The late-Byzantine romance: problems of defining a genre[*]

Ulrich Moennig

Questions concerning the Byzantine romance as a genre are usually not easy to treat. There was no Byzantine literary theory concerning the generic characteristics of the romance. In Byzantine references to ancient romances no definition of the literary genre is given.[1] Thus, there is no *a priori* standard which would help us to classify a late-Byzantine (narrative) text as a romance.

In external and internal references to ancient or Byzantine romances a number of *termini*, which describe single aspects of what is a romance, are found. None of these *termini* can be taken as a genre name, or – more precisely – as an *exclusive* genre name.[2] The reason for this lack might lie in the fact that there was no ancient *terminus* for romance.[3] Since there is no ancient or Byzantine *terminus* meaning "romance" or "novel", the surviving texts are not called "romance" in their respective manuscripts (for example, in the rubrics). Nouns such as διήγησις,[4] διήγημα,[5]

[1] For references see Beaton 1996b: 713.
[2] On *termini* used for "external and internal references" to the romance as a genre or to single texts of this genre see Agapitos 1991: 43-7.
[3] Cf. Holzberg 1995: 8-9 and 1996: 11 and *passim*.
[4] Διήγησις ἐξαίρετος Βελθάνδρου τοῦ Ρωμαίου (*Belthandros and Chrysantza*, ed. Cupane 1995, tit.).
[5] Τὸ κατὰ Καλλίμαχον καὶ Χρυσορρόην ἐρωτικὸν διήγημα (*Kallimachos and Chrysorrhoe*, ed. Pichard 1956).

ἀρχή,[6] στίχοι or ἀφήγησις,[7] which are found in the titles of several late-Byzantine romances, do not refer to a literary genre. This makes it sometimes difficult to decide whether a given text should be regarded as a "romance" or not.

The fact that there existed a Byzantine romance as a self-conscious genre is beyond question. The group of the four twelfth-century (= Komnenian) erotic romances, for example, is well defined by its *imitation* of ancient models, such as the *Leukippe and Kleitophon* of Achilles Tatios and the *Aithiopica* of Heliodoros.[8] This imitation may serve as proof for the existence of the genre. Moreover, it is a mark of its "Renaissance".[9] The late-Byzantine romance, which is the subject of the present paper, continues this revival.

Since we have no external criteria for classifying a Byzantine text as a romance, our knowledge about romance as a genre and its generic features has to be based on analysis and comparison of the extant texts. This situation causes a problem of circular reasoning in Byzantine philology: what we consider to be the standard of the romance as a genre depends on our selection of texts, and our selection of texts depends on what we consider to be the standard of the genre.

In his monograph *The Medieval Greek romance*, Roderick Beaton (1996a) analyses a total of eleven late-Byzantine romances ("1204-1453"). Some of these are relatively closely related to their ancient and twelfth-century Byzantine predecessors (*Libistros and Rhodamne, Kallimachos and Chrysorrhoe,* and *Belthandros and Chrysantza*), others show an impressive variation compared to this triad (for example, the *War of Troy*). Other late-Byzantine narrative texts have not even been

[6] Ἀρχὴ τοῦ πανθαυμασιωτάτου καὶ μεγάλου Ἀχιλλέως (*Achilleid N*, ed. Cupane 1995). (Ole Smith in his new edition [1999] supplies the title Διήγησις τοῦ Ἀχιλλέως.)

[7] Στίχοι πολὺ ἐρωτικοί, ἀφήγησις Λιβίστρου, πῶς ὁ φίλος ὁ Κλιτοβὸς διηγεῖται τῆς Μυρτάνης (*Libistros and Rhodamne,* Codex Neapolitanus, ed. Lambert 1935).

[8] See e.g. Cupane 1995: 12-16. The texts are conveniently accessible in one volume with an Italian translation in Conca 1994.

[9] "Renaissance of a genre" is the title of the relevant chapter in Beaton 1996a (52-69). See especially MacAlister 1996, a comparative study of ancient and Komnenian erotic romances.

(seriously) discussed as to whether they can be considered as romances or not. I have in mind at least one of the later versions of the *Alexander Romance* (recension zeta [*ζ]), which was substantially reworked in Byzantine times.[10] One could also regard the *Belisariad* as a romance, and I would even think of the *Chronicle of the Morea* as related to the genre of the romance.

If we look at the literature on late-Byzantine romances, we will hardly find a definition which could be used as a basis for what is and what is not a romance. The most serviceable attempt towards a definition is that made by Carolina Cupane (1996). Cupane approaches the late-Byzantine romance as erotic romance. She stresses the continuity as to the rhetorical elements – descriptions, monologic parts, inserted letters and speeches – and observes innovations in the use of the vernacular, in the consequent use of metre (*politikos stichos*) and in aspects of content. In her definition, style is characterised by formulaic expressions and in what she calls "immanent intertextuality".[11] Following others, Cupane divides the extant texts into "original romances" and "adaptations of western romances", according to Beaton's monograph.[12] Cupane draws attention to three of the "original romances" (the triad I already mentioned in the previous paragraph), which are generally considered to be the central late-Byzantine romances. In comparison with their ancient and twelfth-century predecessors they display great continuity (in the use of *topoi*, for instance). What Cupane means by changes of motif concerns innovations in the concept of sexual morals in these texts: lovemaking, for example, is allowed even without an official wedding. She also refers to what Beaton calls the "bipartite structure" (e.g. 1996a: 119), and to the self-referring narrator.[13] As far as the "adaptations" are concerned,

---

[10] On this late-Byzantine recension of the *Alexander Romance* see Moennig 1992.

