* (Amsterdam 1967)]; M. G. Arbagi, *Byzantium in Latin Eyes: 800–1204*, PhD. thesis (New Brunswick 1969); D. A. Zakythinos, *Byzantinische Geschichte: 324–1071* (Vienna, Cologne and Graz 1979) 1–6; T. C. Lounghis, 'Some questions concerning the terminology used in narrative sources to designate the Byzantine state', *Byzantina Symmeikta* 11 (1997) 11–22; M. Carrier, *L'image des Byzantins et les systèmes de représentation selon les chroniqueurs occidentaux des croisades: 1096–1261*, PhD. thesis (Paris 2006) 68–70, 264–9.

prefer to replace the modern term by '(Eastern) Roman Empire'.[5] It is also this context along with the question of reciprocal east-west perceptions and linguistic evolution that might provide particular consequence to the results of the following analysis.

A statement that the terms 'Byzantium' and 'Byzantine empire' are anachronisms introduced only after the fall of the state they describe has become notorious in our manuals of Byzantine history. *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, which is perhaps the first recourse for many scholars, stresses the groundbreaking role of transalpine humanism:

> The Byzantines themselves called their state the Roman Empire (*basileia ton Rhomaion*) rather than Byzantium, applying the name Byzantion only to their capital, renamed Constantinople. Byzantium as a term for the state was introduced into scholarship only in the 16th c. by Hieronymus Wolf (1516–80).[6]

Fordham University's *Internet History Sourcebooks Project*, seconded by *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies*, follows along the same lines, but imputes the semantic transition to the seventeenth century and specifically to the influence of the French scholar Du Cange (Charles du Fresne):

> Both the state and the inhabitants [of Byzantium] always called themselves *Roman*, as did most of their neighbors. Western Europeans, who had their own *Roman Empire* called them *Orientals* or *Greeks*, and later following the example of the great French scholar DuCange, *Byzantines* after the former name of the Empire's capital city, Constantinople.[7]

The primacy in the term's use is surely better attributed to the German humanist scholar Hieronymus Wolf (1516–80)[8] than to Du Cange. Wolf introduced the form *res Byzantina* (by analogy with Roman *res publica*) already in the preface to his 1557 edition of the Byzantine historians John Zonaras and Niketas Choniates.[9] In 1562, he added a second volume containing late Byzantine sources and described the collection

5   See a summary of the debate in A. Kaldellis, 'From Rome to New Rome, from Empire to nation state: Reopening the question of Byzantium's Roman identity,' in L. Grig and G. Kelly (eds.), *Two Romes: Rome and Constantinople in Late Antiquity* (Oxford 2012) 387–404.

6   A. P. Kazhdan, 'Byzantium' in Kazhdan (ed.), *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, I (New York and Oxford 1991) 344–5. J. Shepard gives the same date in the introduction to *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire c. 500–1492* (Cambridge 2008) 5 note 2.

7   P. Halsall, 'Byzantium: Byzantine studies on the internet', *Internet History Sourcebooks Project* (1996), http://sourcebooks.web.fordham.edu/byzantium/, accessed 6 Feb. 2018; E. Jeffreys, J. F. Haldon, R. Cormack, 'Byzantine studies as an academic discipline', in E. Jeffreys, J. F. Haldon, R. Cormack (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies* (Oxford and New York 2012) 4.

8   The fundamental publication on Wolf's life and work in service of the Fugger family in Augsburg is H. G. Beck, 'Hieronymus Wolf', in W. Zorn (ed.), *Lebensbilder aus dem bayerischen Schwaben*, IX (Munich 1966) 169–93.

9   H. Wolf (ed.), *Nicetae Acominati Choniatae, magni logothetae secretorum…Imperii graeci historia*, (Basel 1557) 9.

as 'a corpus of Byzantine history'. Here he already worked with the term *imperium Byzantinum* in marginal notes.[10] However, the interesting question is why some historians date the new semantic development to the seventeenth, others to the sixteenth century and yet others, such as Georg Stadtmüller and A. Philippson, ambiguously to the era of (Italian or transalpine?) humanism.[11] And where exactly does the idea of Wolf's primacy come from?

Modern scholars have considered the problem of terminology so trivial that it is actually very difficult to track the information to its source. Traces, it seems, lead to the article *Byzance et empire byzantin* by Louis Bréhier published in 1929 and quoted in a detailed terminological introduction to Zakythinos' *Byzantinische Geschichte 324–1071*.[12] Bréhier discussed origins and history of two meanings of 'Byzantium': the city and the medieval state. Originally a name of an ancient colony on the Bosphorus, it designated, according to Bréhier, the city of Constantinople throughout the Middle Ages, growing in popularity especially in the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Greek sources.[13] Regarding the latter, broad sense, he situated its origins in Western Europe:

> Et le nom de Byzance…ne tarda pas à être adopté par les Occidentaux,
> en particulier par ceux qui, comme Filelfe[14] étaient venus étudier
> la langue et la littérature grecques à Constantinople. Ce sont eux, ainsi
> que les Grecs émigrés en Occident après 1453 qui ont introduit les
> expressions de Byzance et d'empire byzantin dans le langage de l'érudition.[15]

The quoted passage would suggest that the semantic extension took place already in the fifteenth century, but the formulation is quite unfortunate. It mingles two different realities: the increase of the term's popularity (still in the narrow sense) outside of Byzantium and the semantic shift proper. Since all primary sources of an earlier date cited by Bréhier refer only to Constantinople, we may guess (but only guess) that the oldest evidence for the broad definition of 'Byzantium' in his hands was indeed Hieronymus Wolf's corpus and after that the seventeenth-century works of père Labbé, Allatius and Du Cange, who 'definitively' adopted the new expressions.[16]

10   H. Wolf (ed.), *Nicephori Gregorae, Romanae, hoc est Byzantinae historiae Libri XI…* (Basel 1562) 5.

11   G. Stadtmüller, *Geschichte Südosteuropas* (Vienna 1950) 75; A. Philippson, *Das Byzantinische Reich als Geographische Erscheinung* (Leiden 1939) p. 25.

