

Speculum

Robert of Courtenay (1221-1227): an idiot on the throne of Constantinople? Byzantine influenced rulership and Western historiography. --Manuscript Draft--

Manuscript Number:	SPECULUM-D-12-00277
Full Title:	Robert of Courtenay (1221-1227): an idiot on the throne of Constantinople? Byzantine influenced rulership and Western historiography.
Article Type:	Article
Corresponding Author:	Filip Van Tricht University of Ghent Melle, East Flanders BELGIUM
Corresponding Author Secondary Information:	
Corresponding Author's Institution:	University of Ghent
Corresponding Author's Secondary Institution:	
First Author:	Filip Van Tricht
First Author Secondary Information:	
Order of Authors:	Filip Van Tricht
Order of Authors Secondary Information:	
Abstract:	<p>Robert of Courtenay's rule as emperor of Constantinople from 1221 until his death in 1227 has been largely neglected by modern historiography. To our knowledge not a single article, apart from entries in a few reference works, has been dedicated to his person or rule. Yet his reign is of pivotal significance for the history of the Byzantine space in the thirteenth century since it witnessed the dramatic collapse of the empire of Constantinople, which until then had assumed the role of aspirant hegemon in the Eastern Mediterranean. This development paved the way for the rise of both the empire of Nicaea and the empire of Thessalonike.</p> <p>Among scholars who have discussed Robert's reign - however superficially - there appears to exist a consensus of opinion that the misfortunes that befell the Empire of Constantinople during this period are largely to be attributed to his personal and utter incompetence. In this contribution we challenge this view. Through a thorough reexamination of all available sources concerning Robert's reign, we construct an alternative and hopefully more convincing image of Robert's emperorship.</p> <p>We argue that the current view is based on the uncritical use of a limited selection of rather biased chronicle passages, themselves based on one-sided information provided by a particular political faction in Constantinople. Adducing overlooked or neglected sources we then paint more nuanced picture, highlighting how in the period under consideration Byzantine influences at the imperial court were strong while Latin-Byzantine power struggles ran high.</p>
Suggested Reviewers:	David Jacoby jacobgab@mssc.huji.ac.il Expert on the Latin empire of Constantinople.
Opposed Reviewers:	

Robert of Courtenay (1221-1227): an idiot on the throne of Constantinople?

Byzantine influenced rulership and Western historiography

Introduction

Robert of Courtenay's rule as emperor of Constantinople from 1221 until his death in 1227 has been largely neglected by modern historiography. To our knowledge not a single article, apart from entries in a few reference works, has been dedicated to his person or rule. Yet his reign is of pivotal significance for the history of the Byzantine space in the thirteenth century since it witnessed the dramatic collapse of the empire of Constantinople, which until then had assumed the role of aspirant hegemon in the Eastern Mediterranean. This development paved the way for the rise of both the empire of Nicaea and the empire of Thessalonike, reducing the empire of Constantinople to the position of a merely regional player.¹

¹ Filip Van Tricht, *The Latin Renovatio of Byzantium. The Empire of Constantinople (1204-1228)*. *The Medieval Mediterranean* 90 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 371, 386, 480-481. Jean Longnon, *L'empire latin de Constantinople et la Principauté de Morée*. *Bibliothèque historique* (Paris: Payot, 1949), 159-168. Robert Lee Wolff, "The Latin Empire of Constantinople," in: *A History of the Crusades*, ed. Kenneth M. Setton, 6 vols. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1962), 2: 187-233. Alice Gardner, *The Lascarids of Nicaea. The story of an Empire in Exile* (London: Messrs. Methuen & Co Ltd., 1912), 96-97. John Langdon, *John III Ducas Vatatzes' Byzantine Empire in Anatolian exile, 1222-54. The Legacy of His Diplomatic, Military and Internal Program for the "Restitutio Orbis"* (Ann Arbor: University of California, 1980), 69-71. Michael Angold, *A Byzantine Government in Exile. Government and Society under the Lascarids of Nicaea 1204 - 1261*. *Oxford Historical Monographs* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 29, 183. Donald M. Nicol, *The Despotate of Epiros* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957), 103. François Bredenkamp, *The Byzantine Empire of Thessalonike, 1224-1242* (Thessalonike: Municipality. History Centre, 1996), 73-109.

Among scholars who have discussed Robert's reign - however superficially - there appears to exist a consensus of opinion that the misfortunes that befell the Empire of Constantinople during this period are largely to be attributed to his personal and utter incompetence. In this contribution we would like to challenge this view. While it is of course true that during Robert's rule the empire had to sustain severe territorial losses and that no adequate response could be formulated in the face of these major successes by the rival rulers of Nicaea and Epiros/Thessalonike, we intend to show that the blame for these developments is not exclusively or even principally to be laid on emperor Robert's shoulders.

Through a thorough reexamination of all available sources concerning Robert's reign, we will construct an alternative and hopefully more convincing image of Robert's emperorship. We will argue that the current view is founded on the uncritical use of a limited selection of rather biased chronicle passages, themselves based on one-sided information provided by a particular political faction in Constantinople. Adducing overlooked or neglected sources we will then paint a more nuanced picture, highlighting how in the period under consideration Byzantine influences at the imperial court were strong while Latin-Byzantine power struggles ran high.

We will start our argument with a survey of how previous authors have portrayed and assessed Robert of Courtenay's person and reign, paying special attention to the various sources used.

Robert of Courtenay and modern historiography

In his standard work *L'empire latin de Constantinople* Jean Longnon has the following to say about Robert's person and rulership: "Robert n'avait ni l'énergie de son père [Peter of Courtenay], ni le sens politique de son oncle Henri, ni les vertus morales de son oncle

Baudouin ni même l'activité de son frère [Baldwin II]. C'était un tout jeune homme, porté aux plaisirs, indolent et borné: quasi rudis et idiota, dit Aubry de Trois-Fontaines. Il fut tenté par la couronne prestigieuse sans en comprendre la charge pesante." A few pages further the author supplements this already critical picture with the general statement that "l'oeuvre magnifique de l'empereur Henri a été définitivement ruinée par l'incapacité de son neveu Robert". Referring to the *Chronicon Turonense* he then adds that after the successive defeats at the hands of emperor Theodore I Laskaris of Nicaea and Theodore Doukas, ruler of Epiros: "L'empereur lâcha la bride à ses mauvais instincts, séduisant les filles, grecques ou françaises, pillant les trésors ecclésiastiques, et suscitant ainsi le mécontentement de la population, des barons et du clergé." Longnon concludes, referring to the so-called *Chronique d'Ernoul et de Bernard le trésorier*, with an account of how near the end of his reign Robert turned down a marriage with Nicaean princess Eudokia Laskaris, presented as being politically advantageous, and instead secretly married the daughter of a French knight whom he had fallen in love with, neglecting state affairs and causing his barons to rebel against him.²

Robert Lee Wolff in his review article on the empire of Constantinople in Setton's *A History of The Crusades* states: "But emperor Robert, as his contemporaries agreed, had none of the necessary qualities [to rule the empire successfully]: 'quasi rudis et idiota' is perhaps their most succinct and damning judgment." As the main reason for the collapse of the empire during Robert's reign the author argues that: "Robert not only failed to exploit this division among the Greeks [Nicaea versus Epiros], but reverted to the fatal policy of fighting two-front-wars." Just like Longnon Wolff ends his treatment of Robert's reign with the dramatic marriage sequence found in the already mentioned *Chronique d'Ernoul et de Bernard le trésorier*, picturing the emperor fleeing to Rome "full of shame".³ Benjamin Hendrickx,

² Longnon, *L'empire latin*, 159, 167.

³ Wolff, *The Latin Empire*, 214-216.

referring to both Longnon and Wolff, in Murray's recent encyclopedia on the crusades writes in a similar vein: "Robert, a man inclined to pleasures generally neglected state affairs, and his reign was disastrous for the Latin Empire. When the barons mutilated the face of the young Frenchwoman he had married in secret, Robert left Constantinople."⁴

Kenneth Setton himself, referring to Longnon and also to the fourteenth-century *Chronica per extensum descripta* by the Venetian Doge Andreas Dandolo, in *The Papacy and the Levant* calls Robert "indolent and licentious" and "a terrible disappointment to his barons who finally invaded his palace and inflicted some grave indignities upon him in an effort to stir him into some activity, but Robert left Constantinople in furious resentment [...]"⁵ Typical for the way Robert's rule is treated by modern historians is a lapsus by Robert Langdon. Against the background of the negative image created by his predecessors he misinterprets a passage in the chronicle by Philippe Mouskes and wrongfully concludes that the chronicler called the emperor "Robert the Fool". The passage in Mouskes' chronicle however runs as follows: *Dont recommencierent la guierre / Li Coumain par toute la tierre / L'empereres Robiers le sot / Et cil plus tost k'il onques pot / I envoia ses cevaliers / [...]*. It is clear that the phrase *Robiers le sot* should be translated something like "Robert was informed of this".⁶

Michael Angold and Gunther Prinzing - referring to Longnon, Wolff and Setton - in respectively *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* and the *Lexikon des Mittelalters* both

⁴ Benjamin Hendrickx, "Robert of Constantinople," in: *The Crusades*, ed. Alan V. Murray, 4 vols. (Santa Barbara: ABC Clio, 2006), 4: 1041.

⁵ Kenneth M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant (1204 - 1511)*, 4 vols. (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1976), 1: 54.

⁶ Langdon, *John III Ducas Vatatzes' Byzantine Empire*, 70. Philippe Mouskes, *Chronique rimée*, ed. Frédéric de Reiffenberg, Collection de Chroniques belges inédites (Brussels: Commission Royale d'Histoire, 1938), 408-409.

restrict themselves to an enumeration of the main events during Robert's reign without trying to explain the successive defeats against Nicaea and Epiros. They do however ascribe to the emperor a lack of resilience in the face of these setbacks. "Militärisch und aussenpolitisch erfolglos oder überhaupt untätig, verlor Robert zusehend an Rückhalt bei den Baronen, die ihn zwangen, sich von seiner nicht standesgemässen Gattin, der Tochter eines (gefallenen) französischen Ritters, zu trennen", says Prinzing, while Angold similarly maintains that: "He lapsed into a life of indolence, which so frustrated the barons that they broke into the palace, murdered his mother-in-law, and disfigured his wife."⁷

The relative consensus of opinion among modern historians on the major responsibility of Emperor Robert for the collapse of his empire is conspicuously enough not shared by all older authors. The well-known seventeenth-century French historian and philologist Charles du Fresne du Cange in his *Histoire de l'empire de Constantinople sous les empereurs français* agrees with the current view and no doubt was very influential in shaping this view. Longnon, whose own work as we have seen has also contributed much to shaping present opinion on Robert's reign, leans heavily on Du Cange throughout. The following extract sums up Du Cange's point of view: "Albéric et les auteurs du temps ont remarqué que la faiblesse de son esprit en la bassesse de son courage causèrent les funestes révolutions qui arrivèrent de son temps dans l'empire d'Orient, et qui donnèrent sujet à ses ennemis de s'en prévaloir, et de le dépouiller de plusieurs provinces et places considérables. Ce qu'il fit assez

⁷ Michael Angold, "Robert of Courtenay," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. Alexander Kazhdan, 3 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 3: 1798-1799. Günther Prinzing, "Robert von Courtenay," in *Lexikon des Mittelalters* (München: LexMA Verlag, 1995), 7: 886.

paraître en la facilité qu'il apporta à rompre avec ses voisins, au lieu d'entretenir avec eux les traités d'alliance que ses prédécesseurs avaient solennement contracté."⁸

Not unsurprisingly historians with a special interest in the Courtenay family have come to different conclusions. Jean du Bouchet, a contemporary of Du Cange who was marquis of Souches and *Grand prévôt de France*, wrote his *Histoire généalogique de la maison royale de Courtenay*, which he dedicated to Louis XIV, in order to prove that the Courtenay family was descended of the French king Louis VI.⁹ The early-eighteenth century English historian Ezra Cleaveland, who for some time was a fellow of Exeter College in Oxford and was appointed *rector* of Powderham, in his *A Genealogical History of the Noble and Illustrious Family of Courtenai*, dedicated to his former pupil and earl of Devon William Courtenay, illustrates both Bouchet's and his own view on Robert of Courtenay in the following way: "Some do say, that by reason of his cowardice, a great part of the conquest that the French had made in Greece, was lost. But I cannot, says Bouchet, find, but that it was more his misfortune than his fault; for the best of his troops perished in the battle against Vatacius at Pemarkin [Poimaneon], and he had but few troops to oppose his enemies with; and it was impossible for him to have succours in another crusade, in season, from kingdoms that were far from him."¹⁰

It is notable that all of the authors discussed in fact present only a very rudimentary explanation for the collapse of the empire of Constantinople. Some authors content themselves with diagnosing reputed defects in Robert's character or recording his supposedly

⁸ Charles du Fresne du Cange, *Histoire de l'empire de Constantinople sous les empereurs français*, ed. Jean Alexandre Buchon, Collection des chroniques nationales françaises écrites en langue vulgaire du treizième au seizième siècle (Paris: Verdier & J. Carez, 1826), 198.

⁹ Jean du Bouchet, *Histoire généalogique de la maison royale de Courtenay* (Paris: Jean du Puis, 1661), 63-64.

¹⁰ Ezra Cleaveland, *A Genealogical History of the Noble and Illustrious Family of Courtenai* (Shakespeare's Head: Edward Farley, 1735), 55.

objectionable morals, which are then explicitly or implicitly treated as the cause of the empire's steep decline. Some others have ventured a little beyond this. Wolff suggests briefly that Robert made the vital mistake of choosing to fight a two-front-war instead of trying to exploit dissensions among his opponents, but does not further develop this proposition. Du Cange similarly maintains that the emperor frivolously broke off the existing good relations with the neighbouring states, a policy which then resulted in the downgrade of the empire. Neither Wolff nor Du Cange however adduce source references that actually link Robert's person to these choices and decisions. Neither do they demonstrate convincingly that these policies were indeed pursued in Constantinople. Bouchet and Cleaveland, while relieving Robert of most of the blame, elaborate no alternative explanation: they only state that the emperor was unlucky in losing the battle against Vatatzes at Poimaneon in 1224 and that, now lacking the necessary troops or any foreign support, he was unable to recover from this blow.

Aubry of Trois-Fontaines: a character assassination

When we take a closer look at the sources used by the authors mentioned, we find that their evaluations of Robert's person and rule are based on passages in three (near) contemporary sources. These are first Aubry of Trois-Fontaines' world chronicle; secondly the old French continuations of William of Tyre's *Historia rerum in partibus transmarinis gestarum* - known in many more or less related versions circulating in the historiography under various titles such as the *Chronique d'Ernoul et Bernard le trésorier* and *L'Estoire d'Eracles*; and thirdly the anonymous *Chronicon Turonense*.

Aubry († after 1252) was a monk attached to the cistercian abbey of Trois-Fontaines in the county of Champagne. The influence of epic literature on his chronicle inspired some

authors to suggest that in his youth he possibly had been a jongleur. Only a few copies of his work survive which may indicate that its popularity was rather limited. He started writing his world chronicle around 1232 and describes events up to the year 1241.¹¹ His treatment of Robert's reign deserves to be quoted in full:¹²

(under the year 1220) Frater eiusdem Philippi Robertus nomine in imperatorem Constantinopolitanum tanquam heres assumitur, in cuius diebus de iis, que in Grecia fuerunt acquisita, Latini perdidierunt multa, cum ille esset quasi rudis et idiota.