[11] On these problems and the relevant discussion see Beaton 1996a: 164-88.

[12] Beaton 1996a: 101-45 (see also Beck 1971: 117-47).

[13] On the self-referring narrator in *Libistros and Rhodamne*, *Kallimachos and Chrysorrhoe* and *Belthandros and Chrysantza* see Agapitos 1991: 74-95 and Cupane 1994-5. For samples, see Cupane 1995: 714 (indice, under "interventi autoriali metanarrativi").

Cupane stresses their close dependence on their respective models.

In her article, which is based to some extent on the first (1989) edition of Beaton's monograph, Cupane gives an *a posteriori* definition. Her definition is primarily based on a selection of texts which continue to a relatively large extent the tradition of ancient and twelfth-century Byzantine erotic romance. If we accept this definition for the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century romances, we will find an impressive percentage of exceptions.

In what follows I will try to single out several features in a number of late-Byzantine texts which might be helpful for classifying and eventually defining what a romance is in (thirteenth-,) fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Byzantium. These features appear in texts which deviate to a considerable degree from the conventions of ancient and twelfth-century Byzantine romance. At a narrative level, these features concern a different concept of time. On the level of contents they concern the existence of historical references, a "historical axis". This historical axis, in the texts under consideration, is often combined with a biographical setting of the life of the protagonist. Precisely because there was no *a priori* definition of the genre, late-Byzantine romance writers felt free to innovate, thus widening the range of generic *variatio* and extending the boundaries of the genre by producing new texts with innovative features. I will try to describe the extension of the generic range by linking together texts which have common characteristics, moving from the more traditional texts to some of the more innovative ones.[14] The love theme and its specific treatment, which plays a central role as a generic characteristic in ancient and Byzantine romance writing, will serve as a linking element between the more conventional and the innovative texts. (A first attempt at widening the generic range can already be seen in the twelfth-century *Digenes Akrites*, a text that on linguistic grounds and on the basis of the facts of its reception is more

---

[14] See Holzberg 1996 for an analogous problem in ancient romance.

closely linked to the late-Byzantine than to the twelfth-century works.[15])

One problem in our judgement on the late-Byzantine romances lies in the traditional division into "original romances" and "adaptations of western romances". These seemingly clear categories do not correspond to the narrative features of the respective texts. Among the "originals" the previously mentioned triad of erotic romances is usually singled out. In these erotic romances we first meet the heroes as grown-ups. We then witness their first experience in the desire of love and watch them going through a series of tests and adventures. In the (happy) end any obstacles to their final union have been overcome. As far as these three romances are concerned, "original" implies a close relationship (at the level of the story) to the conventions of the older tradition of the genre. The – equally "original" – *Byzantine Achilleid*[16] features a great deal of diversification in comparison with this triad, for example in its unhappy end[17]. On the other hand, among the "adaptations", the *Apollonios Romance*, for example, has a story which is much closer to the older conventions than that of the *Byzantine Achilleid*.

Let me continue discussing the division into "original romances" and "adaptations of western romances". According to Beaton,[18] there is a fifth "original romance", the *Byzantine Iliad*. The outline of the *Byzantine Iliad* is based on the chapter about the Trojan War in the twelfth-century chronicle of Konstantinos Manasses[19] and on a number of secondary (Greek)

---

[15] The oldest versions are accessible in a new bilingual (Greek and English) edition in Jeffreys 1998, the text of the younger contamination Z in Trapp 1971.

[16] For reasons of convenience I refer here to the Naples version (ed. Smith 1999).

[17] Beaton (1996a: 102-3) links the *Achilleid* to the *Digenes Akrites*. He explains its unhappy end as an imitation of the *Digenes Akrites* ("Its ending, with the death of the heroine substituted for that of the hero, also seems as if it is addressed to readers or hearers more familiar with that poem [i.e. *Digenis Akritis*] than with the conventions of the twelfth- or fourteenth-century romances").

[18] 1996a: 107 and *passim*.

[19] Verses 1119-1451 (ed. Lampsidis 1996).

sources.[20] Given this fact, can we really consider the *Byzantine Iliad* to be an original romance, or do we have to treat it as an adaptation – an adaptation of a Greek model? This would mean that this text would have to be moved from the category of "original texts" to the "adaptations", and that the group of adaptations will no longer be confined to texts based on a *western* model. Indeed, I believe that the *Byzantine Iliad* is not the only late-Byzantine narrative, reworked on a Greek model. Late-Byzantine transformations of the *Alexander Romance* have to be discussed as similar instances.