12   L. Bréhier, 'Byzance et empire byzantin' *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 30 (1929/30) 360–65; Zakythinos, *Byzantinische Geschichte*, 1–6.

13   Bréhier, 'Byzance et empire byzantin', 361–2. For examples from the twelfth century that is under scrutiny here, see: *Annae Comnenae Alexias,* ed. D. R. Reinsch and A. Kambylis (Berlin 2001) 49 et *passim*; *Nicetae Choniatae Historia,* ed. J.-L. van Dieten (Berlin 1975) 12 et *passim*.

14   Francesco Filelfo (1398–1481), an Italian humanist scholar, resided in Constantinople for seven years (1420–27) as a chancellor and notary of the Venetian *baile*, and a diplomat of the emperor Manuel II. T. Ganchou, 'Les ultimae voluntates de Manuel et Iôannès Chrysolôras et le séjour de Francesco Filelfo à Constantinople', *Byzantinistica* 7 (2005) 195–7.

15   Bréhier, 'Byzance et empire byzantin', 363.

16   Bréhier, 'Byzance et empire byzantin', 363.

The conclusions of Bréhier's article are hardly concrete. The article is ambiguous and poorly referenced, which I presume, is the reason why Byzantinists take up different dates of origin for the basic nomenclature of their field. Nevertheless, it has been more convenient not to question its results than to look for a needle in a haystack. The research of the last decades has refined what we know about usage, meaning and colouring of the names 'Greece', 'Constantinopolitan empire' and *Romania*, but in basic points it has not introduced any innovations. At present, the evidence of *Partonopeus de Blois* outlined in the next section provides the impetus for reconsideration. Could the meaning of the term 'Byzantium' as we understand it today have been authentic for the Middle Ages after all?

The source and its nomenclature

Before we can look for an answer to this question, a brief presentation of the source is needed. *Partonopeus de Blois* is an Old French verse romance set in the time of king Clovis (fifth century) that relates adventures of the eponymous French hero Partonopeus. It was composed in the second half of the twelfth century by a poet, in all probability a cleric, whose identity remains obscure. He might have finished the original redaction of the romance either around 1171 or more traditionally between 1182 and 1185.[17] His name has not been preserved despite the great popularity of his work, which soon after its appearance was often copied, translated and cited.[18] General consensus on the patronage of the romance points to Thibaut V, count of Blois (1152–91), and the recent monograph on *Partonopeus* by Penny Eley contains strong arguments for a double commission by the count and his wife Alix of France, daughter of king Louis VII.[19] The Blois family and its related house of Champagne funded several literary projects of Byzantine setting[20] and had for a long time maintained lively artistic and personal relations with Byzantium. Several family members, including the count's brother Henry the Liberal, count of Champagne from 1152, had travelled to the East and enjoyed friendly contacts with Byzantine emperors.

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17   Arguments for the earlier date were proposed on several occasions by P. Simons and P. Eley, 'The prologue to *Partonopeus de Blois*: text, context and subtext', *French Studies* 49 (1995) 1–16; P. Simons, 'A romance revisited: reopening the question of the manuscript tradition of *Partonopeus de Blois*', *Romania* 115 (1997) 368–405; P. Eley and P. Simons, '*Partonopeus de Blois* and Chrétien de Troyes: a re-assessment', *Romania* 117 (1999) 316–41; and scattered throughout P. Eley, *Partonopeus de Blois: Romance in the Making*, (Woodbridge 2011). In support of 1180s dating, see A. Reynders, 'Le *Roman de Partonopeu de Blois* est-il l'oeuvre d'un précurseur de Chrétien de Troyes?', *Le Moyen Age* 111 (2005), 479–502.

18   Simons, 'A romance revisited', 368.

19   Eley, *Partonopeus de Blois*, 196–205.

20   Such as Chrétien de Troyes's *Cligès* and Gautier d'Arras's *Ille et Galeron* and *Eracle*. J. F. Benton, 'The court of Champagne as a literary center', *Speculum* 36 (October 1961) 560–72.

Eventually in 1180, the countess became a sister-in-law of the heir to the Byzantine throne Alexios (II).[21]

As reconstructed from seven surviving manuscripts and three fragments, the primitive version of *Partonopeus de Blois* that stemmed from this environment told a story of the young count of Blois Partonopeus and of his love for a beautiful eastern empress Melior. It recounted his adventures from the moment he became lost in a forest and boarded a mysterious empty ship until his eventual assumption of the throne of — why not use the word? — Byzantium: The ship transported the hero to an equally mysterious splendid city that seemed emptied of all people except for the empress–magician. In a curious scene of a medieval erotic fantasy she became Partonopeus's lover under cover of night, unseen but most certainly felt. However, she entreated him not to try to discover her looks and identity for two years until he had reached the age to marry and rule. A betrayal of this promise, playing on the ancient Cupid and Psyche theme, led to the lovers' separation and a series of hardships. Only after Partonopeus's victory in a grand final tournament for the empress's hand could the two be reunited on the imperial throne. At this point, some 10600 verses into the poem in Collet and Joris's edition,[22] manuscripts begin to show significant variations. One part of the tradition appends a later continuation that depicts a war against one of Melior's unsuccessful suitors, the Persian sultan.[23]

With regard to our enquiry into proper names it is the hero's first meeting with the empress that has a central role. After Partonopeus's arrival at Byzantium, no indication is given at first of a name or a location. After the first night spent together in a sumptuous palace, Melior introduces herself to the young French in the following grandiose style:

> Or entendés, amis, a moi.
> Jo sui de terre rice assés,
> Car .xx. rois ai de moi casés
> Et .cc. contes et .xx. dus
> Et princes et demaines plus
> Les cevaliers ne sai conter,
> Qu'a droit nes poroit nus esmer.
> *Tote Besance est mes empires* [my italics],

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21   K. N. Ciggaar, *Western Travellers to Byzantium. The West and Byzantium, 962–1204: Cultural and Political Relations* (Leiden 1996) 183–8.