(under the year 1221) In Grecia regnabat apud Nicheam post Lascarum Grecum gener eius, Vastachius nomine, qui nostros ita permittente Deo devastavit, quod Eskisiam abstulit et Troadam et Militenem insulam et totam fere terram, que acquisita fuerat ultra brachium. Predictus siquidem Lascarus plures habuit filias de prima uxore, Andronici filia, quarum unam habuit iste catholicarum devastator Vastachius, aliam duxit dux Austrie,¹³ tertiam rex Bela, regis Andree filius primogenitus, quartam Anselmus de Kieu, de Pontivo natus. Dux etiam Durachii Theodorus Grecus Tessalonicam abstulit et de duce se regem constituit; hic est qui comitem Petrum Autisiodorensem captivavit.

¹¹ André Moisan, "Aubri de Trois-Fontaines et la 'matière de Bretagne'," *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale* 31 (1988), 42. Mireille Schmidt-Chazan, "Aubri de Trois-Fontaines, un historien entre la France et l'Empire," *Annales de l'Est* 36 (1984), 191. Jan Prelog, "Alberich von Troisfontaine," in: *Lexikon des Mittelalters* (München: Artemis & Winkler Verlag, 1980), 1: 282.

¹² Albericus Trium Fontium, *Chronica*, ed. Paul Scheffer-Boichorst, MGH SS 23 (Hannover: Impensis Bibliopolii Aulici Hahniani, 1874), 910-911.

¹³ On this marriage which continues to somewhat elude historians: Andreas Rhoby, "Byzanz und 'Österreich' im 12./13. Jahrhundert: Mythos und Realität," *Miscellanea Mediaevalia* 36 (2011)(forthcoming).

The chronicler thus succinctly describes the dramatic territorial losses in both Asia Minor and in Greece. The responsibility for the empire's collapse is exclusively attributed to emperor Robert, since he was *quasi rudis et idiota*, a catching phrase cited by Du Cange, Longnon Wolff and Setton. Aubry however does not explain in any way how Robert's policies or person were precisely to blame for ruining the empire. In fact he confines himself to a mere character assassination. In this context we may ask ourselves what exactly is the meaning of the words *rudis* and *idiota*. In Favre's edition of Du Cange's *Glossarium Mediae et Infimae Latinitatis* *idiota* is explained as *illiteratus, imperitus, rudis, rusticus, indoctus, ignarus*. The term *rudis* is not treated separately, but the cited enumeration makes clear that the author considered the term to be close in meaning to the term *idiota*.¹⁴ Niermeyer in his *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minor* translates *idiota* as 'a person illiterate, simple, unlearned'. Again *rudis* is not included in the reference work.¹⁵ Basing ourselves on both authors we may then suggest that Aubry meant to say that in his eyes Robert was an ignorant person when it came to possessing the necessary ruling qualities. Further on we will come back to the issue of Robert's incompetence.

It would be interesting to know on what information Aubry's harsh evaluation of emperor Robert is founded. An element in the cited passages may serve as a clue. In describing the territorial losses *ultra brachium* three localities are specifically mentioned: *Eskisia* (the town of Kyzikos), *Troada* (the Troad region) and *Militene* (the island of Lesbos). In an earlier passage of his chronicle concerning the death of emperor Baldwin I of Flanders/Hainaut in 1205 the chronicler explicitly names archbishop John of Lesbos as one of

¹⁴ Charles du Fresne du Cange, *Glossarium Mediae et Infimae Latinitatis*, ed. Léopold Favre, 10 vols. (Niort: Léopold Favre, 1883-87), 4: 284a.

¹⁵ Jan Frederik Niermeyer, *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976), 508.

his sources.¹⁶ Since the loss of Lesbos, in Latin hands since emperor Henry's 1212-1213 campaign against Nicaea, is particularly mentioned among the Latin territorial losses under emperor Robert, we may infer that at least one of Aubry's sources for this passage - and no doubt also for his evaluation of Robert's reign - was this archbishop John. Biographical information concerning him is scant, but the prelate was certainly well connected to the imperial court. At some point Cono I of Béthune, who had participated in the Fourth Crusade and until his death in 1219 was one of the most important barons at the imperial court serving twice as regent of the empire (1216-1217 and 1219), had granted him a precious relic.¹⁷ He is also presumably to be identified with the archbishop of Lesbos to whom pope Honorius III in 1222 confirmed papal legate John Colonna's decisions - probably at archbishop John's request - to unite two bishoprics (Methymna and Assos) to the archbishopric of Lesbos, and to make Chios, formerly subject to Nicaean held Rhodes, a suffragan see.¹⁸ Colonna was a leading figure within the Constantinopolitan imperial elite in the years 1218-1221. In this respect it is to be noted that the legate pursued a rather rigorous policy vis-à-vis Byzantine clerics who

¹⁶ Albericus Trium Fontium, *Chronica*, 885. Archbishop John confirmed to Aubry that emperor Baldwin had died in the Bulgarian capital of Tirnovo following the crushing defeat at Adrianople. The chronicler was checking information he had received earlier from a Flemish priest who claimed to have been travelling through Tirnovo at the time of Baldwin's capture and death.

¹⁷ The relic grant is recorded in an early thirteenth century inventory of the cistercian abbey of Clairvaux: Paul E.D. Riant, ed., *Exuviae Sacrae Constantinopolitanae*, 2 vols. (Geneva, 1878), 2: 195. See also: Van Tricht, *The Latin Renovatio of Byzantium*, 257 (note 55).

¹⁸ Petrus Pressutti, ed., *Regesta Honorii Papae III*, 2 vols. (Rome, 1888), 1: n° 3816. Aloysius L. Tautu, ed., *Acta Honorii III (1216-1227) et Gregorii IX (1227-1241). Pontificia Commissio ad redigendum Codicem Iuris Canonici Orientalis. Fontes. Series 3/3* (Vatican: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1950), n° 92-92a. See also: Robert Lee Wolff, "The Organization of the Latin Patriarchate of Constantinople 1204-1261. Social and Administrative Consequences of the Latin Conquest," *Traditio* 6 (1948), 46. Van Tricht, *The Latin Renovatio of Byzantium*, 324-325.

refused to acknowledge papal authority and that around 1220 he acted as regent of the empire.¹⁹ Archbishop John is probably also the unnamed archbishop of Lesbos present at the Lateran Council in 1215.²⁰

After Lesbos had been lost John left the empire for the West, where he assisted at the coronation of Louis IX in Reims on 29 November 1226.²¹ It is unclear whether he departed on his own initiative or whether he was on a diplomatic mission looking for Western assistance for Constantinople. We know that earlier that year Hugh, viscount of Arras, had served as an imperial envoy looking for assistance from Louis VIII, who at the time had been besieging the town of Avignon. The French king had responded favourably promising to send aid, but his premature death a short time afterwards (8 November 1226) prevented the plan from materializing. It is possible that archbishop John was part of this embassy and that he tried to restart discussions regarding aid for Constantinople with Blanche of Castile, regent for her underage son Louis IX.²² In September 1228 he dedicated the chapel of Our Lady at Hérinnes by order of the local bishop Geoffrey of Cambrai. In October of the same year he dedicated the church of the Benedictine monastery of the Holy Maccabees in Cologne, acting as the local archbishop Henry I of Müllenark's surrogate. In March 1230 he was present in Thuin - a fortified town in the prince-bishopric of Liège - at the consecration of the new local bishop, also called John, by archbishop Henry of Reims, notwithstanding the fact that Liège was a

¹⁹ John Colonna's regency is mentioned in a papal letter: Pressutti, *Regesta Honorii Papae III*, 1: n° 2557. See also: Van Tricht, *The Latin Renovatio of Byzantium*, 291-292.

²⁰ Raymonde Foreville, *Latran I, II, III et Latran IX. Histoire des Conciles oecuméniques* 6 (Paris: Editions de l'Orante, 1965), 391.

²¹ Giorgio Fedalto, *La chiesa latina in Oriente*, 2 vols. (Verona: Casa Editrice Mazziana, 1973-76), 2: 160.

²² Philippe Mouskes, *Chronique rimée*, 539. Jean Longnon, *Les compagnons de Villehardouin. Recherches sur les croisés de la quatrième croisade* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1978), 55. Several imperial envoys were sent out around 1226: Van Tricht, *The Latin Renovatio of Byzantium*, 288 (note 154), 301 (note 191).

suffragan see of Cologne.²³ In 1233 together with his suffragan bishop John of Chios, with whom he thus appears to have travelled to the West and who perhaps shared his views regarding emperor Robert, and with the bishops of Châlon-sur-Saône and Ösell John authored a vidimus of a papal letter by Honorius III in favour of the cistercian abbey of La Ramée in the duchy of Brabant.²⁴ Around the same time the archbishop *preces fudit* to be said in all abbeys belonging to the Cistercian Order for one Joannes Urgeolus, who had no doubt belonged to his entourage.²⁵ He appears never to have gone back to the East and died a monk in 1240 at the abbey of Clairvaux, to which he donated the relics mentioned earlier.

We may now wonder what reasons archbishop John, if indeed he was Aubry's source for the passages cited, may have had for laying the blame for the empire's collapse on Robert's

²³ 1228: Richard Knipping et al., *Die Regesten der Erzbischöfe von Köln im Mittelalter. Publikationen der Gesellschaft für rheinische Geschichtskunde* 21, 12 vols. (Bonn: P. Hanstein's Verlag, 1913), 3: n° 761; 1230: *Annalium Laubiensium Continuatio*, ed. Georg Heinrich Pertz, MGH SS 4 (Hannover: Impensis Bibliopolii Aulici Hahniani, 1841), 26. John's activities in 1228-1230 may be seen in the context of a thirteenth-century trend whereby exiled (arch)bishops were used as welcome substitutes. Perhaps he played some role in the contacts between pope Gregory IX and archbishop Henry of Müllenark during these years, which centered around the conflict between the papacy and emperor Frederick II of Hohenstaufen: the consecration of the new bishop of Liège in 1230 by the archbishop of Reims probably took place at the instigation of papal legate Otho, cardinal deacon of San Nicola in Carcere. See also: Michael Müllenark, *Heinrich I. von Müllenark, Erzbischof von Köln (1225-1238). Studien zur Kölner Kirchengeschichte* 25 (Siegburg: Verlag Franz Schmitt, 1992), 143, 557-558, 633.

²⁴ Georges Despy & André Uyttebrouck, *Inventaire des archives de l'abbaye de La Ramée à Jauchelette. Archives générales du Royaume et Archives de l'Etat dans les Provinces. Inventaire analytique des Archives ecclésiastiques du Brabant. 1e série: Abbayes et Chapitres* 4 (Brussels: Archives générales du Royaume, 1970), 171.

²⁵ Joseph-Marie Canivez, *Statuta capitulorum generalium ordinis Cisterciensis ab anno 1116 ad annum 1786. Bibliothèque de la Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique* 9, 8 vols. (Louvain: Bureaux de la Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique, 1933-41), 2: 114, n° 18.

shoulders. Of course, he had lost his archbishopric and it was never to be recovered. This no doubt was reason enough for feeling some resentment against the way things had worked out during Robert's reign. It remains however unclear why this resentment appears very strongly to have been directed at Robert's person. As we have seen Aubry does not give any relevant information in this respect. For the moment we can only conclude that among the persons holding a position of importance in the imperial quarter, the part of the empire in Thrace and Asia Minor under the direct authority of the emperor, and entertaining close relations with the imperial court, there were some - and archbishop John can be considered as an exponent of this group (see the relic grant by Cono of Béthune, John's contacts with de facto regent and papal legate John of Colonna, and John's possible diplomatic mission in France) - who held Robert personally responsible for the empire's misfortunes.

The Old French continuations of William of Tyre: emperor Robert versus his barons

The second source that we need to look into are the Old French continuations of William of Tyre's *Historia rerum in partibus transmarinis gestarum*, known under various names such as the *Chronique d'Ernoul et de Bernard le trésorier* and *L'Estoire d'Eracles*. The genesis of this related group of texts remains unclear and much debated.²⁶ For our purposes we don't need to go into this discussion, since all versions of the continuations give a practically identical text of the relevant passage without significant variants. The passage can be read as the dramatic finale of a longer sequence wherein an elaborate account of the Fourth Crusade and a succinct history of the Latin emperors in Constantinople up to 1227 is given, besides developments

²⁶ See inter alia: Margaret Ruth Morgan, *The Chronicle of Ernoul and the Continuations of William of Tyre*. *Oxford Historical Monographs* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973). Peter Edbury, "New Perspectives on the Old French Continuations of William of Tyre," *Crusades* 9 (2010), 107-113. The latter author is preparing a modern critical edition of the continuations to be published by Brill.

taking place in the West and in the Latin East.²⁷ The passage must have been written shortly after the described events took place, since successive versions of the continuations incorporating the relevant passage can be dated to around 1227-1231.²⁸ In our view it is also rather likely that the account originated in the Latin Orient and not in the West.²⁹ Again the passage concerning Robert's reign deserves to be quoted in full:

Cils Robert ses freres³⁰ i ala, et ala par Hungherie, pour chou que li roine de Hongerie estoit se suer et qu'il ot le conduit et l'aïue le roi de Hongerie parmi se tiere et parmie

²⁷ *Chronique d'Ernoult et de Bernard le trésorier*, ed. Louis de Mas Latrie (Paris: Jules Renouard. Libraire de la Société de l'histoire de France, 1871), §30-33, 325-394. *L'Estoire d'Eracles empereur et la conqueste de la Terre d'Outremer, Recueil des Historiens des Croisades publié par les soins de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres. Historiens Occidentaux*, 5 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1859), 2: 243-295.

²⁸ Morgan, *The Chronicle of Ernoul*, 13, 190. Edbury, "New Perspectives on the Old French Continuations," 108.

²⁹ The account in our eyes displays an involvement with events in the Kingdom of Jerusalem and the Latin East. To be noted are for example the sympathy for Aimery of Lusignan, King of Jerusalem and Cyprus, in the context of a confrontation with a group of crusaders, the geographical specifications concerning Gibelet, and the assessment with respect to the funds collected by Fulk of Neuilly: *Et si vous dit bien c'onques avoires qui alast en le tierre d'Outremer ne vient si bien à point* (*Chronique d'Ernoult et de Bernard le trésorier*, 338, 340-341, 343; *L'Estoire d'Eracles*, 244-245, 246-247, 249). Catherine Croizy-Naquet also appears to assume a Latin Oriental origin for the entire *Chronique d'Ernoult et de Bernard le trésorier* (Catherine Croizy-Naquet, "Y a-t-il une représentation de l'Orient dans la Chronique d'Ernoult et de Bernard le Trésorier," *Cahiers de recherches médiévales et humanistes* 8 (2001), 263). Peter Edbury hypothesises that someone associated with John of Brienne, king of Jerusalem (1210-1225) and emperor of Constantinople (1231-1237), on the basis of various existing compositions put together the versions of the Ernoul-Bernard chronicle that have been transmitted to posterity in the late 1220's and early 1230's (Edbury, "New Perspectives on the Old French Continuations," 109).

³⁰ Robert's brother was Philip II of Courtenay, marquis of Namur (1216-1226), who had declined the emperorship in favour of his younger brother.