Moreover, "adaptations" are not even confined to those based on western and Greek models. There is another late-Byzantine romance, not yet published and, as a consequence, not commented on in Beaton's monograph (1996a): the *Tale of Alexander and Semiramis*. This romance is based on an oriental, Ottoman or Persian, model.[21] Thus, our current categories are not as clear as they might seem. The genre is divided into a small group of four "original texts" and a much larger group of "adaptations", with a variety of provenances for their respective models. On a thematic level, several "originals" have a closer relation to certain "adaptations" than to their own group – and *vice versa*.

In any case, "adaptation" means that these texts are not simply translated. The *sujet* is based on a French, Italian, Greek or oriental narrative text. But the story is often remodelled, several times substantially so.[22] Some of these narratives were "byzantinized", thus featuring a lesser or higher degree of "originality". In several instances, it is this recasting of the model which reveals how the *topoi* of the late-Byzantine romance are used. The *Byzantine Iliad* is a good example of that (I will come to this at a later point of this paper). What we should ask ourselves is this: should we continue to categorise the texts into "originals" and "adaptations", or should we consider all texts as witnesses of the range of flexibility that romance, as

---

[20] Lavagnini 1988: 29-85.

[21] Moennig 1993: 107-8, n. 14. Cf. Dimitroulopoulos 1995: 55-110.

[22] See, for example, M. and E. Jeffreys (1971) on the *Imberios,* Cupane (1995: 448-9) and Agapitos–Smith (1992: 69) on the case of the *Florios,* and Lavagnini (1988: 29-85) on the *Byzantine Iliad.*

a non-defined, open, and developing genre, possessed in the last two or three centuries of Byzantium?

A good case-study for the change of generic conventions within late-Byzantine romance might be offered by the *Achilleid*. As I have already mentioned, this text is not based on any (known) model. Thus, its deviations from genre tradition have to be ascribed to its late-Byzantine author. A basic difference from the triad *Libistros and Rhodamne*, *Kallimachos and Chrysorrhoe*, and *Belthandros and Chrysantza* lies in its biographical arrangement.[23] The story begins at a point when the hero is not yet born. It begins even before his conception. Achilles will be the only son of an elderly king and his wife, who had both despaired of ever having a child and heir. When Achilles is born, he soon shows his eminent virtues in learning at school, in physical strength, and in fighting skills. When he becomes a young man, he is described in terms of a military leader and heir to his father's throne. But his real nature is an erotic one. We are informed about this fact at an early point in the romance (see Smith's commentary on verses N 283-327 [1999: 89-90]). When Achilles is fifteen years old (N 191), but still a "boy" (the narrator speaks of him as a παιδίν in verses N 331 and N 359), he leaves his country to fight a foreign aggressor. (The king, Achilles's father, is unable to confront his powerful enemy.) Achilles succeeds in freeing his country from danger. In the scene following his victory, Achilles sees the defeated enemy's daughter from a distance and falls in love at first sight. From the scene of Achilles's triumph onwards there is a marked change in the attitude towards the hero: from now on he is treated as an adult. His character and virtues as a grown-up are those very ones that crystallised during his childhood and youth, as described in the first part of the romance (verses 21-751).[24] The major themes in the second part of the text are the

---

[23] See Jouanno 1996 on the *topoi* for describing the youth of a future saint or romantic – "épique", according to her approach (see especially 1996: 43, "enfances épiques") – hero (including the case of Achilles in the *Byzantine Achilleid*).

[24] I think Beaton (1996a: 117-18) is right in analysing the (Naples version of the) *Byzantine Achilleid* as tripartite, rather than as bipartite, as Smith does (1999: 71, 109).

girl and the obstacles to the fulfilling of Achilles's and – as the story develops – the couple's mutual desire. The (unnamed[25]) heroine is described in a detailed *ekphrasis*. At first she turns down Achilles's wooing. Later on, though, she seems to be even more passionate to consummate their desire than Achilles himself.[26] Thus this first obstacle is removed. But there is a second one: she is the daughter of the enemy king, and in defeating her father Achilles has killed two of her brothers. Her parents would never give her to him willingly. That is why, in the third part, Achilles kidnaps her, with her consent, using his great physical strength. There follows a description of their life together: the girl's family gives in, the couple marry, and in a sequence of scenes Achilles's great strength is proved once again. Suddenly (N 1654, ed. Smith) the plot turns again, and it does so in a very abrupt way: the young woman falls ill, and despite his overall virtues Achilles is not able to defend her against Charos, the personification of death. Then, in the Naples version, there follows the Trojan end (N 1860-1926).

The first turning-point in the plot, the scene when Achilles falls in love, can be described as an initiation (to adult life) by the experience of desire and the pains love may cause. A scene of initiation is almost obligatory in erotic romances, usually at an early point within the story. In the *Achilleid* this scene of initiation is a marked turning-point in the development of the story. The focus, which until that point was concentrated on Achilles's personality and character, is turned to the love theme.