22   *Le Roman de Partonopeu de Blois*, ed. and trans. O. Collet and P.-M. Joris (Paris 2005). All future citations, abbreviated to 'PB', refer to this edition. The electronic edition of all manuscripts and fragments prepared by P. Eley (et al.) has, unfortunately, been withdrawn from the University of Sheffield's server. Transcriptions are consultable only in .xml format via 'Partonopeus de Blois: transcriptions of all manuscripts', *University of Oxford Text Archive* at http://purl.ox.ac.uk/ota/2499, accessed 7 February 2018. An indication of corresponding metatext verses will be given in parentheses after the print edition's verse number.

23   An older hypothesis that saw the continuation as a part of the original version has been convincingly disproved. (Eley, *Partonopeus de Blois*, 150–78.)

Vos en serés et rois et sires
Se mon consel volés tenir,
Qui legiers vos ert a soufrir.

(Now listen to me, friend. I am rich enough in lands since 20 kings, 200 counts, 20 dukes, even more princes and lords and I cannot count how many knights – no one can tell the exact number – hold their fiefs from me. *All Byzantium is my empire*. You will be its king and lord if you keep to my advice which is of the kind that you can bear easily.)[24]

This passage leaves us in no doubt about a broad meaning of the word *Besance* (compare modern French *Byzance*). When the empress concludes by saying 'Tote Besance est mes empires,' the adjective *tote* (all, the whole) interacts with the previous enumeration of her numerous vassals. *Empires* is singular, nominative just as *tote Besance* and grammatically it is a simple predicate of the subject. Conclusively, *Besance* equals the empire and the name clearly covers not only the area of one city but the whole of many kingdoms, duchies, counties and other principalities.

The same toponym in a slightly different spelling variant appears twice more in the second half of the story. On the first occasion, *empire de Bisance* designates an area where news coming from Melior's capital circulates (see below). The other passage refers to a donation of a fief in *empire de Bisance* to Partonopeus's friend Gaudin.[25] In both cases the possessive preposition *de* enables us to translate either as 'the Byzantine empire' or 'the empire of Byzantium'. It is therefore grammatically possible that *Bisance* here indicates only the empire's capital, not the empire in its own right. Yet it would be strange because throughout the story the centre of Melior's power is called either Constantinople or more often by a fictitious name Chef d'Oire. Moreover, the first of the two passages mentions *empire de Bisance* alongside the city of Chef d'Oire, which further confirms that the names are not synonymous:

Par tot l'empire de Bisance
Ert bien seü del roi de France
Que il avoit tel guerre eüe,
Por poi n'avoit terre perdue,
Quant uns enfes de son linage

    .   .   .   .
Et la roiame desfendi
Et en Chief d'Oire le cité
En ot il grant parole esté.

24   PB, v. 1330–40 (Meta 1350–60).
25   PB, v. 11729–34 (Meta 12546–51): 'Rices ert de ça et de la | Car .iii. bones contés avra | Une en l'empire de Bisance | Et .ii. el roiame de France, | Si pora manoir par anees | en ses terres bien estorees.' ('Since he will have three good fiefs, one in the Empire of Byzantium and two in the Kingdom of France, he will gain riches from here and there. He will be able to live in turns in his well provided lands.')

(Throughout the whole Empire of Byzantium it was well known that the king of France knew such a war that he almost lost his land, if it were not for a youth of his lineage who… managed to defend the kingdom. And in the city of Chef d'Oire there was a great tumult about it.)[26]

It is equally important to note that the poet used no alternative ways to designate Melior's realm. There is no sign of Greece, no empire of Constantinople, no *Romania*. To conclude, the interpretation of *Besance* and *empire de Bisance* in the broad territorial sense is in perfect accord with the text's internal logic. Having proved as much it is now time to ask when and why the term found its way to the Old French romance. Was it introduced by the original author or a *remanieur*? Did either of them draw on a particular source? Or were they following their own literary plan?

An import from a twelfth-century model?

To answer the questions raised above let us first look at the manuscript context. Seven manuscripts (*A* Paris, Arsenal 2986; *B* Bern, Burgerbibliothek 113; *G* Paris, BnF fr. 19152; *L* Paris, BnF nouv. acq. fr. 7516; *P* Paris, BnF fr. 368; *T* Tours, Bibliothèque Municipale 939; *V* Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Pal. Lat. 1971) and three fragments (*C* Yale, Beinecke Library 395; *F* Paris, BnF fr. 792; *X* Parker Library, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, EP-D-62) stretch from the late twelfth or beginning of the thirteenth century (*A*) to the fourteenth century (*PT*).[27] The quantity of witnesses, which diverge — as has been noted — in their concluding part, caused a great deal of disagreement about the story's development. The whole scope of the problem is beyond the concern of the present analysis. Let it suffice to say that two tripartite groupings emerge from trend-setting studies. On linguistic grounds, Leon P. Smith proposed and Anne Reynders refreshed a scheme according to which *Group 1* assembles manuscripts and fragments *BCGVX*, *Group 2* consists of a single manuscript *A* and *Group 3* bunches together the fragment *F* and manuscripts *GLPT*.[28] On the other hand, Penny Eley distinguishes the *A* version, the *V* version and the rest of the tradition (fragments excluded).[29] While the Smith–Reynders scheme promotes ms *V* as closest to the primitive version, Eley strongly advocates authority of the *A* version.

What can be determined if we now situate the three quoted occurrences of 'Byzantium' in *Partonopeus de Blois* within these theories? The two verses alluding to *empire de Bisance* occur exclusively in the oldest ms *A*, meaning they are certainly authentic for the late twelfth century or the first years of the thirteenth century, though

26   PB, v. 10541–50 (Meta 11358–67).

27   Eley, *Partonopeus de Blois*, 216–17.

28   L. P. Smith, *The Manuscript Tradition of the Old French Partonopeus de Blois*, PhD. thesis (Chicago 1930) 66–95, cited in Reynders, 'Le *Roman de Partonopeu de Blois*', 481–5, 491–500. Ms *G* figures in two groups as a 'contaminated' text.