Blakie. Et sauvement ala en Costentinoble et porta corone. Et quant il ot porté corone, il ne fist gaires d'exploit, car il n'avoit mie mené gent dont il peust granment exploitier, et si eust perdue se terre et Costentinoble, s'il n'eust eue l'aïue des Blas. Mais li Blac li aidierent se tiere à retenir, çou qu'il en trova. Or vous dirai que cil empereres fist. Il avoit une dame en Costentinoble veuve, qui fille avoit esté .i. chevalier d'Artois, qui avoit a non Bauduins de Neuville. Celle dame avoit mere. Li empereres ama tant celle qu'il ne pooit durer sans li, et si l'espousa coïement, et le mist avec lui en son manoir et le mere ensement. Quant li chevalier de Costentinoble sorent qu'il l'avoit espousée, si en furent molt dolant car il estoit si entres en li, que, por besoigne que il eussent, ne le pooient traire de la cambre.³¹ Il prisent conseil ensanle, qu'il feroient. Ils alerent en le cambre où li empereres estoit, si comme consaus lor avoit aporté, si le tinrent; et prisent le mere se feme, si le misent en .i. batiel, et l'envoierent noier en le mer. Après si vinrent a se feme, se le copèrent le nés et le baulèvre. Atant si laisserent l'emperéour em pais. Quant li empereres vit le honte c'on li ot fait de se feme, que on ot le nés copé, et de se mere que on ot noié en le mer, si fu moult dolans. Si fist armer galies et entra ens, si laissa Costentinoble et s'en ala à Rome. Quant il vint à Rome, si se plainst à l'apostole de le honte que si homme li avoient faite. Et li apostoles le conforta drument, et se li dona del sien et fist tant vers lui qu'il s'en retorna arriere en Constantinoble. En ce qu'il s'en retorna arriere en Constantinoble, si arriva en le tiere Joffroi de Vile Harduin. Là li prist maladie, si fu mors.³²

³¹ We prefer the manuscript tradition of the manuscripts A, B and G which reads *de la cambre* (instead of *de Costentinoble*).

³² *Chronique d'Ernoul et de Bernard le trésorier*, 393-395. *L'Estoire d'Eracles*, 294-295.

In the secondary literature this passage up until now has been taken at face value as a perhaps slightly inaccurate, but basically trustworthy summary of Robert's reign. We will argue that this is by no means the case. The passage consists of two parts. First a general assessment is given. Then (*Or vous dirai*) one dramatic incident - leading the emperor to depart for Rome, never to return - is treated in some detail. In the entire passage it is remarkable that the enormous territorial losses during Robert's rule - the central element in Aubry of Trois-Fontaines' account - are completely negated. It is on the contrary stated that Robert managed to hold on to the territories he had inherited from his parents - described as rather modest - thanks to his alliance with Bulgaria. The losses are in an earlier passage explicitly relegated to the reign of his father, emperor Peter of Courtenay, who is said to have become the victim of the treachery of the Greek lord of Durazzo (Dyrrachion), to be identified of course with Theodore Doukas, ruler of Epiros and later the empire of Thessalonike. This in turn led many Greeks to also successfully rebel against the Latins and they *reconquisent toute li tiere que li empereres Henris*³³ *avoit conquise*.³⁴ We may ask ourselves whether there is a reason why Robert's reign is so mal-represented in this respect, or put differently: did anyone perhaps benefit from such a representation?

Emperor Robert himself gains little by the omission of the territorial losses. He is in fact portrayed in an exclusively negative light as a completely inactive ruler (*il ne fist gaires d'exploit*), who indulging an infatuation married, below his status it is implied, the daughter of a mere *chevalier d'Artois* and neglected the concerns of his barons. Compared with Robert these barons are positively depicted. Their drastic actions against their suzerain are not criticized in any way. Care is taken to note that they did not touch the person of the emperor himself, only his wife and mother-in-law were brutalized. The fact that not one of these men

³³ Henry of Flanders/Hainaut, second Latin emperor of Constantinople (1206-1216).

³⁴ *Chronique d'Ernoul et de Bernard le trésorier*, 392-393. *L'Estoire d'Eracles*, 293-294.

is cited by name and that they are presented collectively as *li chevalier de Constantinoble* creates the impression that the discontent with Robert's rule was general among the barons in the metropolitan area. However, this seems highly unlikely to us, for it would not have been possible for Robert to rule without the support of at least part of the Latin barons. This leads us to the hypothesis that the author of the passage in question based himself on information coming from someone connected with a faction of barons who were dissatisfied with Robert's rule and chose to intervene. It speaks for itself that this group would have sought to depict its actions as lawful. One way to do this was by presenting themselves as acting on behalf and with the support of the entire Latin elite. The discontent with Robert's rule among persons connected with the Constantinopolitan Latin elite is something we already established while discussing Aubry of Trois-Fontaines' account of his reign. We tentatively identified archbishop John of Lesbos as opposed to Robert's policies, albeit for the time being without knowing what these implied exactly.

If information coming from a faction of barons opposed to Robert indeed is at the basis of the representation of his reign in the Old French continuations of William of Tyre, then these barons also should have had some interest in transferring the huge territorial losses from Robert's reign to that of his father, emperor Peter of Courtenay. This would make sense in so far that some barons carried a major responsibility in the military defeats that lead to these losses. At the lost battle of Poimaneon in 1224 against emperor John III Vatatzes of Nicaea the army was commanded by Nicolas of Mainvault, marshall of the empire, and Thierry of Walcourt.³⁵ Both barons were rather recent arrivals in Constantinople. Nicolas and

³⁵ Philippe Mouskes, *Chronique rimée*, 409. Nicolas is only attested in the empire in the context of the battle of Poimaneon, during which he was captured with his fellow-commander Thierry. The latter is already mentioned in 1221 as one of the barons taking part in the peace negotiations at that time with emperor Theodore I Laskaris of Nicaea (Van Tricht, *The Latin Renovatio of Byzantium*, 365). Georgios Akropolites mentions Isaac and Alexios Laskaris, brothers of the late emperor Theodore I, as commanders of the Constantinopolitan army at

Thierry are both still attested in their respective home counties of Hainaut and Namur in 1220.³⁶ That both Constantinopolitan barons are attested back in their home region shortly after the end of Robert's reign - Nicolas is attested in October 1228 and Thierry in 1232 - can be interpreted as an indication that things had not worked out as they had imagined. The serious conflict with emperor Robert could very well serve as explanation.³⁷ It could be then argued that these men, and their associates, after their departure from Constantinople circulated an account that was favourable to their specific situation. By keeping quiet about

Poimanenon (Georgios Akropolites, *Historia*, ed. August Heisenberg, *Georgii Acropolitae Opera* 1 (Leipzig: In aedibus B. G. Teubneri, 1903), §22).

³⁶ Nicolas - a *miles* who held possessions in Mainvault and Quévy (county of Hainaut) - in 1220: Joseph Jean De Smet, ed., *Cartulaire de l'Abbaye de Cambron. Monuments pour servir à l'Histoire des Provinces de Namur, de Hainaut et de Luxembourg* 2, 2 vols. (Brussels: Commission Royale d'Histoire, 1869), 2: 689, n° 46. Thierry - as lord of Walcourt a prominent figure at the comital court of Namur and as lord of Clermont and Rochefort also at the prince-episcopal court of Liège - in 1220: Léon Lahaye, *Cartulaire de la commune de Walcourt. Documents inédits relatifs à l'histoire de la province de Namur* (Namur: Typographie de Ad. Wesmael-Charlier, 1888), xvii-xxviii.

³⁷ Nicolas in 1228: De Smet, *Cartulaire de Cambron*, 2: 907, n° 13. Thierry in 1232: Lahaye, *Cartulaire de la commune de Walcourt*, 9, n° 3. Neither Nicolas nor Thierry appear to have ever returned to Constantinople. Interesting to note is that in a 1234 charter Thierry mentions that a daughter of his had remained behind *in partibus Romanie*, probably because she was married to a member of the Constantinopolitan elite. This woman, named Gerberga, eventually also returned to her homeland: with her son Bilas she is attested in an April 1261 charter in favour of the premonstratensian abbey of Bonne-Espérance in the county of Hainaut (Ursmer Berlière, "Note sur les seigneurs de Walcourt au XIIIe siècle," *Annales de la Société archéologique de Namur* 20 (1893), 47-48). Her son's given name seems to indicate that her husband in Constantinople was of Hungarian descent. Stephen of Walcourt, canon of Saint-Denis in Liège, was no doubt related to Thierry and his daughter Gerberga: around 1243 he travelled to Constantinople where he obtained several precious relics, which may indicate that at this time Gerberga was still living in the East (Paul Bertrand, "Edition des authentiques de la collégiale de Soignies," in *Reliques et châsses de la collégiale de Soignies. Objets, cultes et traditions*, ed. Jacques Deveseleer, *Les cahiers du chapitre* 8 (2001), 197).

the territorial losses under Robert they relieved themselves from any responsibility for these losses. By portraying Robert as a passive ruler fallen into the clutches of his questionable wife and mother-in-law, they justified their actions against the emperor. In this way these barons averted the possibility that the shameful disgrace of the collapse of the empire of Constantinople would fall upon them.

While the Constantinopolitan barons are thus represented as the good guys taking up their responsibility to stir the emperor into action, the real villains of the piece are Robert's wife and mother-in-law, which is made clear by the very harsh punishments they are made to suffer. It indeed seems to us that the violence used - mutilation and death by drowning - was rather excessive. A more moderate approach in removing both women from the imperial presence could for example have consisted in confining them to a convent. In our opinion these extreme measures are the sign of an intense anger and even hatred felt by the Latin barons in question vis-à-vis both women. It is clear that their close proximity to the emperor - of which they themselves were deprived - was a source of exasperation for the barons, but this in itself cannot sufficiently explain the outrage against the empress and the murder of her mother. The question thus remains why both women were so detested. Unfortunately the anonymous chronicler does not give us much information on who these women were exactly. Of Robert's wife we only learn that she was the widowed daughter of one Baldwin of Neuville, an Artois knight to whom we shall return further on. Robert's mother-in-law is even more of a mystery, although she is mentioned several times in the short passage under discussion. The passages gives no clue at all about who she was, but it is clear that the barons' anger was primarily directed at her. It was she who got killed, while her daughter was 'only' mutilated. The way how her daughter was mutilated - her nose and lips were cut off - in itself may also be meaningful, since this type of mutilation in Byzantine eyes made her unsuited as

empress. This leads us to the hypothesis that the Latin barons with their actions wanted to send a message to the Byzantine elite and population in and around the capital.

To recapulate the central issue in the conflict between Robert and a group of his barons was a perceived breach of the feudal contract. The members of the mentioned faction were clearly of the opinion that they should have had their suzerain's ear, while in reality this was not - or not sufficiently enough - the case (*por besoigne que il eussent, ne le pooient traire de la cambre*). At the same time we found that Latin-Byzantine tensions may have played an important role in the conflict, a hypothesis strongly supported by the third source we need to examine.

The Chronicon Turonense: Latins versus Byzantines

The *Chronicon Turonense* was written in the first third of the thirteenth century. Until 1220 it is basically a copy of Robert of Auxerre's *Chronologia* and its continuation, substituting local data concerning the region of Auxerre and Sens with particulars concerning Touraine. For the years 1221-1227 it provides original information written down by a contemporary chronicler, who - as has been convincingly argued - must have been a canon of the chapter of Saint-Martin in Tours. One editor, André Salmon, has tentatively identified him with canon Péan Gatineau (or Paganus Gatinelli)(† around 1227), who belonged to a local noble family and is the known author of both hagiographical and liturgical works.³⁸ Editor Brial suspected that the author may have been involved in or connected to the royal administration because of the detailed information his chronicle contains regarding governmental affairs. Brial also notes

³⁸ André Salmon, ed., *Recueil de chroniques de Touraine. Collection de documents sur l'histoire de Touraine 1* (Tours: Imprimerie Ladevèze, 1854), xvi-xxxviii.

that the chronicle served as the main source for the *Gesta Ludovici VIII*.³⁹ The collegial church of Saint-Martin and its domain in any case had always formed a royal enclave within the town of Tours, which itself together with the entire Touraine region was Angevin territory until its incorporation in the royal domain by Philip II August in 1202-1203 at the expense of the English king John Lackland. In the wake of this conquest the French king intensified his control over Saint-Martin's.⁴⁰

The passage in the Chronicle of Tours regarding Robert of Courtenay's reign - under the year 1225 - again deserves to be quoted in full:

In Graecia vero insurrexerunt Graeci, Latinorum meritis exigentibus, in Latinos. Nam, cum Robertus Constantinopolis imperator, juvenili admodum animo et aetate, uxores Graecorum et filias saepius violasset, terramque necnon et ecclesias innumeris thesaurorum copiis denudasset, eisque malis dispersis, fluxui et luxui deditus medicasset, Graeci, ut credimus, divina suffulti potentia, in imperatoris stolidi detrimentum magnam partem imperii, expulsis et occisis Latinis, suo dominio subjugarunt. Et nisi pius et misericors Dominus assueto pietatis oculo post flagella suum populum respexisset, et religio christianae fidei in illis partibus deperisset, et ipsa Constantinopolis civitas in Graecorum manibus devenisset. Quia, dum idem imperator ita dissolute viveret, in tantum quamdam Graeculam adamavit, quod eam, maledictione cujusdam Graeci presbyteri pro benedictione suscepta, clanculo desponsavit et ad imperium coronavit; et ob hoc Graeci, qui in Constantinopolitana civitate a captione ejusdem urbis usque ad haec tempora fuerant quasi servuli sub

³⁹ Michel Jean Joseph Brial, ed., *Recueil des Historiens des Gaules et de la France* 18 (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1822), xi-xii.

⁴⁰ Hélène Noizet, *La fabrique de la ville. Espaces et sociétés à Tours (IXe-XIIIe siècle)* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2007), 334-335.

dominio Latinorum, antiquum superbiae supercilium erexerunt, et forinsecis Graecorum principibus mandaverunt quod Constantinopolitanam urbem omnesque Latinos eis traderent, si clam de nocte usque ad portas urbis cum armatorum manu valida pervenirent. Quo comperto, Latini, nec aetati parentes nec sexui, in Graecos irruunt, omnesque quos possunt assequi, perforant gladiis et occidunt. Caede tamen completa, Latini ad palatium imperatoris properant, et focariam illam Graecam, quam imperator duxerat, a lectulo imperatoris extrahunt et flagellant, eique naso cum labro superiori in imperatoris praesentia detruncantes, sic a Graecorum superbia civitas liberatur, et in ea, Latinis pro fide certantibus, christiana fides integre conservatur.

In a way the quoted passage is the most informative source concerning Robert's reign. It is however to be used with caution, since it contains some major inaccuracies and internal contradictions. First of all the territorial losses are all ascribed to Robert's reign. In an earlier passage emperor Peter of Courtenay's capture in 1217 by Theodore Doukas is cited, but the chronicler does not mention the beginning of Doukas' successful offensive against the kingdom of Thessalonike in the wake of this. Secondly the territorial losses under Robert are presented wrongly as the consequence of a rebellion by the *Graeci* within the empire against the emperor, and not as the outcome of a confrontation with two neighbouring and independent rulers, emperor John III Vatatzes of Nicaea and Theodore Doukas of Epiros, although in Latin eyes the latter in 1221 was no doubt still considered to be a renegade vassal. Thirdly, there's an inconsistency in the description of Robert's treatment of the *Graeci*: on the one hand before the rise of the rebellion he is said to have greatly offended them (abuse of women, steep taxes, no respect for church possessions, etc.), but on the other hand his later marriage to a *Graecula* - and her coronation as empress - is said to have been the cause of

great arrogance on their part. This raises the following question: did the emperor in general adopt a benevolent attitude vis-à-vis his Byzantine subjects, or did he not.