So far, the *Achilleid* is an "original" romance but quite different compared to the classical triad, which in the treatment of the love story is closer to the ancient and twelfth-century Byzantine conventions of the erotic romance. One difference is that the time in which the *Achilleid* is set is not as fictitious as in traditional erotic romances. For, although the story of the *Achilleid* is not the story of the Homeric (and post-Homeric) Achilles, the hero's very name carries a link to historical

---

[25] With the exception of N 1352, where she is called Polyxene.
[26] See Smith's commentary on N 1296-1341 (1999: 126-7).

time.[27] A second element of variation lies in the different treatment of narrative time. Traditionally, we are used to first meeting the heroes of erotic romances as young men. Their initiation is a scene which we would expect somewhere near the beginning of a romance of the more traditional type.[28] Moreover, a traditional erotic romance ends with the marriage of hero and heroine. Hero and heroine are still young, and illness and death are too far away to be a subject of the story. If we compare the *Achilleid* to *Libistros and Rhodamne, Kallimachos and Chrysorrhoe,* and *Belthandros and Chrysantza,* this wider focus covering the span of the hero's entire life is an innovative setting, with the unhappy end as the most unexpected feature. Beaton comments on the unhappy end as follows: "the happy ending of the romance is diverted from its conventional course..." (1996a: 110), and more bluntly: "then the story parts company with the genre of romance" (Beaton 1996b: 730). I do not think that it parts company with the genre. In my view, romance in its late-Byzantine state of development allows for the unhappy end. If we compare the *Achilleid* to other texts, this feature will not seem unique.

The text that springs to mind for comparison with the *Achilleid* is the *Digenes Akrites.* In fact the *Digenes Akrites* is not just one text, but a number of texts, each with its own size, structure, story, plot, but always featuring the same hero, Digenes Akrites, the son of a Christian mother and an Arab father. Until recently the *Digenes Akrites* was considered to be an epic poem. As to time in history and place in geography, the setting of *Digenes Akrites* evokes the situation in the middle Byzantine no-mans-land between Byzantium and Syria.[29] In the introduction to her new edition of the Grottaferrata and Escorial versions, Elizabeth Jeffreys brings the *Digenes Akrites* quite close to the genre of romance and to the four twelfth-century Byzantine texts. She claims that there was an original on which

---

[27] On the elements of the Homeric and post-Homeric Achilles in the *Byzantine Achilleid* see Smith's analysis in 1991-2, especially 78-82.
[28] *Libistros and Rhodamne*, Codex Escurialensis, ed. Lambert 1935, verses 100ff.; *Kallimachos and Chrysorrhoe* (ed. Cupane 1995) verses 449ff.; *Belthandros and Chrysantza* (ed. Cupane 1995) verses 366ff.
[29] Jeffreys 1998: xxx-xli.

the oldest versions are based. This original, according to her opinion, dates from the twelfth century, close in time to the four Komnenian romances.[30] "Literary affiliations", in both versions, to "literary texts" belonging or related to the genre of romance support her approach. A striking "affiliation" to ancient and contemporary erotic romances is the use of the traditional imagery of love in the *Digenes Akrites*.[31] The question that arises is the following: how does this fifth twelfth-century romance fit into what we considered until now the Komnenian romance? Compared to the other four extant texts it differs in several major respects. There are quotations of ancient models, but there is no close imitation; the background is Christian, not pagan; the love theme may be strongly present, but it is not the central one; the setting in time and place includes a number of references to historical time. And there is the biographical setting, beginning at a time even before the conception of the hero and ending with the death of both him and his wife.

There is a third text, or rather group of texts, which is not usually taken into account in discussions on the Byzantine romance. I am referring to the *Alexander Romance*. Beaton characterises the *Alexander Romance* as a "legacy from antiquity" and excludes it from discussion.[32] I do, however, consider the fourteenth-century recension zeta to be closely related to the late-Byzantine romance. The text of zeta is lost, but there is a contemporary Slavonic translation, which can easily be used to fill the gap.[33] I would not consider this recension of the *Alexander Romance* to be a "legacy from antiquity" because it has been revised to a very great extent. It is a late-Byzantine adaptation of a middle-Byzantine model. Alexander has become

---

[30] Jeffreys 1998, especially lvi-lvii.

[31] Jeffreys 1998: xliv-xlvii. See also a number of her comments and especially those on Book 6 of the Grottaferrata version.

[32] Beaton 1996a: 31.