29   Eley, *Partonopeus de Blois*, 1–2. See also scattered arguments relating to the 'making' of the romance in Chapters 4–6, especially p. 179–91. Cf. Simons, 'A romance revisited', 369–70.

not necessarily for the primitive form of the text. However, the more important line 'Tote Besance est mes empires' can be found in all full manuscripts with the exception of the *GP* couple. No matter, then, to which of the above theories one inclines, the line is represented within all three groups and consequently more than likely to have formed a part of the original story before it underwent succeeding editions.

It is therefore in the period up to the 1170s or 1180s that we must look for possible inspirations of the author's name choice. The romance's known or presumed sources include a wide range of Latin and vernacular writings, but none that could serve as a model for the specific semantic value of its *Besance*. It does not help if we presume the later dating of 1182–5, which conjectures extensive loans from Chrétien de Troyes on top of older *romans d'antiquité*, Breton *lais* and classical material.[30] However, my investigation of the latter led to an interesting finding.

As indicated by Anthime Fourrier, a list of participants at the tournament for the hand of empress Melior shows unmistakable parallels with geographical descriptions in Iulius Solinus' third-century *Collectanea rerum memorabilium* known via several wide-spread works: Orosius' *Historiae adversus paganos*, the *Etymologiae* of Isidore of Seville and Honorius of Autun's *De imagine mundi*.[31] Since it is uncertain which one of these was our poet's source, my analysis is based on all three texts.[32] The poet certainly knew respective chapters about Africa and islands from which he took, among others, the names of Melior's provinces and peoples, such as Getulia, Numidia, Crete and *Nathabres*. But these chapters mention also the African province Byzacium (central Tunisia), spelled *Byzacena*, *Bizacium*, *Bizancium*, *Byzantium* or even *Bisace*.[33] The author could not have drawn on this section without stumbling upon the term. I must therefore pose a daring question: what if *Partonopeus de Blois* is not a Byzantine story at all? Should we not read it as a tale of a French–African connection? After all, there are no Greeks to help us identify the strange empire with contemporary

30   On the poet's sources, see T. H. Brown, 'The relationship between *Partonopeus de Blois* and the Cupid and Psyche tradition', *Brigham Young University Studies* 5 (1964) 193–202; H. Newstead, 'The traditional background of *Partonopeus de Blois*', *Publications of the Modern Languages Association of America* 61 (December 1946) 916–46; Eley, *Partonopeus de Blois*, 7–8, 23–8; A. Fourrier, *Le Courant réaliste dans le roman courtois en France au Moyen Âge: Tome I: Les débuts (XIIe siècle)* (Paris 1960) 385–94.

31   Fourrier, *Le Courant réaliste*, 403–4.

32   In favour of Orosius would speak the sequence of Crete, Getulia (*Getule*), *Nathabres* (*Natabre*) and Numidia (*Nonmede*) (PB, v. 7355, 7360, 7361, 7366 (Meta 7441, 7446, 7447, 7452)) since *Nathabres* figures only in Orosius' text. Yet the particular verse has almost as many variants as there are manuscripts. It is rather the reading determined with the help of the Latin text than a source determined by the reading. Cf. note to v. 7360.

33   Orosio, *Le storie contro i pagani*, I, ed. A. Lippold, trans. A. Bartalucci (Milan 1976) 38; Isidorus Hispalensis, *Etymologiarum libri XX.*, ed. J.-P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina* 82 (Paris 1878) 509–510. The last two variants from Honorius Augustodunensis, *De imagine mundi libri tres*, ed. J.-P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina* 172 (Paris 1854) 130, indicate respectively a city and the surrounding province. 'Byzacium', in J. G. T. Graesse, F. Benedict, H. Plechl (eds.), *Orbis latinus: Lexikon lateinischer geographischer Namen des Mittelalters und der Neuzeit*, I (Braunschweig 1972) 369.

Byzantium and the whole presumption rests on a single reference to Constantinople[34] that might as well be an interpolation.

The answer is no. The presence of the verse 4561 (Meta 4619) that refers to Constantinople in the majority of manuscripts proves it is not a *remanieur*'s interpolation but rather the original reading. Therefore, even if the African *Byzacium* had served as a model to the poetic name, the latter received a new Byzantine content. And even if the poet was aware of the African toponym, it is possible that the particular connection of form and meaning comes from yet another, hitherto unidentified source of the romance.

With this option in mind I studied twelfth-century Old French romances and epics, the twelfth-century Crusade chronicles along with some later material (the whole corpus of twelfth- and thirteenth-century romance), but have not found a similar case, nor has Clément Wingler who worked with German as well as French fiction of the same period and glossed over the uncommonness of the term.[35] In these texts we come across the same set of proper names as in Latin non-fiction genres: *Coustantinoble* (*Costentinoble*, *Constentin…*), *terre de Gris* (*Grizois*, *Gregeis…*) or *Grece* (*Grice*, *Gresse…*) with a specific and slightly offensive form *Grifonie* (*Griffonie*, *Grifonnie…*).[36] From around the same period as *Partonopeus de Blois* I have found only a few instances where variants of the word *Besance* were used, though not to indicate the medieval state. The closest chronologically is Wace's *Roman de Rou* (1160–74) that mentions *Besancie* as the old name of Constantinople.[37] Another example occurs in a compilation of the Virgin's miracles written by a trouvère–monk Gautier de Coincy between 1219 and 1236. The monk made it very clear in one of the miracles that *Byssance* was 'la grant cité | Que Coustantins, qui cuer oeut noble, | Apela puis Coustantinoble' ('the great city that Constantine of noble heart later called Constantinople').[38] He probably inherited the nomenclature from the legend's Greek original. A similar process can be assumed in the case of Gui de Cambrai's *Barlaam et Josaphat*, originally an Indian Buddha tale transformed into a Christian legend and channelled to the West via an intermediate Greek adaptation. Here, too, the author was explicit about the narrow meaning of the word:

> N'i avoit pas adonc empire
> Com'il a ore en la cité.
> Jo vos dirai la verité:
> Coustantinoble est or nomée;
> Bisante estoit dont apelée.