It would seem to us that the chronicler's accusations concerning Robert's supposed maltreatment of the Byzantines are not very credible. The use of ecclesiastical revenues to support the needs of the empire is in other sources, namely in papal letters, only attested after the catastrophic events of 1224-1225.⁴¹ Before this date we find no other trace of the (mis)use of church property by the emperor in the papal registers or elsewhere. On the contrary in 1221 Robert confirmed the agreement concerning the ecclesiastical possessions in the empire, which had been concluded in 1219 by papal legate John Colonna, cardinal-priest of Saint Praxedis, and regent and sebastokrator Cono I of Béthune. High taxes, the misuse of state funds, and the abuse of women are not confirmed by any other source. They are rather general complaints and the latter - together with the accusation concerning church property - in our opinion would seem to indicate that the chronicler foremost wanted to present the collapse of the empire within a moral and edifying framework:⁴² the emperor gravely sinned and was punished for it by losing virtually all of his lands.⁴³ If this line of reasoning holds true, then

⁴¹ Tautu, *Acta Honorii III et Gregorii IX*, n° 128, n° 157.

⁴² The overall vagueness of the passage similarly supports this interpretation; - for example apart from Robert and Constantinople no persons or places are mentioned by name.

⁴³ On medieval chroniclers sacrificing historical truth to moral truth: Suzanne Fleischman, "On the representation of history and fiction in the Middle Ages," *History and Theory* 22 (1983), 278-310. While in the Old French continuations any possible responsibility of the Latin barons for the empire's collapse under Robert is as said evaded by simply relegating the major losses to his father's reign, in the chronicle of Tours the barons are acquitted because the phrase *Latinorum meritis exigentibus* in concreto solely applies to the *stolidus* emperor for only his sins are mentioned.

there is no longer any plausible reason to assume that emperor Robert' pursued an offensive policy vis-à-vis the Byzantine aristocracy and people within his empire.⁴⁴

And then the real conflict emerges: by some - a group to which the chronicler's informant(s) must have belonged - the emperor was clearly deemed to have been much too benevolent towards the Byzantine aristocracy and population. The *superbia Graecorum*, the arrogance of the Constantinopolitan Byzantines, is indeed a central element in the passage under consideration. For this group, no doubt to be identified with the faction that we encountered in our discussion of the quoted and remarkably similar passage in the continuations of William of Tyre, the emperor's marriage with a *Graecula* - note the slighting diminutive - appears to have been seen as the culmination of the emperor's Byzantine friendly policy, and as such was insupportable for them. This was no doubt all the more so because the marriage was concluded after the major losses in 1224-1225, that caused many barons to lose their fiefdoms and lordships, and without consulting them.⁴⁵ All this must have acerbated their feelings vis-à-vis the remaining Byzantines within the Latin empire and heightened their distrust of this group.⁴⁶ In such a paranoid atmosphere a - real or imagined or even concocted, small- or large-scale - Byzantine conspiracy was all this faction needed to 'save' the empire

⁴⁴ In this context it should be remembered that no other source in fact speaks of any general maltreatment of the Byzantine aristocracy and population, or of a Byzantine rebellion because of it against emperor Robert (see also note 45).

⁴⁵ The term *clanculo* - or *coiement* in the Old French continuations (see supra) - in our opinion should indeed be understood in this sense.

⁴⁶ After the battle of Poimaneon (1224) a possible marriage between the emperor and Eudokia Laskaris, daughter of the late Theodore I Laskaris and sister-in-law of John III Vatatzes, was once more discussed, indicating that Robert was not married at the time. The negotiations were only abandoned for good after Vatatzes had reopened his offensive against Latin Asia Minor, following Theodore Doukas' conquest of Latin Thessalonike. See inter alia: Philippe Mouskes, *Chronique rimée*, v. 23195-23202, p. 409. Georgios Akropolites, *Historia*, §22-24. Van Tricht, *The Latin Renovatio of Byzantium*, 370.

from the emperor's inadequate rule by taking drastic measures against those deemed responsible for the miserable state the empire had degraded to. We should however bear in mind that no other source confirms this true or false conspiracy story and the accompanying pogrom against the Byzantine population of Constantinople.

The Byzantine chronicler Georgios Akropolites (°1217-†1282) for example, who during these years lived in the city together with his parents, does not make the slightest reference to any such incident. As we shall see further on he may have had his reasons to paint a rather mild picture of Latin rule in Constantinople. Nevertheless it is hard to see how he could have completely disregarded a massacre as described by the author of the *Chronicon Turonense*. It then seems plausible that such a general bloodbath never took place and that the latter chronicler is greatly exaggerating, portraying the barons' deeds as a heroic attempt to preserve the true Christian faith in the queen of cities. Still in our view it is rather likely that in the margin of the action of a number of Latin barons against emperor Robert - and against his wife and his mother-in-law - some targeted Byzantine aristocrats and citizens suffered as well. To be noted is that the canon from Tours paints a misleading picture of the position of the *Graeci* before Robert's rule, calling them *servuli*. In reality the first two emperors, Baldwin I of Flanders/Hainaut and especially his brother Henry, had installed a regime that did not exclude Byzantines from the ranks of the great feudal princes and the highranking military commanders, court dignitaries or civil servants.⁴⁷

Our interpretation of the cited passage is of course greatly dependant upon the reality of Robert's marriage with a *Graeca*. In fact no other source confirms his marriage with a Byzantine woman. Several chroniclers - inter alia Philip Mouskes and Georgios Akropolites - do mention, ultimately unsuccessful, negotiations that took place in the years 1221-1224 between the Constantinopolitan and Nicaean courts regarding a possible marriage between the

⁴⁷ Van Tricht, *The Latin Renovatio of Byzantium*, 251-270.

emperor and Eudokia Laskaris, daughter of Theodore I Laskaris and sister-in-law of John III Vatatzes.⁴⁸ One might then suggest that the chronicler from Tours perhaps mistook news concerning these marriage discussions for an actual marriage. The quoted passage in the continuations of William of Tyre's chronicle however confirms that Robert did get married, although the woman in question is identified as the daughter of one Baldwin of Neuville. This does not have to present a problem, if we accept that this Baldwin a few years after the capture of Constantinople in April 1204 married a Byzantine woman. By 1224-1225 the hypothetical fruit of their union would have been a young woman of marriageable age of mixed descent. In the first months and years following the Latin conquest, and to be sure also in later years, several Latin-Byzantine marriages are attested. Still in 1204 the Byzantine magnate Theodore Branas married Agnes, daughter of the French king Louis VII.⁴⁹ Also in 1204 marquis Boniface of Montferrat, married Margaret, daughter of the Hungarian king Bela III and widow of the late emperor Isaac II Angelos.⁵⁰ In 1208 a natural daughter of emperor Henry of Flanders/Hainaut married Alexios Sthlabos, ruler of the Rhodopes region and a

⁴⁸ See references in note 45.

⁴⁹ As a child she had been betrothed to the imperial heir-apparent Alexios II Komnenos. She was sent to Constantinople in 1179 and from then on she lived in Byzantine court circles. After Alexios was murdered in 1182 she was married to the usurper Andronikos I Komnenos (†1185). According to Aubry of Trois-Fontaines by 1193 she had become the mistress of the mentioned Theodore Branas. See: Robert de Clari, *La conquête de Constantinople*, ed. Philippe Lauer, Les classiques de l'histoire de France au moyen âge 40 (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Edouard Champion, 1924), §53; Geoffroy de Villehardouin, *La conquête de Constantinople*, ed. Edmond Faral, 2 vols., Les classiques de l'histoire de France au moyen âge 18-19, 2nd ed. (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1961), §249, §403. Albericus Trium Fontium, *Chronica*, 870, 885.

⁵⁰ Villehardouin, *La conquête*, §262. Clari, *La conquête*, §99. See also: Luigi Tautu, "Margarethe di Ungheria imperatrice di Bisancio," *Antemurale* 3 (1956), 51-79.

member of the Bulgarian ruling family.⁵¹ In 1203, even before the crusader army had reached Constantinople, Thierry of Flanders, a natural son of count of Flanders and Vermandois Philip of Alsace (1177-1191), had already married a daughter of Isaac Komnenos, independent ruler of Cyprus in the years 1185-1191.⁵²

The cited marriages are to be situated in the upper reaches of the feudal and aristocratic hierarchy.⁵³ Our available sources indeed show an interest in the marriage and

⁵¹ Henry de Valenciennes, *Histoire de l'empereur Henri de Constantinople*, ed. Jean Longnon, Documents relatifs à l'histoire des croisades 2 (Paris: Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres, 1948), §545-549, §555-557.

⁵² Thierry married this lady because in that way he hoped to obtain a viable claim on the island of Cyprus. After this claim was rejected by Amalric of Lusignan, king of Jerusalem and Cyprus, he first travelled to the kingdom of Cilician Armenia and then to Constantinople. See: Wipertus Hugo Rudt de Collenberg, "L'empereur Isaac de Chypre et sa fille (1155-1207)," *Byzantion* 38 (1968), 123-179; Longnon, *Les compagnons de Villehardouin*, 145.

⁵³ Latin-Byzantine marriages are also attested in later years, for example: Narjot I of Toucy, attested in the empire from 1217 and regent in 1228 and again in 1238, married a daughter of Theodore Branas (Albericus Trium Fontium, *Chronica*, 885, 947; see also note 133); Anseau II of Cayeux, the son or close relative of the eponymous participant in the Fourth Crusade who obtained a prominent position at the imperial court, married Eudokia Laskaris (Georgios Akropolites, *Historia*, §24; on the Cayeux family: Longnon, *Les compagnons de Villehardouin*, 200); Isabella of Clermont (no doubt related to Macaire of Clermont, who is mentioned as witness in a 1219 charter by then regent Cono I of Béthune: Gottlieb L.F. Tafel & Georg M. Thomas, eds., *Urkunden zur älteren Handels- und Staatsgeschichte der Republik Venedig mit besonderer Beziehung auf Byzanz und die Levante*, 3 vols., Fontes Rerum Austriacarum. Diplomataria et Acta 12-14 (Wien: Kaiserlichen-königlichen Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1856-57), 2: n° 256) around 1228 married a further unidentified member of the Angelos family (Lucien Auvray et al., eds., *Les Registres de Grégoire IX*, 3 vols., Bibliothèque des Ecoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome. Deuxième Série 9 (Paris: Fontemoing, 1896-1907), 1: n° 1138). Imperial *meas doux* Philokales (attested in 1206-1214) appears to have been connected to the Venetian Navigaioso family (Van Tricht, *The Latin Renovatio of Byzantium*, 112, note 33). These and other elements clearly contradict Michael Angold's recent thesis that "marriage with native families played virtually no role in the Latin conquest and

family relations of this social group, but much less so in providing genealogical information concerning the somewhat less lofty lords and knights. There is in our view however no reason to assume that such marriages would not also have taken place at lower echelons of the social ladder.⁵⁴ One remaining problem however is the identification of Baldwin of Neuville. Villehardouin mentions a namesake who with many others perished at the battle of Adrianople in April 1205.⁵⁵ Longnon and others before him have assumed that this individual is to be identified with our Baldwin of Neuville, who according to the Old French continuations hailed from the county of Artois and was clearly deceased by the time of his daughter's marriage with Robert. In his biographical work on the participants of the Fourth Crusade the author has suggested that this name of origin is probably to be identified with Neuville-Vitasse near Arras. Longnon provides no further information concerning his background or antecedents.⁵⁶ If the Baldwin who died in April 1205 is indeed to be identified with the Baldwin of Neuville in the Old French continuations then this leaves rather limited time for a marriage with a Byzantine lady to take place and a daughter to be conceived, although it is of course not impossible.

settlement of the Greek lands". The author does not take into account all the prosopographical material available (Michael Angold, "The Latin Empire of Constantinople, 1204-1261: Marriage Strategies," in *Identities and Allegiances in the Eastern Mediterranean after 1204*, eds. Judith Herrin & Guillaume de Saint-Guillain (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), 60.

⁵⁴ Attested later in the thirteenth century are the *gasmouloi*, descendants of mixed Byzantine-Latin (often Venetian) marriages or unions. Emperor Michael VIII Paleologos (1258-1282) recruited them as mercenaries for his army (Mark C. Bartusis, *The late Byzantine army. Arms and society, 1204-1453* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 44).

⁵⁵ Villehardouin, *La conquête*, §361. This is the only mention of Baldwin in the entire chronicle.

⁵⁶ Longnon, *Les compagnons de Villehardouin*, 171 (*Le croisé qui périt lui aussi à la bataille d'Andrinople est vraisemblablement le 'chevalier d'Artois qui avoit a non Bauduins de Neuville'* [citing the Old French continuations of William of Tyre]).

Giselbert of Mons however in his *Chronicon Hanoniense* mentions that in 1185 count Baldwin VI of Hainaut retained a *Balduinus de Novavilla*, brother of *Eustachius*, as one of his *commilitones*, assigning feudal assets to him worth 300 pounds.⁵⁷ In a 1195 charter of Amalric of Lusignan, lord of Cyprus at the time, a *Balduinus de Nova Villa* appears as witness.⁵⁸ It is unclear whether this Baldwin is identical with the 1185 Baldwin or perhaps belonged to a branch of the family settled in the Latin East. Several other elements indeed indicate that a branch of the Neuville family did settle in Outremer in the second half of the twelfth century.⁵⁹ In 1168 a *Guago de Novavilla* already appears as one of the witnesses in a charter of king Amalric I of Jerusalem (1163-1174).⁶⁰ The *Lignages d'Outremer* mention one *Estace de Neuvelles* who married Orable, daughter of Walter III, lord of Beirut and later of La Blanchegarde (attested between 1168 en 1179), and whose grandson was lord of *Quevides* (Kividhes) on Cyprus.⁶¹ The same source also mentions one *Bauduin de Nevilles* who married Helvis, daughter of John of Antioch, marshall of Cyprus and attested between 1232 and 1248.⁶² The persons mentioned in the *Lignages*, the 1195 Baldwin and the 1168 Guago were

⁵⁷ Gislebert de Mons, *La chronique*, ed. Léon Vanderkindere, Recueil de textes pour servir à l'étude de l'histoire de Belgique (Brussels: Commission Royale d'Histoire, 1904), 175, 328. In the context of the count's passing in 1195 the chronicler mentions Baldwin of Neuville once more, listing him among the comital *commilitones*. The editor, like Longnon, identifies *Novavilla* with Neuville-Vitasse near Arras.

⁵⁸ Hans Eberhard Mayer, ed., *Die Urkunden der Lateinischen Könige von Jerusalem*, 4 vols., MGH Diplomata Regum Latinorum Hierosolymitanorum 1-4 (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, Hannover, 2010), 2: n° 589.

⁵⁹ See also Emmanuel Guillaume Rey, *Les familles d'Outremer de Du Cange* (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1869), 570-571.

⁶⁰ Mayer, *Die Urkunden der Lateinischen Könige von Jerusalem*, 2: n° 332.

⁶¹ *Lignages d'Outremer*, Marie-Adélaïde Nielen, ed., Documents relatifs à l'histoire des croisades 18 (Paris: Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres, 2003), 75. Emmanuel Rey, "Les seigneurs de Barut," *Revue de l'Orient Latin* 4 (1896), 17-18.

⁶² *Lignages d'Outremer*, 127. Rey, *Les familles d'Outremer de Du Cange*, 512.

no doubt related to the Neuilles in Flanders-Hainaut: this is borne out by the fact that all their first names ran in the family.⁶³ In addition the French version of the Chronicle of Morea mentions a family *de Nivele* as relocating from Constantinople to the principality of Achaia after 1261. Considering that in the same passage the chronicle gives a distorted version of several names of origin, the cited toponym may be identified as Neuville.⁶⁴ This would then indicate that the Neuville family was part of the Latin elite of Constantinople in the entire period 1204-1261.