[33] This Slavonic translation was retranslated into (vernacular) Greek, probably in the course of the fifteenth century. I call this retranslation "zeta". It is preserved in a number of manuscripts, several of which have been edited (see Moennig 1992: 32-4 and 41-5). The best accessible editions are those of manuscripts F and E by Lolos 1983 and Konstantinopulos 1983. A convenient edition of the Slavonic text with a translation into German is offered by Christians 1991.

a Byzantine emperor, the attitude towards the world and its history displayed in this recension is that of Byzantine chroniclers. The connection to historical time (and space) is even more obvious in this text than in the *Byzantine Achilleid* and the *Digenes Akrites*. Compared to its antecedents, recension zeta features an extensive use of rhetorical descriptions,[34] which is a generic characteristic of the Byzantine romance. And, what is more, the relationship between Alexander and his wife Roxane is turned into a romantic love story with a tragic end: when Alexander dies of poison, Roxane commits suicide.[35] For the *topos* of shared death by suicide see, for example, the parallel in the *Byzantine Achilleid*: καὶ τὸ μαχαίριν ἥρπαξεν νὰ σφάξῃ τὸν ἐαυτόν του (ed. Smith, N 1814).

If we regard the *Alexander Romance* as a late-Byzantine romance, our definition of what is a late-Byzantine romance, at least as far the genre's formal conventions are concerned, has to be altered. The (lost) original text was written in prose and most probably at a learned level of Byzantine Greek.[36] This is a major deviation from what is accepted as the formal norm of a late-Byzantine romance. As far as the thematic conventions of the late-Byzantine romance are concerned, compared to the central motif of the fulfilment of Alexander's role in world history, the love theme is secondary. But nonetheless, it constitutes a strong link between zeta and the late-Byzantine romance.

Thus, beside the classical triad of erotic romances there is another group of texts which display the common characteristic of a biographical setting. The stories start by introducing the hero's parents, continue by describing his birth and youth, and lead to a scene of initiation, which introduces the narration of his deeds in adult life. In this type of romance deaths of the hero and his wife traditionally mark the end. This scene is often

---

[34] See, for example, the description of the Indian palace in Christians 1991: 344-7, and Konstantinopulos 1983: 98-9 (chapter FE103. 2). See also my comment on this chapter in Moennig 1992: 268-70.

[35] See Christians 1991: 478-81, Konstantinopulos 1983: 204-7, and Moennig 1992: 302-3. On the *topos* of suicide in ancient and Komnenian romances see MacAlister 1996.

[36] Moennig 1992: 85-6.

followed – I have not yet mentioned this – by an epilogue about the vanity of all things.

With the treatment of the love theme as a criterion, the *Byzantine Achilleid* seems to be more closely related to the traditional erotic romances than the *Digenes Akrites* (in all its versions) is, and the *Digenes Akrites* again seems to be more closely related to the tradition than the *Alexander Romance*. For within the group of the "biographical" texts, the love theme plays an important part, but it is not as central as it is in the purely erotic romances. The scene of the initiation of the hero is a proleptic indicator as to the role love will play in the plot.[37] Nonetheless, the existence of the love theme means that there are links between the group of erotic romances proper, without a biographical setting, and the "biographical" texts. Thus, a number of intermediate texts link the *Alexander Romance*, recension zeta, to the traditional erotic romances.

An interesting instance of an intermediate form is the *Byzantine Iliad*. Scholarly literature is not very enthusiastic about this romance. Major problems are seen in the strange use of traditional narrative material covering the Trojan War.[38] I would rather stress the innovative use of literary conventions. The central hero of the *Byzantine Iliad* is Paris, who is, again, introduced at a point of time before his birth. We watch him growing up, falling in love with Helen, defending his love against Menelaos, and being killed as a consequence of the capture of Troy. The *Byzantine Iliad* is very interesting, because the anonymous author of the text does not merely use the *topoi* of the late-Byzantine romance; he plays with them. Paris is the only instance, in Byzantine romance, of a "negative" hero who uses his virtues in order to cause harm. The woman he falls in love with is already married, and their love story leads to the

---

[37] See *Digenes Akrites*, Grottaferrata version, book 4 (ed. Jeffreys 1998: 66-132), and Escorial version, verses 702-1088 (ed. Jeffreys 1998: 292-320). For the *Alexander Romance*, recension zeta, see Christians 1991: 85-9, and Lolos 1983: 138-43.

[38] Cf. Beaton (1996a: 134): "a writer much less sure of his craft than the authors of the romances so far discussed seems to have tried with only limited success to create a unified story by combining popular history with the form and conventions of the romance".

death of many "positive" heroes, like Hector and Achilles, and, finally, to the destruction of the famous city of Troy. In this romance, the scene of Paris's initiation is very interesting. In a shipwreck with him as the only survivor, Paris becomes aware of the fact that fate protects him, so that he can cause evil:

> καθ᾽ ἑαυτοῦ του ἔλεγεν· νᾶτον πνιγμὸς σὲ μέναν,
> νᾶχα πνιγῆ κ᾽ ἐγὼ μαζὶ μετὰ τοὺς ἐδικούς μου
> καὶ διὰ νὰ γένουν τὰ 'πασιν οἱ μάνται ἀστρονόμοι,
> ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου ἐβγάζει με ἡ ἄτυχή μου τύχης
> (*Byzantine Iliad*, ed. Nørgaard-Smith 1975, verses 438-41).