34 PB, v. 4561 (Meta 4619).

35 Wingler, *Un passeport pour le prince de Byzance*, 317.

36 The term derived from *Grifon* (the Greek), which occurs also in Latin historiography, bears an unflattering association with a griffin, a symbol of avarice and duplicity. See Nicolaou-Konnari, 'Strategies of distinction', 182–4; Carrier, *L'image des Byzantins*, 354–5.

37 *Le Roman de Rou de Wace*, I, ed. A. J. Holden (Paris 1970) Troisième partie, v. 15–32.

38 Gautier de Coinci, *Les miracles de Nostre Dame*, IV, ed. V. F. Koenig (Geneva 1970) 128 (v. 466–8).

(There was not an empire then as it is in the city nowadays. I tell you the truth: it is now called Constantinople; at that time, it was called Byzantium.)[39]

In a different vein, *Folque de Candie*, an epic from the turn of the century, refers to a 'roche Bisance', apparently a rocky place, situated in the vicinity of Iberian Gandía.[40] Further examples come from Latin histories, such as those of William of Malmesbury, Richard of Poitiers, Annalista Saxo, Otto of Freising and Gilo of Paris.[41] Nor have I found among these any yet that could not be explained as a synonym of Constantinople. The overall conclusion of the search therefore is that, for the moment, we must see the semantic value of *Besance* and *Bisance* in *Partonopeus de Blois* as the poet's own original invention. And if it is so, what might have been his motivation for such creativity?

A surreal name for a surreal land

Two options spontaneously come to mind. One has to do with the common practice of choosing and deforming proper names to fit a desired rhyme. The other presumes that the poet purposefully avoided calling the empire 'Greece' or 'Greek'. While the former can be quickly dismissed because the word in question occurs in the middle of a line and does not influence the rhyme's structure, the latter deserves closer attention.

The author was consistent in not attributing Greekness to Byzantium. He used the names 'Greece' and 'Greek', but never to describe Melior's land or people. The Greeks are mentioned only in reminiscences of the Trojan war. The only exception that locates the Greek element in the present of the main plot and can be linked to the primitive version does not imply (or exclude) any link with the empress. Greeks are simply listed

39   Gui von Cambrai, *Balaham und Josaphas: Nach den Handschriften von Paris und Monte Cassino*, ed. C. Appel (Halle 1907) v. 9978–82. For the tale's transmission, see C. Cordoni, *Barlaam und Josaphat in der europäischen Literatur des Mittelalters* (Berlin, Boston 2014) 5–137.

40   Herbert le Duc de Danmartin, *Folque de Candie*, I, ed. O. Schultz-Gora (Dresden 1909) v. 5116.

41   For the first occurrence in each text, see: William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum: The History of the English Kings*, I, ed. E. A. B. Mynors, R. M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom (Oxford 1998) 622; *Ex Richardi Pictaviensis Chronica*, ed. G. Waitz [Monumenta Germaniae Historica SS 26] (Hanover 1882) 78; 'Liber de compositione castri Ambaziae et ipsius dominorum gesta', in L. Halphen and R. Poupardin (eds.), *Chroniques des comtes d'Anjou et des seigneurs d'Amboise* (Paris 1913) 10; *Die Reichschronik des Annalista Saxo*, ed. K. Nass [Monumenta Germaniae Historica SS 37] (Hanover 2006) 493; *Ottonis episcopi Frisingensis Chronica sive Historia de duabus civitatibus*, ed. A. Hofmeister [Monumenta Germaniae Historica rer. Germ. 45] (Hanover and Leipzig 1912) 22. *The Historia Vie Hierosolimitane of Gilo of Paris and a Second, Anonymous Author*, ed. and trans. C. W. Grocock and J. E. Siberry (Oxford 1997) 174 (v. 230). Gilo's verse history of the First Crusade contains an interesting accusative form *Byzantinos* (the Byzantines) describing a relief force for which the crusaders were looking out during the siege of Antioch in 1098. Given the military context — the emperor Alexios I, having led out his troops from Constantinople earlier that year, was carrying out operations in Asia Minor — it is likely that the term meant 'those coming from Constantinople'.

among many nations taking part in the tournament for the sake of diversity without any obvious pattern.[42] At this conspicuous absence, it is tempting to conclude that the author's name choice had the purpose of distinguishing between the contemporary medieval state and the more distant past. Such a concept would set the author apart from many a chronicler who made reference to ancient material in order to justify their (usually negative) image of the Byzantines.[43] Moreover, Clément Wingler has interpreted the absence of the Greeks as a symptom of the author's alleged concept of *translatio* that imagines a transfer of power from the east to the west and has for an effect a denigration of Byzantine worth:

> Ne cherchons pas plus loin les motifs qui ont poussé le poète à ne plus parler des Grecs. Leur présence dans le roman est devenue inutile, ils appartiennent au passé, à l'histoire de la chute de Troie, et non plus au temps de Clovis. La préservation de leur avenir, ou plutôt de celui de Constantinople, passe désormais par un enfant occidental, mais pas n'importe lequel: un jeune garçon de sang royal né en France, terre bénie…[44]

These theories, although thought-provoking, do not explain the nomenclature of *Partonopeus de Blois* satisfactorily. Wingler's interpretation is perhaps too focused on finding evidence of the pre-defined *translatio* concept and overestimates the poet's preoccupation with the east-west competition. A foreign realm in need that provides a setting for a hero to distinguish himself, just like Partonopeus who prevails in the tournament and answers Byzantium's need for a worthy male ruler, is a common motive of vernacular fiction. In it, the hero is usually without rival among the native population, whether Greek, Roman or other; such a situation provides very little opportunity for a poet to use generalizing names typical especially for battle scenes.[45] Furthermore, while a *translatio* subtext and the author's historical consciousness may explain why Greece was substituted, it does not explain why it was substituted by the new term *Besance*. The same effect could have been achieved by situating the story traditionally in the empire of Constantinople. Another factor must have been decisive in the name's genesis.