These fragmentary genealogical data in our opinion show that the 1205 Baldwin doesn't necessarily has to be identified with the Baldwin of Neuville mentioned in the Old French continuations and whose daughter emperor Robert married, thus leaving more time for his marriage with a Byzantine lady to take place and for a child to be conceived. The identity of the woman in question further remains unknown, but it would seem a safe assumption that she belonged to the Byzantine metropolitan - perhaps even former imperial - aristocracy which was well represented in Latin Constantinople.⁶⁵ Her implicit portrayal in the Old French continuations as being influential in emperor Robert's entourage - hence the Latin barons hatred against her - would appear to confirm her high standing. Her husband's position in the empire is likewise unknown, but it should be noted that in the context of the Latin take-over of Byzantium many modest knights and lords managed to obtain large estates and high

⁶³ In a charter datable circa 1177-1191 the sons of the 1185 Baldwin of Neuville's brother Eustache are mentioned: the *milites Wago, Nicolaus* and one *clericus* named *Balduinus* (André Duchesne, *Histoire généalogique de la maison de Béthune. Preuves* (Paris: Cramoisy, 1639), 37). It is unclear whether this *Wago* is to be identified with the 1168 *Guago*.

⁶⁴ *Livre de la conquête de la princée de l'Amorée. Chronique de Morée (1204-1305)*, ed. Jean Longnon (Paris: Librairie Renouard. Société de l'histoire de France, 1911), §87.

⁶⁵ Van Tricht, *The Latin Renovatio of Byzantium*, 151-153, 251-270. For a male member of the imperial Angelos family present in Constantinople around 1228: see note 53.

offices, making them eligible potential husbands for daughters of Byzantine aristocratic families willing to cooperate with the Latin elite.⁶⁶ In any case we now hope to have plausibly argued that Robert's marriage to a woman of partially Byzantine descent actually took place and is no invention or mistake of the author of the *Chronicon Turonense*.

Other voices: Philippe Mouskes, Georgios Akropolites & The Chronicle of Morea

The negative and with regard to modern historiography very influential depiction of emperor Robert in the three chronicles discussed, which in our opinion represents the view of a particular political faction of the Latin aristocracy in the capital and the surrounding imperial quarter, is compensated by several other narrative sources that treat Robert's person and rule somewhat differently and in a more nuanced fashion. Indeed, not all (near) contemporary chroniclers held Robert personally and exclusively responsible for the calamities that befell the empire. However, up until now these voices have not attracted much attention in this context.

Philippe Mouskes is one chronicler who doesn't take a negative stance vis-à-vis the person of emperor Robert. Nothing much is known about this author, except that he was a citizen of Tournai living in the first half of the thirteenth century. His verse chronicle

⁶⁶ Two examples: Macaire of Saint-Mènehould, a rather modest fiefholder from the county of Champagne, rose to the position of imperial *panetarius* (Longnon, *Les compagnons de Villehardouin*, 45); Gerard of Walcourt, who belonged to a family of local lords in the county of Namur (and who was a relative - perhaps a brother - of the already mentioned Thierry II of Walcourt), became a provincial governor under emperor Henry of Flanders/Hainaut (1206-1216)(Lahaye, *Cartulaire de la commune de Walcourt*, xxii; Van Tricht, *The Latin Renovatio of Byzantium*, 145-146).

comprises a history of the kings of France, starting with the fall of Troy and ending in 1243.⁶⁷ Robert is introduced in the chronicle in a neutral way when Mouskes mentions the offspring of the imperial couple Peter of Courtenay and Yolande of Flanders/Hainaut.⁶⁸ His election as emperor - after his brother Philip of Courtenay, marquis of Namur, had declined - is, in contrast with Aubry of Trois-Fontaines, not criticised. His journey to Constantinople is described as politically fruitful: the strengthening of the good relations with both the Hungarian and Bulgarian king is highlighted.⁶⁹ In the capital he is well received by his barons, who at the time under the leadership of Gérard La Truie were successfully fighting the Nicaean emperor Theodore Laskaris, who after the death of empress Yolande whose daughter Mary he had married, had claimed the emperorship for himself. The conflict with Laskaris is ended in an honorable way: a marriage alliance is negotiated, whereby Robert is to marry Theodore's daughter.⁷⁰

Mouskes then paints a distorted picture of the emperor's two-front-war with Theodore Doukas of Epiros and John III Vatatzes of Nicaea. Not anywhere however does emperor Robert receive any blame for his handling of these threats or for the defeats and losses sustained.⁷¹ In fact none of his barons, of whom many were either killed or captured in

⁶⁷ Martine De Reu, "Philippe Mousket, Chronique rimée. Historia regum Francorum," in: *The Narrative Sources from the Medieval Low Countries. De verhalende bronnen uit de Zuidelijke Nederlanden* (Brussels: Koninklijke Commissie voor Geschiedenis, since 2009 (url: www.narrative-sources.be, consulted on June 7th, 2012).

⁶⁸ Philippe Mouskes, *Chronique rimée*, 403: *Deus fuis orent, bien m'en sai ciert / L'un Filippou, l'autre Robert and Robers ses freres, ce fu drois / Ot grant tiere et viles tot à plain.*

⁶⁹ Philippe Mouskes, *Chronique rimée*, 404.

⁷⁰ Philippe Mouskes, *Chronique rimée*, 405-407. On the conflict around 1220-1221 with Laskaris: Van Tricht, *The Latin Renovatio of Byzantium*, 365.

⁷¹ Philippe Mouskes, *Chronique rimée*, 408-409: *"Dont recommencièrent la guerre / Li Coumain par toute la terre / L'empereres Robiers le sot / Et al plustost k'il onques pot / I envoya ses cevaliers / Et des plus preus, et des plus fiers"*. Here the chronicler appears to confuse Theodore Doukas (elsewhere referred to as *li Commenius*)

battle, receive any personal blame, except perhaps for Nicolas of Mainvault. Mouskes tells us that he was vanquished and captured with his fellow commander Thierry of Walcourt, because the enemy successfully attacked them by surprise (*gattiet i furent et soupris*). In this context Mainvault is explicitly mentioned as *mariscaus*, whose duty it usually was to command the advance guard. By doing so the chronicler may have wanted to attribute the responsibility for the defeat implicitly to Mainvault, who as presumed leader of the vanguard apparently failed to anticipate the destructive surprise attack. This interpretation is reinforced by the fact that Mouskes says of Mainvault that *il ot cuer haut*, which may be translated as that he was haughty.⁷² His colleague Walcourt on the contrary is praised (*qui mult estoit preus et cieris*).

It is further remarkable that apart from an embassy to the French king Louis VIII requesting aid for the beleaguered empire, nothing more is mentioned by Mouskes concerning Robert's reign. The entire marriage episode (and with it the tensions between the emperor and his barons or between Latins and Byzantines) - a pivotal element in the Old French continuations and in the Chronicle of Tours - is completely absent. In our opinion this is no coincidence. The chronicler is on the whole rather well informed on Robert's reign, his narrative being both the longest and the fullest among the chronicles discussed, notwithstanding some confusion on certain points. It seems rather unlikely then that he would have known nothing about the emperor's marriage. Mouskes in our view consciously chose not to include these rather controversial events. This would fit in well with one of his chronicle's main purposes: glorifying the kings of France and their lineage, to which Robert - a great grandson of Louis VI - belonged. But it also may have something to do with the nature with *li Coumain*; more on the chronicler's confused account of events: Van Tricht, *The Latin Renovatio of Byzantium*, 368-369 (note 63).

⁷² François Halma, *Le grand dictionnaire Français et Flamand*, 4th ed. (Amsterdam: Wetsteins & Smith, 1733), 515.

of Mouskes' sources. Although it is unknown from whom the chronicler got his information, his fairly positive stance toward Robert may well be a reflection of the views of those informants, who may have been people belonging to the retinues of the emperor's closest and trusted collaborators.

Georgios Akropolites likewise doesn't take a negative stance vis-à-vis Robert. The Byzantine chronicler, who was born in Constantinople and spent his youth there with his parents until at the age of sixteen he was sent to Nicaea in 1233 to complete his education, in fact mentions him only a few times. The first mention of Robert occurs when Akropolites, after having briefly narrated emperor Peter of Courtenay's defeat by Theodore Komnenos of Epiros in 1217, sketches the family relations between the successive Latin emperors. The chronicler names Robert indistinctively as one of the children of the imperial couple Peter and Yolande of Flanders/Hainaut, adding that both he and his brother Baldwin ruled over Constantinople as emperors, since their elder brother Philip had declined the imperial office.⁷³ A little further Akropolites mentions that the Nicaean emperor Theodore I Laskaris took as his third wife the sister of emperor Robert, who is presented as the immediate successor of his uncle emperor Henry of Flanders/Hainaut (1206-1216).⁷⁴ The chronicler is mistaken here of course, since it was the imperial couple Peter and Yolande who succeeded Henry, and it was Yolande who married her daughter Mary of Courtenay to Theodore.⁷⁵

⁷³ Georgios Akropolites, *Historia*, §14.

⁷⁴ Georgios Akropolites, *Historia*, §15.

⁷⁵ Samuel Löwenfeld, "Une lettre de l'impératrice Marie de Constantinople," in: *Archives de l'Orient latin*, 2 vols. (Paris: Société de L'Orient Latin, 1884), 2/2: 256-257. Adolf Schaube, "Eine bisher unbekante Regentin des lateinischen Kaiserreiches," *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung* 8 (1887), 587-594.

In the next relevant passage Akropolites again presents Robert as the immediate successor of emperor Henry of Flanders/Hainaut in Constantinople. In doing so he compares both sovereigns evaluating Robert's rule as *malakoteron*.⁷⁶ The two translators of Akropolites' chronicle, Wilhelm Blum and Ruth Macrides, differ on how this crucial term should be interpreted. Macrides translates as 'rather feebly', while Blum opts for 'gentler' or 'friendlier' (*sanftiger*).⁷⁷ When the sentence in question is isolated, both options are of course perfectly arguable since the word *malakos* does carry this twofold meaning. However, when the broader context is taken in consideration it seems clear to us that Akropolites intended to say that Robert pursued a gentler, less aggressive policy in comparison with his as more belligerent depicted uncle. In the immediately preceding chapters the chronicler discusses Theodore I Laskaris' reign, in particular his unsuccessful confrontation with emperor Henry, whose good relations with the Byzantine aristocracy and population are mentioned in a digression. Next are treated Theodore's very different relations with the new emperor Robert: again the Nicaean emperor's marriage with Robert's sister is mentioned, and treated more elaborately - and very critically - is the proposed marriage between Theodore's daughter Eudokia and Robert, which however did not materialize because of Laskaris' death shortly afterwards. It is clear that Akropolites with regard to Theodore's reign wanted to create a contrast between a policy of confrontation under Henry, and a policy of rapprochement under Robert.

In one last passage, focusing on the accession of emperor John of Brienne (around 1229-1231), Akropolites mentions Robert's death which he situates - incorrectly it would

⁷⁶ Georgios Akropolites, *Historia*, §18.

⁷⁷ George Akropolites, *The History. Translated with an Introduction and Commentary*, trans. Ruth Macrides, Oxford Studies in Byzantium (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), §18, 157. Georgios Akropolites, *Die Chronik*, trans. Wilhelm Blum, Bibliothek der griechischen Literatur 28 (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1989), §18, 86.

seem - as having taken place on Euboea.⁷⁸ The chronicler gives no hint whatsoever regarding the circumstances of his voyage there. The sharp conflict between Robert and some of his barons, attested in the Old French continuations of William of Tyre - where it is the cause of Robert's journey - and in the *Chronicon Turonense*, is completely absent. Neither does the chronicler, as has already been seen, mention any pogrom against the Byzantine population of Constantinople, as does the chronicler from Tours. From this we deduced that a largescale massacre probably never took place, since Akropolites could not have ignored such a dramatic event. This however does not exclude the possibility of more smallscale violence against Byzantines in the context discussed. Akropolites may have chosen to withhold such information in view of the fact that his parents in 1204 had elected to remain in the capital under the new Latin imperial dynasty.⁷⁹ It is no doubt partly in light of this fact that his assessment of emperor Henry's rule (1205/1206-1216) as benevolent towards the Byzantine elite and population, stressing that many *Romaioi* were accepted among his dignitaries and in his armies, needs to be seen.⁸⁰ In a similar way the mention of the supposed outbreak of violence against the Byzantine aristocracy in the aftermath of the Latin losses around 1224-1225 perhaps would have made his family's choice much less understandable in the eyes of his public. In this respect we must add that Akropolites' account originally must have

⁷⁸ Georgios Akropolites, *Historia*, §27. As has been seen the discussed passage of the Old French continuations of William of Tyre states that Robert, having fallen sick, died in Achaia. Since this part of the continuations were written around 1227-1231 (see supra), it seems sensible to prefer this information over Akropolites writing after 1261.

⁷⁹ Georgios Akropolites, *Historia*, §33. It was only in the early 1230's that Akropolites' father - who was a wealthy man employing a large staff, and who appears to have entertained rather close relations with the Latin rulers - decided to send his son to the imperial court at Nicaea, while he himself remained behind in Constantinople where he died a few years later.

⁸⁰ Georgios Akropolites, *Historia*, 16-17.

contained more information regarding Robert's reign. In the here discussed passage (§27) the chronicler states that he has already mentioned the emperor's death earlier, but in the text as it is preserved today Robert's death is mentioned in no other chapter.⁸¹ We can only guess what additional information Akropolites had initially intended to share and why the chronicler, assuming that it was not an early copyist who altered the text, chose to revise his work in this respect. Perhaps Akropolites originally did include a chapter concerning Robert's Byzantine marriage and the resulting troubles, but then at a later compositional stage deemed this information to be too contentious or delicate.

Finally it is to be noted that Akropolites doesn't hold Robert in any way personally responsible for the lost battles or the territorial losses in the years 1224-1225. The emperor is for example not mentioned in any way in the context of the battle of Poimaneon and its aftermath: it is the Laskaris brothers who lead the Constantinopolitan army and who suffered defeat at the hands of John III Vatatzes.⁸² Altogether Akropolites, in the preserved version of his work, devotes only passing attention to emperor Robert's person, creating a fragmentary image of him that is rather neutral. This cursory attention should not be interpreted in the sense that Akropolites considered Robert to be a political featherweight, especially since the chronicler consciously removed certain information regarding this particular emperor and more generally since the reigns of all Latin emperors are treated very sketchily. Even his treatment of the reign of the well regarded Henry of Flanders/Hainaut is confined to a few anecdotes. This is of course perfectly understandable because the chronicler's obvious focus is the empire of Nicaea and its rulers. The Latin emperors in most instances only figure in his history when it is somehow relevant from a Nicaean point of view.

⁸¹ On the unfinished state in which Akropolites' chronicle came down to us, lacking thorough revision: George Akropolites, *The History*, trans. Macrides, 31-32.

⁸² Georgios Akropolites, *Historia*, §19.

In the different versions of the *Chronicle of Morea* emperor Robert again is not portrayed in a negative light. Of course the chronicle is a somewhat special case. First of all it is a much later source than the other texts discussed. Jacoby has plausibly dated the lost original on which the preserved four main versions (French, Greek, Aragonese and Italian) are based to around 1292-1320. We will focus our attention on the two earliest preserved versions, the French (circa 1341-1346) and the Greek (circa 1341/46-1377/88).⁸³ Secondly the 'emperor Robert' character in the chronicle is rather problematic in the sense that, as long has been recognized, it appears to be a rather unhistorical amalgamation of the emperors Henry of Flanders/Hainaut (1206-1216) and Robert of Courtenay himself.

