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DU CANGE AND BYZANTIUM*

It is surprising that Charles Dufresne, sieur Du Cange, is not as well known. In 1988, the three-hundredth anniversary of his death, which is also the 300th anniversary of his *Mediae et infimae graecitatis glossarium* was almost not celebrated. He was born in Amiens, Picardie and the Société des Antiquaires de Picardie was alone in commemorating this anniversary. An issue of their Bulletin was devoted to him.[1] An unsigned note tells the reader that this Société received few encouraging responses, when trying to organize a commemoration, and was unable to organize a Du Cange exhibition. This same note recalls, in contrast, at the initiative of the Society, the erection, almost forty years before, of a statue of Du Cange, and its inauguration with speeches held by the representative of the minister, the mayor of Amiens, the President of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres and other representatives of the Academic world. Even a salvo of artillery was fired. All that happened on 19 August 1849, a date which is not far away from one of the rare general publications on Du Cange.[2]

Du Cange was more celebrated by the latinists than by the Byzantinists. In 1978, a colloquium was held about the lexicography of Medieval latin on the occasion of the anniversary of the publication of the *Glossarium mediae et infimae latinitatis*.[3] Some notes, at the end of the volume, are devoted to Du Cange and to the exhibition which was held then at the Bibliothèque Nationale.[4] This commemoration of the Latin Glossarium should remind us that Du Cange was not primarily a Byzantinist, even if we suppose that this word could have meant anything in the 17th century. His first interest was in genealogy and in heraldry. He elaborated a very modern approach to

* [Paru dans *Through the Looking-Glass. Byzantium through British eyes*, éd. R. Cormack et E. Jeffreys, Aldershot 2000, p. 199–210.]

1. Th. Girard, La formation intellectuelle de Du Cange et ses premiers travaux, *Bulletin de la Société des Antiquaires de Picardie*, 1988 (3rd quarter), pp. 79–88; M. Evrard, Lettres de Du Cange à Nicolas Du Mont (1671–1676), *ibid*., pp. 89–128.

2. L. Feugère, Étude sur la vie et les ouvrages de Du Cange (Paris 1852). For a useful bibliography on Ducange, see E. Bury, B. Meunier, éd., *Les Pères de l'Église au XVIIe siècle*, Paris 1993, p. 529.

3. Y. Lefèvre, éd., *La lexicographie du latin médiéval et ses rapports avec les recherches actuelles sur la civilisation du Moyen-Âge*, *Paris 18-21 octobre 1978* (Paris 1981, p. 11).

4. See, *ibid*., p. 497–500, a speech of Ch. Samaran pronounced in front of Du Cange's house; M. Pastoureau, Du Cange héraldiste, *ibid*., p. 501–504; D. Bloch, Charles Du Cange (1610–1688), Exposition organisée à l'occasion du tricentenaire du *Glossarium mediae et infimae latinitatis* par la Bibliothèque Nationale. Catalogue, *ibid*., pp. 509–547 (with a chronology of his life, pp. 511–512).

heraldry, which could have brought it to the standard actually achieved only in the nineteenth century, but that aspect of his work remained unpublished.[5]

As far as we know, it is only in the 1650s and perhaps, not before 1655, that Du Cange, at the age of forty-five, began dealing with the Eastern world. It was French history, which lead him to Constantinople: his concern was to provide a new edition of Villehardouin and to translate it in "modern" French. He expanded it in a *Histoire de l'empire de Constantinople sous les empereurs français* published in 1657. In both the "Epître au Roy" which opens the book and in the "Preface," Du Cange underlines the links between the history of France and the history of Constantinople, because of the domination of the Empire of Constantinople—these are the very words he uses—by French emperors.[6] This was the justification for the book being published as a part of the Byzantine du Louvre, whose official beginning was 1648. In the same place Du Cange exhorts Louis XIV to wage war on the Turkish empire, because he had a claim to occupy the Imperial throne, earlier occupied by his ancestors. Du Cange explains also that the conquest of Constantinople was not due to the ambition of the French kings: God used them to punish the Greeks for their cruelty and the purpose of the conquest was not to rule more countries, but to re-establish an emperor who had been blinded, and to unify the church.

Du Cange goes so far in his glorification of the French past, that he presents the conquest of Constantinople as a kind of successful remake of the storming of the Capitol by the Gauls and he finishes by saying that the subjects of the king are as courageous and generous as the Gauls and those who took Constantinople put together. He also alluded to the traditional contestation by the French kings that the Habsbourg had no just claim on the imperial title and throne.

More than twenty years later, Du Cange used the same themes when, in 1680, he
201 dedicated his *Historia Byzantina* to Colbert. Again Louis XIV is portrayed as sovereign most able to defeat the Turks; France was the equal of the Eastern Empire. France, added Du Cange, has even a superiority over the Eastern Empire because of the stability of the succession, a remark which points to one of the reasons which made Byzantine History so difficult to understand in early modern Europe.

All these assertions recall the imperial ideology, which, during the centuries, was to a greater or lesser extent stressed by the kings of France and which played a by no means negligible part in Louis XIV's policy. But first we have to consider what value is to be given to the kind of declarations contained in dedicatory epistles, a very rhetorical genre indeed. For instance A. Pertusi would dismiss such words as flattery.[7]

5. Pastoureau, *Du Cange* (quoted n. 4).

6. At the turn of the XVIth and XVIIth century Blaise de Vigenere had, in the same way, published an edition of Villehardouin and one of Chalcocondyles.

7. Pertusi, *Storiografia umanistica e mondo bizantino*, Palerme 1967, pp. 89–90.