   This factor, I believe, can be revealed by exploring the function of Constantinople within the narrative's context. The visualization below maps the toponyms pertaining to Melior's domain in the Arsenal manuscript, distinguishing between identifiable and imaginary names. We may observe that Constantinople's appearance marks the beginning of a section in which the empire acquires more real dimensions in contrast

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42   PB, v. 8686, 9238 (Meta 8916 or 8917, and 9474) = verses present in mss *ABPTV*. Another isolated reference to Greeks among Saracen troops occurs in *T.* (Meta 15391).
43   For the exploitation of ancient models in the interpretation of contemporary Byzantine character, see Carrier, *L'image des Byzantins*, 97–112.
44   Wingler, *Construire pour soumettre*, 311.
45   Cf. Rome in *Ille et Galeron*, the Holy Land in *Sone de Nansay*, Cologne in *Roman de la Violette*, Ile d'Or in *Bel Inconnu*, Bile in *Orson de Beauvais* and Alsace in *Floovant*.
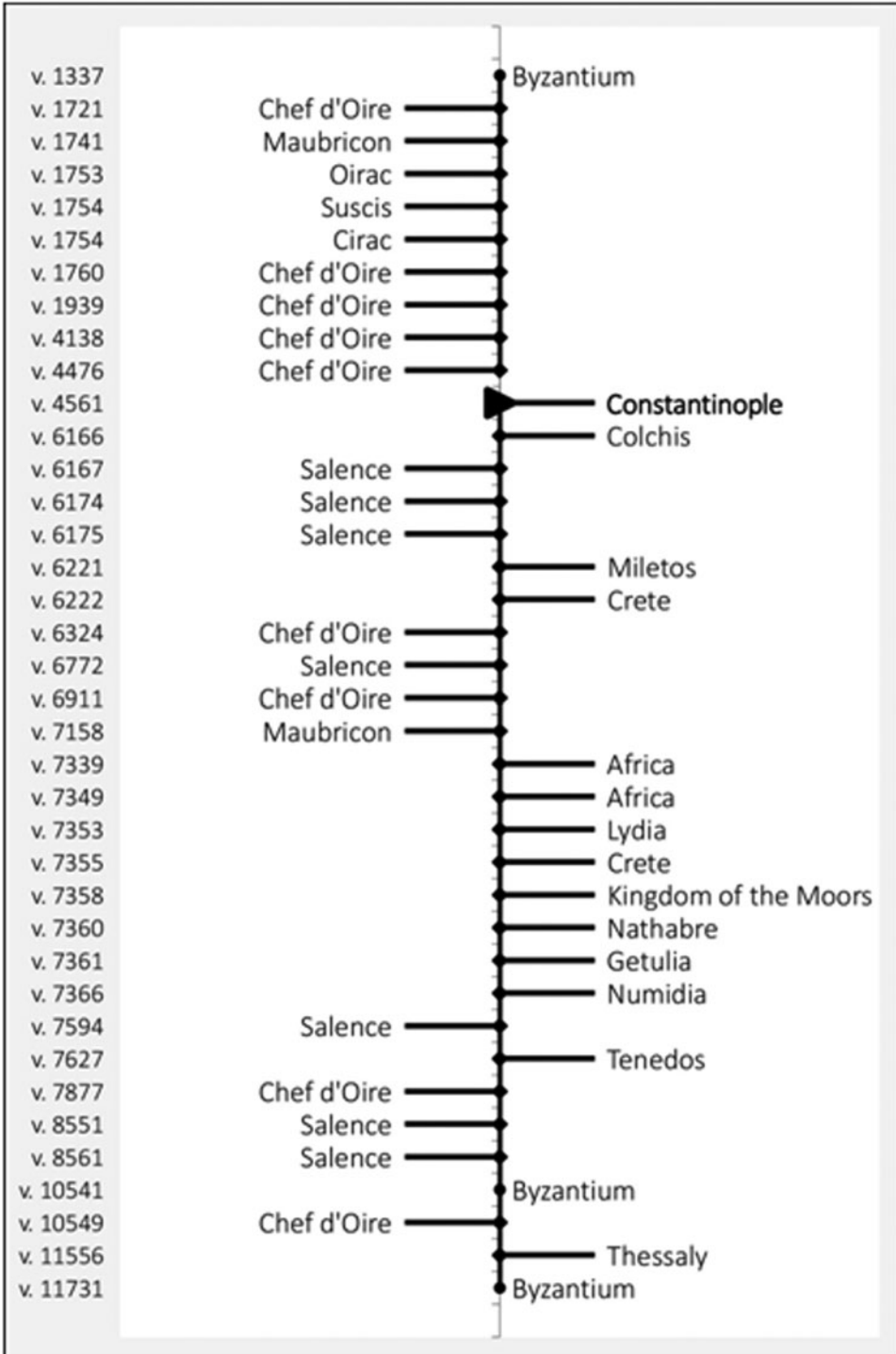
Fig. 1. Distribution of unidentified (left) and identifiable (right) toponyms pertaining to Byzantium in the Arsenal manuscript of *Partonopeus de Blois*.

to the fictional spaces of the previous part. Although exact data are given only for ms *A*, the other witnesses do not contradict this trend.

As discussed above, the occurrence of the Byzantine capital's real name, although isolated, is in all probability genuine. It must have been therefore intentionally introduced at this particular point that corresponds with a major turn in the plot — the breaking of Melior's taboo. The empress, whose physical appearance has just been revealed in the light of Partonopeus's lantern, now reveals also her identity by referring to the first real-life toponym:

> Or vos dirai con est grans sens
> Que l'avés fait sor mon desfens.
> Je fui fille l'empereor
> Qui fu casés de ceste honor.
> De Costantinoble fu sire;
> Quanqu'i apent fu son empire.
> Molt fu cremus et molt amés
> Et molt fu ricement casés.
> N'ot un seul home en tot le mont
> Tant feïst ne tant eüst dont
> Fors seul le fier sodant de Perse…

(Now I will tell you how clever you were to do it in spite of my ban. I am the daughter of the emperor who ruled over these lands. He was the lord of Constantinople; everything that belongs to it was his empire. He was much feared and loved and richly provided for. In the whole world there was no one who would equal him in deeds or fortune save the great sultan of Persia….)[46]

The action preceding the quoted passage revolves in the atmosphere described as an otherworld and utopia;[47] there are magical ships, supernaturally gifted animals, invisible servants and all these are controlled by the magical powers of the empress herself. Although she claims to be Christian, she is not immune to suspicions of a demonic source of her magic articulated by the hero's mother.[48] However, at the very moment when Partonopeus casts a forbidden look at his lover, the empress loses her powers and everything receives rational dimensions. Her magic is explained as a result of extensive study — as a science. The Byzantines are no more invisible and Chef d'Oire awakens to a full life. The storyline continues as an earthly narrative without supernatural encounters.