Doing harm is Paris's fate, he is bad by nature. The unhappy end of this story (verses 1116-37) does not come as a sudden change in the narrative, but as a logical consequence of the hero's existence.

So far, we have four texts which display a biographical setting: the names of their heroes are Digenes Akrites, Alexander, Achilles, and Paris. All these names have historical connotations, as to time and place. One notices a link between the biographical setting of several romances and a certain attitude towards history, which is absent in the traditional erotic romances. If we check the historical references in these texts, we do not usually find them satisfactory – from our point of view. In the *Digenes Akrites* a number of references to places, persons and facts may be found, but put together they do not refer to the same time and place: they are part of the fictional frame of the romance. In the *Alexander Romance*, place and time are anachronistic: the places Alexander visits and the persons he meets do play a role in world history, but they do so at times different from the times when they appear in the plot of the romance.[39] In the *Byzantine Iliad* some central facts of the Trojan War, as they are related in the medieval post-Homeric tradition, are mentioned, but the criteria of combining them in the narrative are not those of historical/chronographical writing. The relation between the Achilles of the *Achilleid* and the Homeric and post-Homeric Achilles is very loose and superficial: for example, Achilles's beloved is not comparable to Briseis, but to his standard medieval mistress, Polyxene.[40] Like the girl in the

---

[39] See Moennig 1992: 136-41.
[40] That she is named Polyxene in N 1352 may serve as proof.

Achilleid, Polyxene is the enemy's daughter. Their (mutual) love leads to the death of both, Achilles and Polyxene. The point I would argue is the following: there is a connection between the biographical setting of the romances under consideration and their being located within a frame of historical time and place. The necessary presupposition is that the concept of history underlying this fictional use of historical material is that of the Byzantine world chronicles.

So far, I have stressed the link between biographical settings in romances and an historical axis. There are two texts which have biographical settings, at least at their beginning, but are not enacted against a specific historical background: the *Florios* and *Imberios* romances.[41] Thus, the combination of the biographical setting and an historical axis is not obligatory.

Nonetheless, if we want to describe adequately the development of romance writing in the late-Byzantine centuries, we will have to take into account that beside the erotic romances proper with their purely fictional settings there is a group of texts which shows a different concept of time and place. This concept is combined with a biographical setting and (though not obligatory) an historical axis within the frame of fictional writing. Using Bakhtin's terminology, the difference between the purely erotic romances and the *Digenes Akrites*, the *Alexander Romance*, the *Byzantine Iliad*, and the *Achilleid* lies in their use of *adventure-time* and *biographical time*.[42] In the *adventure-time* of ancient romances the passage of time leaves the heroes (physically) untouched. The time that passes while the heroine and the hero try to find each other in order to be finally united seems endless, but it does not leave any traces of ageing on them. Their adventures take place in a time independent of their biological life: the time that passes is not spent. Thus, in the end the narrator leaves them as a young couple, who are just starting their adult life. (It is true, though, that the incongruity between narrative time and "real" time in

---

[41] In the two versions of the *Florios* romance, two alternative endings are presented: see the text in Cupane 1995: 564 and 463. See also Smith's comment on the ending of the Vienna version (Smith 1999: 136).

[42] See chapters 1 and 3 of Bakhtin's essay "Forms of time and of the chronotope in the novel" (1975 [1981]: 86-110, and 130-46).

late-Byzantine erotic romances is not as striking as in their ancient and Komnenian counterparts. The *Apollonios* and *Imberios* romances seem to show the greatest divergence between time passed and time (biologically) spent.)

In "biographical" romances what happens before the protagonist's initiation is quite important: it is the story of the development of the hero's character; or, more precisely, it is the story of the revelation of the hero's character. Usually, in a number of (quite topical) episodes the hero's eminent virtues emerge. These virtues in the story of his adult life are usually taken as given. In the *Digenes Akrites* Akrites's supernatural strength becomes evident already from the time of his childhood. In the first part of the *Achilleid* the hero's strength, his being a natural born leader and his erotic nature are stressed. Alexander's virtues as a born leader appear even from his first contacts with the boys of his age. And whatever virtues distinguish the young Paris, he uses them for evil. The *Byzantine Iliad* goes even further in what the concept of biographical time may mean in Byzantine romances: even from the time of Hecuba's pregnancy it is known that Paris will cause the destruction of Troy. On a narrative level he is from the beginning what he will become at the end of the story. All these features come quite close to what Bakhtin describes as *prodigia* (1975 [1981: 138-9]).

Thus, while *adventure-time* leaves the protagonists' *physical life* untouched, *biographical time* leaves their *essence* untouched: they fulfil their role, and this role remains unchanged from the beginning to the end. Whatever will happen within the story is given, on a more abstract level, from the beginning. In "biographical" romances, time in narrative does *not* leave the heroes *physically* untouched: it leads to the end of their existence. They may have won each other through a number of adventures, but their success lasts just as long as their earthly existence. Thus, the epilogue on the vanity of all existence, which usually follows the unhappy end of "biographical" late-Byzantine romances, fits in with this change in perception of the fictional idealisation of human life.