For example the parliament where prince Geoffroy I of Villehardouin (1208-1228/30) recognized Henry's imperial suzerainty, and which in reality took place in 1209 at Ravennika, in the different versions of the chronicle becomes a parliament at Larissa where Geoffroy II of Villehardouin (1228/30-1246) - as the first ruler of Morea to do so - recognized the suzerainty of one 'emperor Robert', who in other passages is identified as the brother of the first Latin emperor Baldwin of Flanders during whose reign he made conquests in Asia Minor, two elements clearly compatible with Henry's biography, who indeed was Baldwins brother and conquered the region around Adramyttion in 1204-1205.⁸⁴ On the other hand, the reason why

⁸³ David Jacoby, "Quelques considérations sur les versions de la 'Chronique de Morée'," *Journal des Savants* (1968), 147-155, 184. Shawcross recently dated what she calls 'the common ancestor' of the four versions to the mid 1320's, but does not seem to take into account that this text itself may well have been based on an earlier *Urversion* of the chronicle (Teresa Shawcross, *The Chronicle of Morea. Historiography in Crusader Greece. Oxford Studies in Byzantium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 42-47).

⁸⁴ *Chronique de Morée*, §73-79. *The Chronicle of Morea. A History in Political Verse, relating the establishment of feudalism in Greece by The Franks in the thirteenth century*, ed. John Schmitt, Byzantine Texts (London, 1904), v. 1171-1221. On the Parliament of Ravennika in 1209: Valenciennes, *Histoire de l'empereur Henri*,

the parliament at Larissa supposedly took place was to restore peace between 'emperor Robert' and prince Geoffroy (II), because the latter had captured and married his daughter, who originally had been destined to be the bride of the King of Aragon.⁸⁵ This clearly alludes to the actual marriage between Robert's sister Agnes of Courtenay and Geoffroy II, which in reality was arranged by empress Yolande of Flanders/Hainaut (1217-1219) during her stay in the principality of Achaia in 1217.⁸⁶

Be all this as it may, the point is that the 'emperor Robert' character in both the French and the Greek versions of the chronicle is positively portrayed throughout. He is mentioned as having made successful conquests in Asia Minor during his brother Baldwin's reign and his wars with the Nicaean emperor Theodore Laskaris are implicitly presented as honorable.⁸⁷ He is upset when prince Geoffroy II marries his daughter without his assent, but is ultimately receptive to Geoffroy's proposal for a reconciliation and shows himself very generous vis-à-vis the prince inter alia making him *grant senescal de l'empire* or *mezas domestikos*.⁸⁸ Later in the chronicle it is again implied that Robert had been on good terms with his vassal Geoffroy II.⁸⁹ Importantly, it is not Robert who is accused of bad government, but - though only in the Greek version - it is his successor Baldwin II who is explicitly reproached for mismanaging the empire.⁹⁰

§667-671. Longnon, *L'empire latin*, 72-75. On the probable reality of an expedition near Larissa under emperor Robert (in the context of the defense of the Kingdom of Thessalonike): Van Tricht, *The Latin Renovatio of Byzantium*, 380-381.

⁸⁵ *Chronique de Morée*, §177-187. *The Chronicle of Morea*, v. 2472-2626.

⁸⁶ *Chronique d'Ernoult et de Bernard le trésorier*, 392. Van Tricht, *The Latin Renovatio of Byzantium*, 179.

⁸⁷ *Chronique de Morée*, §73-79. *The Chronicle of Morea*, v. 1171-1222.

⁸⁸ See references in note 84.

⁸⁹ *Chronique de Morée*, §444. *The Chronicle of Morea*, v. 6301-6330.

⁹⁰ *The Chronicle of Morea*, v. 1272-1276.

The foregoing leads us to conclude that in the mind of the author of the chronicle - to some extent to be considered as representing the Achaian elite - no negative connotations appear to have been attached to the memory of the historical emperor Robert. This may be related to the close family ties that existed between the courts of Achaia and Constantinople: as has been seen prince Geoffroy II had married Robert's sister Agnes and thus was his brother-in-law (and of course also of Robert's successor and younger brother emperor Baldwin II). Rodd suggests that the monastery of Blachernae near Klarentsa may have been founded to contain the tomb of Robert, who died during his stay in Achaia on his way back from Rome to his capital (November 1227), and Longnon, adopting Rodd's theory, hypothesises that Agnes played an instrumental role in the foundation. However it may be, she may at the Achaian court, and among the local aristocracy, anyhow have been influential in the construction of her brother's memory in favourable terms.⁹¹

Emperor Robert of Courtenay: a re-evaluation

In our ensuing re-evaluation of Robert's reign we would like to combine two complementary angles. First we pose the question whether the emperor was indeed the passive or inane ruler as portrayed in current historiography, which as has been seen is largely founded on a limited number of chronicle passages that tentatively can be traced back to a specific political faction among the Constantinopolitan barons. Secondly we try to assess the Byzantine calibre of Robert's emperorship, as we have established that the relations between the Latin and Byzantine components of the elite in Constantinople and the surrounding imperial quarter were a critical issue during his reign.

⁹¹ Rennel Rodd, *The Princes of Achaia and the Chronicles of Morea. A Study of Greece in the Middle Ages*, 2 vols. (London: Edward Arnold, 1907), 1: 141-142. Longnon, *L'empire latin*, 168.

Robert of Courtenay's ascension to the imperial throne was somewhat unexpected. As a younger son of Peter of Courtenay and Yolande of Flanders/Hainaut he had never been first in line to inherit the lion's share of his parents' lands or dignities.⁹² As was the case in Byzantium before 1204 the imperial succession was not laid down in any formal way, but nevertheless heredity and primogeniture were the guiding principles.⁹³ In this way in choosing a new emperor after the death of empress Yolande in 1219, the Constantinopolitan barons initially opted for her oldest son Philip, who in 1216 had already succeeded his parents in the marquisat of Namur and the lordship of Courtenay in France when they had departed for Constantinople.⁹⁴ At that time Robert had only received a number of lesser properties described by Philippe Mouskes as *grant tieres et viles tot a plain* situated in between the towns of Douai and Bouchain in the county of Flanders. Possibly Robert's possessions are to be equated with the dowry of 1000 *librata* (situated in various parts of the county of Flanders), or part of it, that Yolande had received from her brother Baldwin IX/VI of Flanders/Hainaut in 1200 in the context of her marriage to Peter of Courtenay.⁹⁵

⁹² The Chronicle of Tours mentions that Robert was still young (*aetate juvenem*) at the time when he became emperor (*Chronicon Turonense*, 310), which suggests that he was born around or shortly before 1200.

⁹³ Van Tricht, *The Latin Renovatio of Byzantium*, 274-275, 293-295.

⁹⁴ See Venetian podestà Jacopo Tiepolo's letter of December 1219: Tafel & Thomas, *Urkunden*, 2: 220, n° 257: *Sciatis pro certo quod barones palam dicunt et manifestant quod ipsi iuraverunt dominae imperatrici et suis heredibus et quod pro certo dicunt quod habent pro domino et imperatore Philippum filium eiusdem dominae imperatricis.*

⁹⁵ Walter Prevenier, ed., *De oorkonden van de graven van Vlaanderen (1191 - aanvang 1206)*, 3 vols., *Verzameling van de Akten der Belgische vorsten 5* (Brussels: Koninklijke Commissie voor Geschiedenis, 1964-1971), 2: 498-499, n° 235. Yolande was inter alia to obtain 100 *librata* in Aniche, a locality situated in between the mentioned towns of Douai and Bouchain. The other components of Yolande's dowry were situated in Valenciennes, Onnaing and Quaroble (both near Valenciennes), and in the castellany of Bruges.

Robert's situation was comparable with that of other younger scions of a princely lineage, for example his uncle Henry of Flanders/Hainaut, who was granted the same amount of land by his older brother Baldwin (IX/VI).⁹⁶ To our knowledge Robert does not appear in any charters by either his niece and suzerain Jeanne, countess of Flanders/Hainaut (1205-1244), or by his brother Philip. Apart from the fact that the number of preserved relevant charters is rather small because of the limited timeframe (1216-1220), this anyhow does not exclude that he may have played some role at the courts of his niece or his brother. The contemporary chronicler Reinerus, a monk from the benedictine abbey of Saint James in Liège, calls Robert *comes Namurcensis* in an entry describing his departure for Romania.⁹⁷ This may simply be a mistake or - perhaps - an indication of the fact that he was quite a prominent figure in the marquisat. Likewise the fact that Robert, in the context of the war between countess Jeanne and her sister Margaret's husband Bouchard of Avesnes, at one time was captured and kept prisoner by the latter (and eventually released without ransom), may indicate that he held a position of some importance at the court of his niece. In any case it shows that he was actively involved in this conflict, wherein his brother Philip was also involved as his suzerain Jeanne's ally since Bouchard was aided by Waleran, count of Luxembourg, who himself claimed the county of Namur on behalf of his wife Ermesinde.⁹⁸ Finally a probably early fourteenth-century copist of Guillaume de Nangis' Latin chronicle states that Peter and Yolande on their departure for Constantinople left both their sons - from

⁹⁶ Filip Van Tricht, "De jongelingenjaren van een keizer van Konstantinopel: Hendrik van Vlaanderen en Henegouwen (1177-1204)," *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 111 (1998), 198-201.

⁹⁷ Reinerus, *Annales Sancti Jacobi Leodiensis*, ed. Georg Heinrich Pertz, MGH SS 16 (Hannover: Impensis Bibliopolii Aulici Hahniani, 1859), 678.

⁹⁸ Philippe Mouskes, *Chronique rimée*, v. 23221-23224, 23233-23234. Charles Duvivier, *La querelle des d'Avesnes et des Dampierre jusqu'à la mort de Jean d'Avesnes (1257)*, 2 vols. (Brussels: Librairie Européenne C. Muquardt, 1894), 1: 73-74.

the context it is clear that Philip and Robert are alluded to - behind in Namur, which again might be taken as an, admittedly late, indication of a position of some prominence for Robert in the marquisat alongside his brother.⁹⁹

Philip II, marquis of Namur (1216-1226), declined the Constantinopolitan barons' offer and - according to the Old French continuations of William of Tyre - told them to accept his brother Robert as heir to the throne. The Chronicle of Tours states that the choice for Robert was made *cum assensu Regis Francie*.¹⁰⁰ The close link between the context in which the chronicle was produced and the French royal court makes this information rather suspect: why would the king of France need to give his formal assent with regard to the election of the Constantinopolitan emperor? However, it is quite possible that at some point Philip II August (1180-1223) was consulted in view of the fact that the Courtenay family were a branch of the royal lineage. After his nomination Robert appears to have prepared his journey well. The already mentioned Reinerus, who was geographically and chronologically close to the events described, informs us that the emperor-elect left Namur for Constantinople *in virtute magna et potestate*.¹⁰¹ This would seem to contradict the statement in the continuations of William of Tyre that Robert did not bring any substantial troops with him. Robert's confirmation of the constitutional pacts of March 1204 and October 1205 from March 1221 also mentions an unspecified number of *barones qui nobiscum venerunt morati in imperio*.¹⁰² The earlier mentioned Nicolas of Mainvaut and Thierry of Walcourt no doubt belonged to this group.¹⁰³ Furthermore a June 1221 charter mentions the brothers W. and Th., sons of *miles* Richard of

⁹⁹ Guillaume de Nangis, *Chronique latine de 1113 à 1300 avec les continuations de 1300 à 1366*, ed. Hercule Géraud, 2 vols. (Paris: Société de l'histoire de France, 1843), 1: 154.

¹⁰⁰ *Chronique d'Ernoul et de Bernard le trésorier*, 393. *L'Estoire d'Eracles*, 294. *Chronicon Turonense*, 300.

¹⁰¹ Reinerus, *Annales Sancti Jacobi Leodiensis*, 678.

¹⁰² Tafel & Thomas, *Urkunden*, 2: 230, n° 260.

¹⁰³ See notes 35-36.

Fôret, near Odomez in the county of Hainaut, as having departed *ad partes Constantinopolitanas*.¹⁰⁴

Robert appears to have left his homeland in the late summer of 1220. He spent the winter at the court of his brother-in-law king Andrew II of Hungary, who had married his sister Yolande on the initiative of his uncle emperor Henry of Flanders/Hainaur. The emperor-elect did not idle his time away, but according to Philippe Mouskes and the *Chronique dite Baudouin d'Avesnes* managed - with mediation of the Hungarian king - to marry a relative, who belonged to his retinue, to the Serbian king Stephen II Nemanya. At the same time the existing good relations with Ivan II Asen's Bulgarian kingdom, which had been established around 1213 by emperor Henry and continued by empress Yolande, were confirmed, allowing Robert to travel peacefully to Constantinople. Accompanying him was Andrew's son and heir Bela (IV), another clear indication of the excellent bond with Hungary.¹⁰⁵ To us it is clear that Robert and his entourage had consciously conceived the overland journey to Constantinople as a means to strengthen the friendly ties with neighbouring princes and in this way stabilize the northern frontiers of his empire. This, and also the next paragraph, renders idle Du Cange's accusation that Robert would have broken off existing good relations with the neighbouring states.

Robert arrived in his capital around the beginning of spring, and was welcomed and accepted as emperor by the Constantinopolitan elite without problem. On March 25th 1221 he was crowned in the church of Saint-Sophia. Several acts and initiatives during the first months

¹⁰⁴ Armand d'Herbomez, ed., *Chartes de l'abbaye de Saint-Martin de Tournai*, 2 vols. (Brussels: Commission Royale d'Histoire, 1898-1901), 2: 57-58, n° 50.

¹⁰⁵ Philippe Mouskes, *Chronique rimée*, 404. *Chronique dite de Baudouin d'Avesnes*, ed. Joseph Kervyn de Lettenhove, *Istore et chroniques de Flandres d'après les textes de divers manuscrits*. Collection de chroniques belges inédites, 2 vols., (Brussels: Commission Royale d'Histoire, 1880), 2: 675. See also: Van Tricht, *The Latin Renovatio of Byzantium*, 391, 406-407.

of his reign indicate that the new emperor opted for a policy of continuity and stability. In this way the constitutional treaties from 1204-1205 and the Venetian rights therein (and in later documents) described were confirmed shortly after the coronation, although a departure from the earlier custom was that podestà Marino Michiel was co-author of the document of confirmation, which means that this time Venice too was made to explicitly confirm its obligations towards the empire.¹⁰⁶ In June 1221 Robert also confirmed the agreement concerning the ecclesiastical property rights that regent Cono of Béthune had concluded in 1219 for the region *citra Macram* and which meanwhile also had been accepted in the kingdom of Thessalonike, in doing so establishing good relations with patriarch Mattheus and the Church in general. He may have brought pressure to bear upon Venice and his principal vassal lords in southern Greece - Geoffrey of Villehardouin, prince of Achaia, and Otho of La Roche, duke of Athens - to also accept the settlement, which they did in 1223.¹⁰⁷ The policy of rapprochement with regard to Nicaea, inaugurated by emperor Henry and continued by empress Yolande, was initially also maintained. A marriage alliance between Robert and Eudokia, daughter of Theodore I Laskaris, was concluded, but Theodore's death in November 1221, combined with opposition from a anti-Latin faction headed by the Nicaean patriarch Manuel I Sarantenos, prevented the project's realization.¹⁰⁸

Robert also appears to have undertaken action on the Western front shortly after his coronation, launching an offensive against Theodore Doukas, ruler of Epiros, which however

¹⁰⁶ Tafel & Thomas, *Urkunden*, 2: 227-230, n° 260.