46   PB, v. 4557–67 (Meta 4615–25).
47   L. Harf-Lancner, *Les fées au Moyen Âge: Morgane et Mélusine: La naissance des fées* (Geneva 1984) 323; R. Devereaux, *Constantinople and the West in Medieval French Literature: Renewal and Utopia* (Cambridge 2012) 99.
48   PB, v. 3925–6 (Meta 3977–8).

My suggestion is to read the poet's use of Constantinople and the whole system of nomenclature as designed to underline the effect of this transition. Constantinople, the main symbol of Byzantium, may be seen as a tool to reveal Melior's identity.[49] If it is so, the poet could not have introduced the name at an earlier stage while Melior's identity was supposed to be hidden from her lover — we can hardly imagine him as unaware of the city's fame. Therefore, in order to create suspense, the poet used semi-imaginary *Besance* that would not interrupt the plot's logic, but would keep the audience perhaps a small step ahead. Many above-quoted occurrences of the term 'Byzantium' in Latin and Old French literature come accompanied by an explanation, such as 'the city…later named Constantinople', which implies the knowledge was not widespread among general noble public. With his background in Byzantine realia and Latin authors, the poet was probably well aware of the alternative name, but would not expect his audience to be very familiar with it, especially if he modified the semantics. It would be well fitted to play a little trick on the audience and to make mysterious Partonopeus's whereabouts during his initial adventures.

As the hero wakes up after the first night in the enchanted land we learn a little bit more about the city he has come to, called Chef d'Oire. It is situated somewhere at a seacoast and an estuary of the River Oire, which could be translated as 'the Golden'. Courtiers familiar with Constantinople's topography — there must have been several of them at the court of Blois in the 1170s and 1180s — would have picked up these hints to the Golden Horn and the Marmara Sea, but the text does not validate them yet.[50] Other imaginary place names within Melior's empire have the feel of Orient but do not situate the country in any geopolitical relations. The pattern changes in the last two-thirds of the story after the appearance of Constantinople. All but one (*Salence*) newly introduced toponym have been identified with locations or peoples known from the works of Orosius, Isidore of Seville, Honorius of Autun and other non-fiction sources. To complete the transition, Byzantium is correctly situated in the vicinity of Persia, its principal rival, and incorporated into international relations as the host of the tournament whose attendees come from a wealth of well-known lands.[51]

There is one additional way in which 'Byzantium' and the form *Besance* in particular work towards the outlined literary plan. It is the association with bezants (Old French *besant*, Latin *bizantius*), golden coins of eastern provenance termed after the Byzantine capital.[52] Indeed, it is possible that it was primarily the precious coin and only secondarily the city's old name or the African Byzacium that inspired our poet.[53] The expression was current in Old French literature and its stem *besan* with [e] matches the

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49   Of the same opinion is Rima Devereaux (*Constantinople and the West*, 99–101).
50   The way in which the physical description of Chef d'Oire enabled readers to recognize its models — Constantinople, Jerusalem and Troie — has been analyzed in E. Bermejo, 'Chief d'Oire dans Partonopeus de Blois: la ville comme espace de totalisation', *Mediaeval Studies* 63 (2001) 232–8.
51   PB, v. 7192–330 (Meta 7274–414).
52   A. Tobler and E. Lommatzsch, *Altfranzösisches Wörterbuch*, I (Berlin 1925) 937–8.
53   As briefly noted by Clément Wingler, *Un passeport pour le prince de Byzance*, 317.

first quoted occurrence of 'Byzantium' in our romance in contrast to more common *bis(s) an* or *bys(s)an* with [i] in other works of the same period where the city was referred to. The [i]-stem form used in the later part of *Partonopeus de Blois* could then indicate an intervention of the scribe of ms *A* whose primary association was with the alternative name of Constantinople.

In any case the phonetic association with bezants underlines the image of Melior's empire as the land of fantastic riches and interacts with the other prominent fictional name Chef d'Oire. The Old French *chef / chief* indicates a 'head' or metaphorically 'the capital' and *oire* stands for 'of gold' or 'gilded'. The Gilded Capital on the Golden River ruling over the Empire of Gold – such would be the message delivered to a medieval audience. This seems to be confirmed by Renaut de Beaujeu, who copied Melior's empire in his thirteenth-century romance *Bel Inconnu* as 'the Island of Gold' (*Ile d'Or*)[54] just as by the already quoted digression in *Barlaam et Josaphat* that uses bezants as a means to explain the less familiar term for the city.

> Coustantinoble est or nomée;
> Bisante estoit dont apelée.
> De Bisante sunt li besant,
> Qui encor sunt tot aparant.
> De la cité soustinrent non
> Et par droiture et par raison.

([The city] is now called Constantinople; at that time, it was called Byzantium. From Byzantium are bezants, which are still to see in great measure. They have their name from the city rightfully and with reason.)[55]

Conclusions

With the last bezant in place, let us summarize the results of this onomastic, linguistic and literary analysis. First of all, it has been proved with certainty that the morphological and semantic evolution of the term 'Byzantium' into the form used in the modern French language (*Byzance* and archaic *Bizance*) took place already in the twelfth century. This means that the primacy of the German humanist Hieronymus Wolf as the first author to have adopted the old name of Constantinople as the name of the empire should pass to the anonymous poet of the second half of the twelfth century.