What I have shown (rather schematically) so far, covers just a few elements of innovations in the use of *topoi* in late-Byzantine romance. (In the following paragraph I will briefly refer to several texts which come close to the concept of chrono-

graphical story-writing.) It does not explain, for example, the rather sudden change in the narrative (even on the level of microstructure) in several texts, when the story comes to its unhappy end. This sudden change from happiness to death appears in the *Achilleid* and in the *Florios* romance, as it is presented in the Vienna manuscript. A similar end (even in the wording) is also found in the *Tale of Alexander and Semiramis*, which, up to that point, falls within the category either of *adventure-time* or of *biographical time*. There is, for example, no biographical starting-point, and there is no initiation. Nonetheless, it is exactly this abrupt turnaround in these stories which underlines the great difference in conception between romances with a happy end and romances with an unhappy end.

I have mentioned previously that there are texts in which neither the concept of *adventure-time* nor the concept of *biographical time* is applied. I have in mind the case of the *War of Troy*. This romance consists of subplots narrating the deeds of subsequent generations, thus extending the range of the Byzantine romance, leading it into the twilight-zone between fictional story-writing and chronographical history. The *War of Troy* is a text with changing protagonists. And while the *War of Troy* brings late-Byzantine romance writing close to chronographical history, the *Chronicle of the Morea* brings chronographical history close to romance writing. See, for example, the narrator's self-referential statements in the narrative frame of this text. This element of narrative technique has obvious debts to late-Byzantine romance-writing.[43] Here, I could also mention the *Belisariad* as an intermediate instance of story-telling between historical romance-writing and fictional historiography. In any case, the underlying concept of time in these texts is far removed from that of *adventure-time*, for time definitely does change the persons involved in the story.

Thus, in late-Byzantine romances we can posit different concepts of narrative time – *adventure-time* versus *biographical*

---

[43] *Chronicle of the Morea*, Codex Parisinus, ed. Schmitt 1904, verses 1-2: Θέλω νὰ σὲ ἀφηγηθῶ ἀφήγησιν μεγάλην· κι ἂν θέλης νὰ μὲ ἀκροαστῆς, ὀλπίζω νὰ σ' ἀρέσῃ; verses 441-2: ἐν τούτῳ γὰρ θέλω ἀπ' ἐδῶ ὅπως νὰ τὸ σκολάσω, καὶ ἄλλο τοῦ νὰ ἄρξωμαι τοῦ νὰ καταπιάσω... For references concerning the self-referring narrator see above, note 13.

time (and several instances with a concept of time closer to that of chronographical history). There are erotic romances and romances which combine a love story with an historical theme (and a few instances of texts which focus primarily on events). Love theme and historical theme are combined in different ways: the *Achilleid* is a romance with a primary love theme and historical references on a secondary level. The *Alexander Romance* has a primary historical story and a love story on a secondary level. The *Byzantine Iliad* is an example of a romance in which both the love story and the story of an historical event develop on comparable levels. In any future study of the development of the Byzantine romance from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, we should take into account that the genre had already achieved a great range of variety. We should probably speak rather about "innovations" within the late-Byzantine romance than about "exceptions" in order to describe adequately its narrative and thematic features.

References

Agapitos, Panagiotis A. (1991). *Narrative structure in the Byzantine vernacular romances*. A textual and literary study of *Kallimachos, Belthandros* and *Libistros*. Munich [Miscellanea Byzantina Monacensia, 34]

Agapitos, Panagiotis A. and Smith, Ole L. (1992). *The study of Medieval Greek romance: A reassessment of recent work*. Copenhagen [Opuscula Graecolatina, 33]

Bakhtin, Michail M. (1975 [1981]). *Voprosy literatury i estetiki. Issledovanija raziyh let*. Moscow 1975 [I have used the German translation: Michael M. Bachtin, *Formen der Zeit im Roman. Untersuchungen zur historischen Poetik*. Frankfurt am Main 1989; reference is made to the English translation: Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*. Austin 1981 [University of Texas Press Slavic Series, 1]

Beaton, Roderick (1996a). *The Medieval Greek romance*. 2nd edition, revised and expanded. London and New York. [1st

edition Cambridge, New York, Port Chester, Melbourne, Sydney 1989]

Beaton, Roderick (1996b). "The Byzantine revival of the ancient novel", in: Schmeling 1996: 713-33

Beck, Hans-Georg (1971). *Geschichte der byzantinischen Volksliteratur*. Munich [Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft. Byzantinisches Handbuch, II, 3]

Christians, Dagmar (1991). *Die serbische Alexandreis nach der Sofioter Handschrift Nr. 771*. Text und Übersetzung mit wissenschaftlichem Apparat, Stellenkommentar, Glossar und einer Einführung. Mit einem Beitrag zu griechischen Texten von Erich Trapp. Cologne, Weimar, Vienna [Bausteine zur slavischen Philologie und Kulturgeschichte: Reihe B, Editionen; N.F., 2 = 17]