¹⁰⁷ Tautu, *Acta Honorii III et Gregorii IX*, n° 95, 128-132; n° 115, 154-157. Robert Lee Wolff, "Politics in the Latin Patriarchate of Constantinople," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 8 (1954), n° 6, 301-302. Chris Schabel, "Antelm the Nasty, First Latin Archbishop of Patras (1205 - ca. 1241)," in: *Diplomatics in the Eastern Mediterranean 1000-1500. Aspects of Cross-Cultural Communication. The Medieval Mediterranean 74*, ed. Alexander Daniel Beihammer et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 113-120.

¹⁰⁸ Philippe Mouskes, *Chronique rimée*, 405-407. Georgios Akropolites, *Historia*, §18.

proved ineffectual.¹⁰⁹ The emperor also worked together with the authorities in Thessalonike to organize a Western relief expedition for the ailing kingdom: imperial chancellor and archbishop of Thessalonike Warin travelled with king Demetrios of Montferrat to the courts of both the pope and the German emperor Frederick II of Hohenstaufen, and Honorius III included Robert in the preparations for the upcoming crusade.¹¹⁰ Probably in late 1223 or early 1224 the emperor launched yet another offensive in order to rescue Thessalonike, which was being besieged by Doukas from the middle of 1223, resulting in a counter-siege of the town of Serres.¹¹¹ Meanwhile relations with Nicaea had become strained. Following emperor Theodore I's death, the planned marriage alliance with Eudokia as has been seen was broken off and Robert had welcomed his sister's brothers-in-law Isaac and Alexios Laskaris - who in our view brought their sister with them - in Constantinople, after they appear to have failed to secure the Nicaean throne for themselves.¹¹² These were both less than friendly gestures, but in themselves they did not lead to armed conflict. The benefits for Robert offering asylum to the Laskaris brothers were on the political-ideological level: the Laskaris brothers' choice for Latin Constantinople must have strengthened his claim to being the legitimate Byzantine emperor with the Byzantine populations both inside and outside the borders of his empire. Not seeking to profit from the apparent political divisions in Nicaea, where an anti-Latin faction

¹⁰⁹ See: Van Tricht, *The Latin Renovatio of Byzantium*, 379-382.

¹¹⁰ Jean-Louis-Alphonse Huillard-Bréholles, *Historia diplomatica Friderici secundi*, 6 vols. (Paris: Plon Fratres, 1852-60), 2: 328. Pressutti, *Regesta Honorii Papae III*, 1: n° 4059, 4121.

¹¹¹ Philippe Mouskes, *Chronique rimée*, 408. Georgios Akropolites, *Historia*, §22.

¹¹² Georgios Akropolites, *Historia*, §22. In our interpretation of the passage the objective the Laskaris brothers do not achieve, is the overthrow of Vatatzes - an aim intrinsic to their flight to Constantinople - and not the taking with them of their sister Eudokia. In an email conversation with translator Ruth Macrides she acknowledged that this is indeed a possible alternative reading of the passage in question (email of September 13th, 2011).

was now clearly very influential, would no doubt have been considered as a lack of fortitude or ambition.

In this context, and after waiting for more than two years during which the Latin emperor's war with Theodore Doukas did not take a turn for the better from a Constantinopolitan point of view, Vatatzes decided to attack Robert, thus forcing him to fight a two-front-war.¹¹³ In the ensuing battle of Poimaneon (1224) the Nicaean emperor was victorious against the Constantinopolitan army commanded by the Laskaris brothers, Nicolas of Mainvault and Thierry II of Walcourt. Robert's decision to remain in the capital is defensible. He was now fighting a two front war and as head of state it was his responsibility to coordinate things. Moreover he himself was not an experienced military commander. His choice of generals seemed sensible: Thierry of Walcourt was an experienced commander who had secured a victory for Hugh Pierrepont, prince-bishop of Liège, in the battle of Steppes (1213) against duke Henry I of Brabant, while at least one of the Laskaris brothers had held military commands during the reign of their brother Theodore I.¹¹⁴ The defeat caused no immediate disaster as Vatatzes was willing to negotiate a peace treaty, one of the clauses stipulating that the marriage between Robert and Eudokia should go ahead. However, after the

¹¹³ Georgios Akropolites, *Historia*, §22. Just like Robert Lee Wolff Ruth Macrides, following the much later fourteenth-century chronicler Nikephoros Gregoras, argues that hostilities were initiated by Latin Constantinople (George Akropolites, *The History*, trans. Macrides, 167). However, there seems to us no reason to prefer Gregoras' account over that of near-contemporary Akropolites. The fact that the battle was fought near Poimaneon, which at the time belonged to the empire of Constantinople, moreover indicates that it was Vatatzes who took the initiative to invade his rival's territories. There is thus no reason to accuse Robert, as does Wolff (see supra), of choosing to fight a two-front-war.

¹¹⁴ Georgios Akropolites, *Historia*, §22. Philippe Mouskes, *Chronique rimée*, 407 (one of the Laskaris brothers captured in battle and brought to Constantinople as prisoner around 1220), 409. Thierry II of Walcourt, who was lord of Rochefort, and the battle of Steppes: Reinerus, *Annales Sancti Jacobi Leodiensis*, 668-669 (*Theodericus de Rupeforti*).

army besieging Serres also had been defeated (by Theodore Doukas), the Nicaean emperor - seeing that Constantinople's offensive strength had now completely broken down - recommenced his offensive in Asia Minor, besieging and conquering town after town in the winter of 1224-1225.¹¹⁵ Meanwhile the crusade led by marquis William VI of Montferrat to rescue the kingdom of Thessalonike largely ended in failure because of the outbreak of a dysentery epidemic shortly after the army's landing at Halmyros in the spring of 1225.¹¹⁶

Confronted with this crisis Robert did not remain passive. By the end of November 1224 he had obtained from pope Honorius III that all clerics and ecclesiastical institutions in the region *citra Macram* were to donate 10% of their income to aid in the defense of the empire.¹¹⁷ A February 1225 charter places the emperor in Salymbria, a garrison town in Thrace which was part of the imperial domain and which in previous years had been used as point of assembly for the imperial army.¹¹⁸ This proves that he did not isolate himself in his palace in the capital, as the Old French continuations of William of Tyre would have it.¹¹⁹ No

¹¹⁵ Georgios Akropolites, *Historia*, §22. Philippe Mouskes, *Chronique rimée*, v. 23195-23202. See also: Van Tricht, *The Latin Renovatio of Byzantium*, 370.

¹¹⁶ Longnon, *L'empire latin*, 163-164. Bredenkamp, *The Byzantine Empire of Thessaloniki*, 104-106. Michael B. Wellas, *Das westliche Kaiserreich und das lateinische Königreich Thessalonike* (Athens: Stefanos Basilopoulos Verlag, 1987), 45-46.

¹¹⁷ Tautu, *Acta Honorii III et Gregorii IX*, n° 128.

¹¹⁸ Villehardouin, *La conquête de Constantinople*, §490.

¹¹⁹ Tafel & Thomas, *Urkunden*, 2: 255, n° 269. Marco Pozza, ed., *I patti con l'impero latino di Costantinopoli 1205-1231*, *Pacta Veneta* 10 (Roma: Viella, 2004), 88-89. The *datatio* - which reads *X° kallendas martii anno Domini M°CC°XX°III imperii nostri anno quarto* - has been interpreted incorrectly by the editors who dated the document in 1224. Considering that the imperial chancery used the Easter style (Prevenier, *De oorkonden van de graven van Vlaanderen*, 1: 544) and that Robert was crowned on March 25th, 1221 (Philippe Mouskes, *Chronique rimée*, 405), the document needs to be dated in 1225. Marco Pozza in his new edition of the Latin

doubt the emperor was trying to coordinate the defense of Thrace against both Doukas and Vatatzes. In the charter the emperor conceded to Venice three eighths of the *campi* of the Provençal and Hispanic communities. The document - which completed an earlier *privilegium* concerning the *campi* of the other trading communities in the capital and which explicitly referred to the *studium et devocionem* of podestà Jacopo Tiepolo vis-à-vis the empire - no doubt needs to be seen as a token of gratitude and as a means to secure further support from the *Serenissima* in the defense of the empire. Prominent individual Venetians were also approached. A 1343 charter by bishop Pietro of Castelli mentions a charter by emperor Robert in which he attested the authenticity of an icon, embellished with various precious relics, that had been granted to Marino Morosini, probably to be identified with the eponymous duke of Crete (1230) and doge of Venice (1249-1253), *pro subventionem quam tempore necessitatis exhibuit Imperio Romaniae*.¹²⁰ Regent Mary of Courtenay's 1228 confirmation of the Pisan commercial privileges mentions the very useful support that Robert had obtained from the local viscount Jacopo di Scarlatti.¹²¹ Patriarch Mattheus was found prepared to grant the emperor certain ecclesiastical revenues on a temporary basis *ad serviendum imperio*.¹²²

Robert also undertook initiatives to obtain support for his ailing empire from Western princes. In 1226 he sent Hugh, castellan of Arras, as envoy to his relative Louis VIII of France, whom he met while he was besieging Avignon (circa June-September 1226) and who promised to send 200 or 300 knights. The king's death shortly afterwards however made that

imperial charters with regard to Venice - which in our opinion is not really an improvement over Tafel and Thomas' work - adopts without discussion the year 1224 from his predecessors .

¹²⁰ Fernand de Mély, *Exuviae Sacrae Constantinopolitanae* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1904), 261-262.

¹²¹ Löwenfeld, "Une lettre de l'impératrice Marie," 256-257.

¹²² Tautu, *Acta Honorii III et Gregorii IX*, n° 157.

the plan did not materialize.¹²³ Another envoy by the name of Baldwin was sent to Henry III Plantagenet, but nothing is known about the kind of support the English king may have given.¹²⁴ Finally Robert travelled to the West in person to obtain aid from the papacy, whether or not - as the Old French continuations of William of Tyre would have it - in the immediate aftermath of the palace coup by a group of Latin barons, which was in any case fairly easily overcome as is witnessed by the fact that Robert apparently managed to appoint his sister Mary - who according to Philippe Mouskes had already been his de facto co-ruler (see *infra*) - as regent. The journey may have been partly inspired by the extensive tour of Western Europe undertaken in 1222 by king of Jerusalem John of Brienne following the failure of the Fifth Crusade. It seems to us that pope Gregory IX's letter of April 7th, 1227, was one of the results of Robert's trip. In this letter he permanently awarded the emperor the already mentioned ecclesiastical revenues - deriving from the *papates rurales* - which patriarch Matthew had granted on a temporary basis.¹²⁵ The pope showed himself well aware of the serious difficulties of the empire, in particular is mentioned the dramatic decline in revenues causing many knights to leave the land to the detriment of the empire. This, together with the opening phrase *te non sine dolore didicimus referente quod constantinopolitanum imperium in eo*

¹²³ Philippe Mouskes, *Chronique Rimée*, v. 26875-26890, v. 27163-27180, v. 27350-27358. Pierre Feuchère, *De l'épée à la plume. Les châtelains d'Arras. Mémoires de la commission départementale des monuments historiques du Pas-de-Calais* 6/1 (Arras: Commission départementale des monuments historiques du Pas-de-Calais, 1948), 23-27.

¹²⁴ William Henry Stevenson et al., eds., *Calendar of Liberate Rolls preserved in the Public Record Office. Henry III*, 6 vols. (1226-1240) (London: The Hereford Times Limited, 1916-1964), 1: 6. The king ordered that the envoy of the emperor of Constantinople be given four marks for his expenses (December 3th, 1226).

¹²⁵ Tautu, *Acta Honorii III et Gregorii IX*, n° 157. This was clearly not the only way in which the pope aided financially: see *supra* the cited fragment from the Old French continuations of William of Tyre (*li dona del sien*).

difficulatis articulo est constitutum, may indicate that he was informed by the emperor himself visiting the papal court.

On his way back to Constantinople Robert no doubt conferred with his brother-in-law prince Geoffrey II of Villehardouin on how to revive his empire, but his subsequent death (November 1227) during his stay in Achaia and the following long vacancy of the imperial throne rendered empty all the plans he may have made. Indicative of Robert's determination not to give up and to fight back is the constatation he never seems to have intended making peace with Epiros or Nicaea to be an option. Indeed, a truce with Theodore Doukas was only concluded in December 1228 by regent Narjot I of Toucy and only shortly before peace seems to have been concluded with John III Vatatzes.¹²⁶ The preceding survey makes in our opinion clear that Robert wasn't an apathic or particularly incompetent ruler, albeit with the nuance that it is of course hard to assess his direct and personal involvement with the various choices and initiatives we have touched upon because of the fragmentary and/or distant nature of the available intermediary sources. An influential figure in Robert's entourage for example appears to have been his relative Narjot I of Toucy (see also *infra*), whose personal envoy Hugh is attested at king Andrew II's court in 1222 (or perhaps 1223) together with king of Thessalonike Demetrios of Montferrat, no doubt to discuss possible Hungarian aid for the empire.¹²⁷ But although Narjot may have been a political heavyweight, it would appear that

¹²⁶ The truce with Doukas: Roberto Cessi, ed., *Deliberazioni del Maggior Consiglio di Venezia*, 3 vols., Atti delle Assemblee Costituzionali Italiane dal Medio Evo al 1831. Serie terza: Parlamenti e Consigli Maggiori dei Comuni Italiani (Bologna: Nicola Zanichelli, 1930-51), 1: 209-210, n° 140. The peace treaty with Nicaea: Georgios Akropolites, *Historia*, §24. Akropolites states that the treaty was concluded with the *Italoï* (not mentioning any emperor), which seems to indicate that Robert was deceased - or at least absent - at the time. In comparison, the peace between Theodore Laskaris and Henry of Flanders/Hainaut in 1213 is explicitly reported as being concluded between both emperors (cf. §16).

¹²⁷ Tautu, "Margarethe di Ungheria," 61.

Robert himself was certainly no puppet emperor: when he left for Rome, it was probably he who personally appointed his sister Mary as regent in his absence. It was only after his decease that the said Narjot obtained the regency.¹²⁸

The final issue we now need to address, as we announced earlier, is the Byzantine calibre of Robert's reign. Robert's predecessor and uncle Henry of Flanders/Hainault had inaugurated a policy which was aimed at reconciling the Byzantine elite to his rule by granting them a large share in the government of the empire. In this way a Latin-Byzantine political equilibrium had been established. Empress Yolande, as far as one can tell from the meagre sources, would appear to have continued her brother's Byzantine friendly and Byzantine influenced rulership.¹²⁹ Roberts' rule can perhaps be seen as the culmination of this policy. Illustrative of this is the fact that he was the only emperor to marry, as we have argued, a (half-)Byzantine woman.¹³⁰ The emperor in our view wanted to reassure the Byzantine elite in Constantinople and the rest of his empire: notwithstanding the onslaught of both John III Vatatzes and Theodore Doukas there would still be place for Byzantines at

¹²⁸ Mary as regent in January 1228 (no source mentions her after this time): Löwenfeld, "Une lettre de l'impératrice Marie," 256-257. Narjot became regent before December 1228: Cessi, *Deliberazioni del Maggior Consiglio di Venezia*, 1: 209-210, n° 140.