The second point I would like to draw from the analysis is that the concerns at the origin of the poet's name choice were most probably that of a story-teller rather than an ideologue of east–west relations. My interpretation of his literary plan explains how the term could have developed into the broader territorial label without an effort to separate the empire

54   Renaud de Beaujeu, *Le Bel Inconnu*, ed. M. Perret and I. Weil (Paris 2003) v. 1870–943. Cf. PB, v. 787–960, 4557–613 (Meta 797–972, 4613–71).
55   Gui von Cambrai, *Balaham und Josaphas*, v. 9981–6.

from Roman and ancient Greek identities, which is the substance of our current terminology. Judging from the distribution of imaginary and identifiable toponyms, the poet was aiming at the effect of transition from the supernatural to reality and used the little known exotic word in a new context to create suspense. Unlike today's 'Byzantium' and contrary to the medieval 'Greece' it is likely that this word was intentionally created and would be received with a positive connotation of golden bezants.

What difference do these observations make in our understanding of modern Byzantine studies terminology? There seems to be little point in forcing a theory of continuity between the French author of *Partonopeus de Blois* and the four-hundred-years older German humanist. In the 1170s and 1180s, the court of Blois was particularly well predisposed to understand the subtle messages of the poet's naming scheme. The family's contacts with Komnenian emperors and involvement in eastern politics lasted throughout the twelfth century and beyond. In the time of the romance's appearance and quite some years after it, the court would have been frequented by enough eye-witnesses who had travelled to Byzantium, for example in the entourage of the count's brother Henry the Liberal. Some might have even been able to recall the old name of the Byzantine capital hidden in the name of the fictional land. However, in all likelihood, the new semantics did not take deep root in daily language. For one thing, to this day it has not been positively confirmed in any other medieval writing. Furtermore, the manuscript tradition indicates that comprehension of the nomenclature outside of the original milieu was relatively poor. Out of seven manuscripts that include the line quoted according to ms *A* as 'Tote Besance est mes empires', two (*BT*) contain spelling errors in the stem of the proper name written as *Basence* or *Besence*. This suggests that the scribes did not make a mental link with Byzantium. Together with another two manuscripts that omit the name altogether, speaking rather of 'Tote la terre' (*GP*), they bear witness to the fact that later readers could not make much sense of the word. In the twelfth and sixteenth centuries we therefore most probably face two independent developments propelled by two different motives and of different connotations.

The appearance of the term 'Byzantium' in *Partonopeus de Blois* is more significant as an illustration of a metonymic process that could have easily taken place in text or speech more often when the knowledge of Constantinople's alternative name spread across the Latin world in later centuries; texts of the period between 1300 and 1500 have not yet been systematically reviewed. Moreover, in the ongoing debates about keeping or leaving our field's conventional terminology, it provides an argument for the traditionalist approach as we are no longer able to dismiss the term as a complete anachronism. On the other hand, it still does not challenge the fact that the very name of Byzantine studies denies its subject's Roman self-identification.

In view of these limited implications, one might feel disappointed by a conclusion that denies also any political or cultural importance to the poet's name choice. Yet in fact, it is the absence of ideological concerns demonstrable in our romance that

is of greatest consequence in the wider context of east-west relations. This case proves that actual representations of Byzantium in medieval fiction could have been unprejudiced by-products of an author's use of common literary tools. It raises the question whether scholars do not generally overestimate the western cultural and political bias against Byzantium that they see reflected in these representations.

Clément Wingler made a great effort to find parallels between fiction and notorious portrayals of grandiose but morally decadent Byzantium of the Crusade chronicles. The absence of a male heir to the throne of Byzantium in *Partonopeus de Blois* is only one example of a motif he interprets as a perceived lack of manly virtue in the Byzantine East. Another famous case is a decision of a Greek hero in Chrétien de Troyes' *Cligès* to look for knightly formation in Arthurian Britain (i.e. outside of his Constantinopolitan homeland).[56] However, both of these themes can be found also in Byzantine-unrelated contexts.[57] Just like the appearance of the word *Besance* in our romance, they may be therefore explained in purely literary terms, as literary tropes rather than specific cultural stereotypes.

I have argued elsewhere that twelfth-century Old French epic poetry demonstrates a predominantly positive image of Byzantium, including the Byzantines' moral profile. My reinterpretation of Byzantine characters in several romances that takes into account also the stories' face value, unjustly overlooked in favour of complicated symbolic constructs, points in the same direction.[58] These conclusions suggest that in the century preceding the infamous crusaders' sack of Constantinople in 1204 the Western knightly class, or at least its French-speaking part that formed the audience of the Old French fiction, did not foster as significant a cultural antipathy towards Byzantium as generally believed. To confirm this, further review of the complete corpus of romances is needed. However, the likely positive connotation of the term *Besance* and the way in which it found its way into *Partonopeus de Blois* are not a negligible support to the argument. The findings of this paper therefore do not only antedate the first occurrence of the word in its meaning today and reveal how unreliable our information about the beginnings of the terminology of Byzantine studies is. They first and foremost alert us to the danger of overinterpreting portrayals of Byzantium in medieval fiction under the influence of a better known and largely anti-Byzantine Crusade historiography.

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56   Wingler, *Un passeport pour le prince de Byzance*, 333–334.

57   A ruler without a male heir resides for example in Sicily (in Hue de Rotelande's *Ipomedon*), Phrygia or Frisia (in *Richars li Biaus*), Aragon (in *Roman de Laurin*) or Jerusalem (in *Sone de Nansay*); and Arthur's court is the renowned school for knights from all over the Christian world, including Germany (*Claris et Laris*, *Gliglois*) and Britain itself (Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval*). Cf. also note 45.

58   The former result comes from my unpublished thesis *Obraz Byzancie v starofrancúzskych* chansons de geste *(1096–1204)*, PhD. thesis (Bratislava 2016) [The Representations of Byzantium in the Old French *Chansons de Geste* (1096–1204)]. For the latter, see 'The Image of Byzantium in twelfth-century French fiction: a historical perspective,' in E. Egedi-Kovács (ed.), *Byzance et l'Occident 2: tradition, transmission, traduction* (Budapest 2015) 17–45.