Conca, Fabrizio (1994). *Il romanzo bizantino del XII secolo*. Torino

Cupane, Carolina (1994-5). "Δεῦτε, προσκαρτερήσατε μικρόν, ὦ νέοι πάντες. Note sulla ricezione primaria e sul pubblico della letteratura greca medievale", *Δίπτυχα* 6, 147-68

Cupane, Carolina (1995). *Romanzi cavallereschi bizantini*. Torino

Cupane, Carolina (1996). "Roman. VII. Byzantinische Literatur", *Lexikon des Mittelalters*. VII. Munich, coll. 988-90

Dimitroulopoulos, Christos (1995). *Διήγησις Ἀλεξάνδρου μετὰ Σεμίραμης βασίλισσας Συρίας*. Ἕνα ανέκδοτο πρωτονεοελληνικό ποίημα για το Μέγα Αλέξανδρο. Unpublished thesis. Athens

Holzberg, Niklas (1995). *The Ancient Novel*. An introduction. London, New York

Holzberg, Niklas (1996). "The Genre: Novels proper and the fringe", in: Schmeling 1996: 11-28

Jeffreys, Elizabeth (1998). *Digenis Akritis*. The Grottaferrata and Escorial versions. Cambridge [Cambridge Medieval Classics, 7]

Jeffreys, Michael and Elizabeth (1971). "Imberios and Margarona: the manuscripts, sources and edition of a Byzantine verse romance", *Byzantion* 41, 122-60 [also in: idem, *Popular literature in late Byzantium*. London 1983]

Jouanno, Corinne (1996). "Recits d'enfances dans la littérature byzantine d'imagination", *PRIS-MA* 12, 39-56

Konstantinopulos, Vasilis (1983). *Ps.-Kallisthenes: Zwei mittelgriechische Prosa-Fassungen des Alexanderromans*. Teil II. Königstein/Ts. [Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie, 150]

Lambert, Jacoba (1935). *Le roman de Libistros et Rhodamné*. Publié d'après les manuscrits de Leyde et de Madrid avec une introduction, des observations grammaticales et un glossaire. Amsterdam [Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen te Amsterdam. Afdeeling Letterkunde. Nieuwe Reeks, 35]

Lampsidis, Odysseus (1996). *Constantini Manassis breviarium chronicum*. 2 vols. Athens [Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae, 34]

Lavagnini, Renata (1988). *I fatti di Troia*. L'*Iliade bizantina* del cod. Paris. suppl. gr. 926. Palermo [Quaderni dell'Istituto di Filologia Greca della Università di Palermo, 20]

Lolos, Anastasios (1983). *Ps.-Kallisthenes: Zwei mittelgriechische Prosa-Fassungen des Alexanderromans*. Teil I. Königstein/Ts. [Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie, 141]

MacAlister, Suzanne (1996). *Dreams and suicides*. The Greek novel from Antiquity to the Byzantine Empire. London, New York

Moennig, Ulrich (1992). *Die spätbyzantinische Rezension *ζ *des Alexanderromans*. Cologne [Neograeca Medii Aevi, 6]

Moennig, Ulrich (1993). "Digenes = Alexander? The relationship between *Digenes Akrites* and the Byzantine *Alexander Romance* in their different versions", in: Roderick Beaton and David Ricks (eds.), *Digenes Akrites*. New approaches to Byzantine Heroic Poetry. Aldershot [Centre for Hellenic Studies, King's College London. Publications, 2]

Nørgaard, Lars and Smith, Ole (1975). *A Byzantine Iliad*. The text of *Par. Suppl. Gr.* 926. Edited with critical apparatus, introduction and indexes. Copenhagen [Opuscula Graecolatina, 5]

Pichard, Michel (1956). *Le roman de Callimaque et de Chrysorrhoé*. Paris

Schmeling, Gareth (ed.) (1996). *The novel in the ancient world*. Leiden, New York, Cologne [Mnemosyne, Supplementum 159]

Schmitt, John (1904). *The Chronicle of Morea. Τὸ Χρονικὸν τοῦ Μορέως*. A history in political verse, relating to the establishment of feudalism in Greece by the Franks in the thirteenth century. Edited in two parallel texts from the MSS of Copenhagen and Paris, with introduction, critical notes and indices. London

Smith, Ole (1991-2). "Some features of structure and narrative in the *Byzantine Achilleid*", *Ελληνικά* 42, 75-94

Smith, Ole (1999). *The Byzantine Achilleid*. The Naples version. Introduction, critical edition and commentary by –. Edited and prepared for publication by Panagiotis A. Agapitos and Karin Hult. Vienna [Wiener Byzantinistische Studien, 21]

Trapp, Erich (1971). *Digenes Akrites*. Synoptische Ausgabe der ältesten Versionen. Vienna [Wiener Byzantinistische Studien, 8]

University of Hamburg