¹²⁹ Filip Van Tricht, "'La gloire de l'empire'. L'idée impériale de Henri de Flandre-Hainaut, deuxième empereur latin de Constantinople (1206-1216)," *Byzantion* 70 (2000), 211-241. Idem, *The Latin Renovatio of Byzantium*, 90.

¹³⁰ Michael Angold appears to have been unaware of the information concerning Robert's marriage to a *Graecula* contained in the *Chronicon Turonense*, leading him to - in our view erroneously - conclude from the discussed passage from the Old French continuations of William of Tyre that the emperor "was clearly trying to assert himself against a section of his barons who favoured entente with the Greeks" (Michael Angold, "The Latin Empire of Constantinople, 1204-1261: Marriage Strategies," 53-54).

the highest echelons of his administration.¹³¹ Byzantines or Latins with clear Byzantine connections were also more than ever before among the closest advisers and collaborators of the emperor. Alexios and Isaac Laskaris, the late emperor Theodore I of Nicaea's brothers, in the years 1222-1224 clearly held a position of prime importance, since at the battle of Poimaneon they were commanders-in-chief of the imperial army, together with marshal Nicolas of Mainvault and Thierry II of Walcourt.¹³² It has also been shown, basing ourselves on the Old French continuations of William of Tyre and the *Chronicon Turonense*, that the emperor's Byzantine mother-in-law appears to have been an influential figure in Robert's entourage. His sister Mary had been empress of Nicaea for several years, and no doubt brought back to Constantinople Byzantine influenced ideas on government and emperorship of her own. In this context it is important to note that she too was a person of influence in the government. Philippe Mouskes writes that the emperor shared the government of his empire with her, a statement which appears to be corroborated by the fact that he appointed her as regent when in 1227 he left for Rome in search of aid.¹³³ Another person who held an

¹³¹ One may wonder why Robert did not marry Eudokia Laskaris after her brothers Alexios and Isaac had brought her to Constantinople (see supra). Several answers are possible. In the years prior to Vatatzes' invasion the emperor perhaps wanted to keep his options open now that the arrival of the Laskaris brothers in itself had already increased his prestige within the Byzantine space. After Vatatzes' successive successes it was perhaps not deemed politically opportune to marry a woman from the Nicaean imperial lineage. Also Robert's actual bride may have had a closer connection with for example the imperial Komnenos dynasty from before 1204, or was perhaps a member of a Byzantine family that was very prominent within the political fabric of the capital. Lastly, and in the light of Vatatzes' successes which he may have seen as a divine punishment, Robert possibly did not want to go through with a marriage that had been branded as uncanonical by the Nicaean patriarch Manuel Sarantenos because it was within the prohibited degrees of kinship (Georgios Akropolites, *Historia*, §18).

¹³² Georgios Akropolites, *Historia*, §22.

¹³³ Philippe Mouskes, *Chronique rimée*, 406: *Si tint l'empereres s'ouneur / Tout entre luy et sa sereur.*

important position during Robert's reign and who would succeed Mary as regent in 1228, was Narjot I of Toucy (see also supra). He too was closely linked with the highest Byzantine aristocracy through his marriage with a daughter of the magnate and feudal lord of Adrianople Theodore Branas.¹³⁴

In addition to these prosopographical data one document in our opinion pre-eminently illustrates the strong Byzantine influence on Robert's emperors, namely his already mentioned February 1225 charter for the city of Venice.¹³⁵ As has been said this piece complements a (shortly) earlier and now lost imperial *privilegium* which aimed to solve a long standing conflict between the emperors and Venice concerning their respective rights vis-à-vis the *campi* of the metropolitan trading communities. According to the empire's constitutional fundament - the treaty of March 1204 between the leaders of the Fourth Crusade and Venice - three eighths of all possessions in the capital and in the empire were to be attributed to Venice.¹³⁶ The 1225 charter makes clear that this stipulation had not been observed by the first Latin emperors with regard to the metropolitan *campi* and that they had reserved all rights and revenues concerning these quarters for themselves, with Venice protesting to no avail.¹³⁷ However, in 1223 Robert - no doubt in the context of the difficult

¹³⁴ Jean Longnon, "Les Toucy en Orient et en Italie au XIIIe siècle," *Bulletin de la Société des Sciences historiques et naturelles de l'Yonne* 96 (1957), 33-43.

¹³⁵ See note 115.

¹³⁶ Prevenier, *De oorkonden van de graven van Vlaanderen*, 2: 557, n° 267.

¹³⁷ On Venice's position within the Latin empire: David Jacoby, "The Venetian Presence in the Latin Empire of Constantinople (1204-1261): the Challenge of Feudalism and the Byzantine Inheritance," *Jahrbuch der Osterreichischen Byzantinistik* 43 (1993), 141-201; Idem, "The Venetian Government and Administration in Latin Constantinople, 1204-1261: A State within a State," in *Quarta crociata. Venezia, Bisanzio, Impero latino*, ed. Gherardi Ortalli, Giorgio Ravagnani & Peter Schreiner, 2 vols. (Venice: Istituto veneto di scienze, lettere ed

situation the empire was in (see Theodore Doukas' advance against Thessalonike) - issued a bilateral document with podestà Marino Storlato in which they agreed that the conflict was to be solved within a time period of two years *per comunes iudices*.¹³⁸

This procedure was concordant with the stipulations of the March pact and its follow-up, the pact of October 1205.¹³⁹ For example in an earlier conflict regarding the possession of a number of villages in Thrace emperor Henry and podestà Pietro Ziani had both appointed two representatives who were to judge the affair, and these representatives - respectively marshall Geoffrey of Villehardouin and cupbearer Milo le Bréban, and two Venetian *iudices* - had after examining the case issued a charter to make public their verdict and the distribution of the villages in question.¹⁴⁰ Not so however in the case of the *campi*. In the February 1225 charter - and no doubt also in the preceding *privilegium* mentioned therein - emperor Robert acts completely unilaterally: he is the only issuer of the charter, no mention is made of the earlier agreement with podestà Storlato, and no mention is made of the appointment of imperial and Venetian representatives or any verdict by them. Things are clearly presented as if Robert on his own authority and of his own free will has decided to grant Venice a favour, considering the *studium et devocionem* of its (new) podestà Jacopo Tiepolo for the empire. The *Serenissima* is granted a privilege, it is not a question of the recognition or affirmation of certain rights to the city was entitled. In our view this document shows how Robert was strongly influenced by the central Byzantine politico-ideological

arti, 2006), 1: 19-79; Van Tricht, *The Latin Renovatio of Byzantium*, 215-219, 238-239. David Jacoby in our opinion generally tends to overestimate Venice's power within the empire somewhat.

¹³⁸ Tafel & Thomas, *Urkunden*, 2: n° 257.

¹³⁹ Tafel & Thomas, *Urkunden*, 1: n° 160.

¹⁴⁰ Jean Longnon, *Recherches sur la vie de Geoffroy de Villehardouin* (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré, 1939), n° 83, 201-202.

concept of imperial autocracy (or at least of maintaining the illusion of autocracy). For no other Latin emperor a similar principled unilateral stance towards Venice can be adduced.¹⁴¹

These combined prosopographical and diplomatic data, however fragmentary, together with the partial narrative accounts of Robert's reign discussed, then would seem to indicate that by the time of Robert's rule the Constantinopolitan elite had fallen apart into two political factions: one headed by the emperor and in favour of a well-balanced Latin-Byzantine condominium, and one led by discontented Latin feudal barons who were opposed to such a balance of power and who were presumably alarmed by Byzantine influenced autocratic tendencies in Robert's ruling style. A passage in the Old French continuation in fact can be read as a confirmation of this disunity among the Constantinopolitan elite. Following Robert's death the barons "pristrent conseil ensemble, et distrent li plusor qu'il lairoient la cité, et s'en iroient. Li autre distrent que ce ne feroient il ja; que grant honte et grant reprovier en aroient en toz les leus où il iroient, si laissoient si riche cité por noiant."¹⁴² It seems plausible to us to identify the first group with the anti-Byzantine and anti-Robert faction just mentioned. As has been seen several important barons and prelates indeed did leave the Queen of Cities shortly after the catastrophies of 1224-1225 or after Robert's death, inter alia Thierry of Walcourt and marshall Nicolas of Mainvault.¹⁴³

In our view these barons on their return to the West very actively spread a thoroughly negative picture of Robert's person and rule, presenting him as an utter and virtueless fool.

¹⁴¹ To be remembered in this context is that in March 1221 the Venetian podestà for the first time had been compelled to confirm the empire's constitutional treaties from 1204-1205 together with the emperor, see supra and note 104.

¹⁴² *Chronique d'Ernoul et de Bernard le trésorier*, 469-470. Cf. similar versions in the manuscripts C, D and G in *L'Estoire d'Eracles*, 378-382; manuscripts A and B present a different account not mentioning any divisions among the Constantinopolitan elite.

¹⁴³ See note 36.

The just cited passage gives us the reason why this was necessary for them. In order not to suffer the *honte* and the *grant reprovier* of their peers in their homelands, they needed to exculpate themselves for abandoning an empire in dire need.¹⁴⁴ So they presented things as if they had not deserted the capital, but instead as if they had been driven away by an incompetent ruler who had brought the empire to ruin. The discourses with regard to Robert in Aubry of Trois-Fontaines' world chronicle, in the Old French continuations of William of Tyre and in the *Chronicon Turonense* can be seen as the reflexion of this bad-mouthing campaign, with the chronicler from Champagne sticking to the essentials (Robert simply was an *idiota*), the continuations focusing on the frustrated ambitions of a number of feudal barons, and the chronicler of Tours focusing on religious Latin-Byzantine antagonism. These three chronicles for that matter are certainly not the only reflections of this vilification campaign. For example the *damnatio memoriae* of emperor Robert in the *Historia susceptionis corone spinee* of Gauthier Cornut, archbishop of Sens and confidant of both Louis IX and his mother Blanche of Castile, written around 1240 at the request of the king to document the acquisition of the Crown of Thorns from emperor Baldwin II of Courtenay, can also be seen in this context. Baldwin is presented as the direct successor of his parents Peter of Courtenay and Yolande of Flanders/Hainaut, with his brother Robert - unlike his uncle Henry (*imperator clarissimus*) - going completely unmentioned.¹⁴⁵ Following from this the

¹⁴⁴ On the importance of (preserving one's) honour in medieval feudal society, see for example: Sidney Painter, *French Chivalry. Chivalric Ideas and Practices in Mediaeval France*, 9th ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), 33-34; Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 253.

¹⁴⁵ Gualterius Conutus, *Historia susceptionis corone spinee*, ed. Paul E.D. Riant, *Exuviae Sacrae Constantinopolitanae*, 2 vols. (Geneva, 1878), 1: 48. On Gauthier Cornut and his *Historia*: Alexis Charansonnet & Franco Morenzoni, "Prêcher sur les reliques de la Passion à l'époque de Saint Louis," in *La Sainte Chapelle. Royaume de France et Jérusalem céleste? Actes du Colloque de Paris, Collège de France, 2002*, ed. Christine Hediger (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 62-64.

mistrust at the French royal court, personified in queen-mother Blanche of Castile, towards Baldwin II's person and politics - inter alia the presence of Byzantines in his immediate entourage (cf. his brother Robert) - may also find its origin in the slander campaign.¹⁴⁶ Likewise the refusal of the imperial crown after Robert's death by Humbert V of Beaujeu - son of Guichard IV and Sybilla of Flanders/Hainaut, sister of empress Yolande and the emperors Baldwin I and Henry - may also have been related to a concern not to become entangled in a situation that in the context of this slander campaign must have resembled a hornet's nest.¹⁴⁷

To conclude we might say that Robert of Courtenay in the past has fallen victim to a vilification campaign by political opponents to which chroniclers and others - particularly in the kingdom of France, from where the majority of the Latin Constantinopolitan barons hailed - were clearly susceptible, perhaps because these barons' portrayal of Robert - as an irrational and incompetent ruler because he disregarded the advice of (some of) his Western barons and chose to (partially) rely on Byzantines - tied in well with certain xenophobic or ethnocentric tendencies of their own. In this sense it might be possible to say that these views on Robert's reign that were being articulated in the West represent some early form of Orientalism, in a disapproving tone reducing actual realities and politics in distant Constantinople to a number

¹⁴⁶ On Blanche's appreciation of Baldwin II, see the emperor's 1243 reply to a letter of the queen-mother (Teulet, *Layettes du Trésor des Chartes*, 4 vols. (Paris: Henri Plon, 1863-1875), 2: n° 3123) and an anonymous mid-thirteenth-century chronicle claiming that Blanche found Baldwin *enfantin en ses paroles* (*Chronique de Flandres et des croisades*, ed. Joseph Jean De Smet, Recueil des chroniques de Flandre 3 (Brussels: Commission royale d'histoire, 1856), 676-677).

¹⁴⁷ Two interdependent chronicles mention Humbert's refusal: the already discussed *Chronicon Turonense*, 328, and the *Gesta Ludovici VIII*, ed. Michel Jean Joseph Brial, Recueil des Historiens des Gaules et de la France 17 (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1818), 310 (note a).

of exotic anecdotes and an accompanying sense of distrust.¹⁴⁸ Until now this particular discourse had not been noticed by modern authors, who on the contrary treated the texts discussed as relatively neutral and objective factuals accounts.

Of course it would be wrong to overcompensate now by arguing that Robert was an exceptionally talented ruler. It would however to us seem fair to say that it was not his supposed incompetence or apathy, but rather the disunity among the Constantinopolitan elite that thwarted an adequate response to the serious external threats to the empire. It seems telling that with regard to the battle of Poimaneon the different sources as has been seen mention no less than four different military commanders for the Constantinopolitan army.¹⁴⁹ This lack of a unified command, this divided leadership - which no doubt is to be related to the divisions among the elite - may very well be the explanation why Poimaneon and presumably also the other military engagements such as the siege of Serres turned out to be successive major débâcles.

Unlike Henry of Flanders/Hainaut, who in any case came to power in a different set of circumstances, Robert - like his uncle a younger son from a princely household never 'naturally' destined to rule - had not had a kind of introductory period (cf. Henry's role during the Fourth Crusade and under the rule of his brother emperor Baldwin I) during which he might have been able to build up credit for himself, which he then could have used to establish a personal authority strong enough to weld the Constantinopolitan elite back into

¹⁴⁸ On Orientalism: Edward Saïd, *Orientalism* (New York: Random Books, 1978). In 2001 an interesting international conference entitled "Between Empires: 'Orientalism' before 1600" was held at Trinity College, University of Cambridge. Cf. for example also: Croizy-Naquet, "Y a-t-il une représentation de l'Orient," 263-274.

¹⁴⁹ See note 34.

unity.¹⁵⁰ Instead he saw himself obliged to lean primarily on one group, naturally the faction that was pro Latin-Byzantine cooperation (the policy option of both his predecessors Henry and Yolande), thus intensifying the frustrations of the Latin faction which after the shocking 1224-1225 defeats then with a dramatic display of discontent - and no doubt in the belief of serving the interests of the empire - chose to cancel its loyalty towards the emperor.

Robert's death shortly afterwards - followed by a relatively long vacancy of the imperial throne since there was no obvious successor, Robert's brother and heir Baldwin (II) being underage - then temporarily interrupted all immediate attempts of providing an adequate response to Nicaea and Epiros/Thessalonike in order to revive the empire.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ On the relative unity of the Constantinopolitan elite under emperor Henry: Van Tricht, *The Latin Renovatio of Byzantium*, 276-280.

¹⁵¹ On the vacancy of the imperial throne after Robert's death (1228-1231), see Longnon, *L'empire latin de Constantinople*, 169-170.