

Marta Milazzo\*

# The Onomasticon Arthurianum (*et similia*). State of the art of a chimera

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**Abstract:** The aim of this article is to provide an overview of medieval onomastic repertoires devoted to Arthurian literature. It focuses in particular on the unfinished project of the Onomasticon Arthurianum, but at the same time considers a broad chronology from the second half of the nineteenth century to the present day, taking into account the entire European Arthurian production.

**Résumé:** L'article vise à fournir l'état des lieux des répertoires onomastiques médiévaux consacrés à la littérature arthurienne. L'état des lieux s'attarde en particulier sur le projet jamais achevé de l'Onomasticon Arthurianum, mais envisage en même temps une chronologie large allant de la seconde moitié du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle à nos jours et pour prendre en considération l'ensemble de la production arthurienne européenne.

**Zusammenfassung:** Ziel dieses Artikels ist es, einen Überblick über die mittelalterlichen Onomastik-Repertorien zu geben, die sich mit der Artusliteratur befassen. Er konzentriert sich insbesondere auf das unvollendete Projekt des Onomasticon Arthurianum, betrachtet aber gleichzeitig eine breite Chronologie die von der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts bis zur Gegenwart reicht und berücksichtigt dabei die gesamte europäische Artusproduktion.

**Keywords:** onomastics, proper names, Arthurian literature, digital humanities

In a metaphorical sense, the chimera, a heterogeneous mix of elements that could never coexist in nature, describes what cannot be. It is not unusual, in critical studies, to encounter projects that share some of the chimera's traits: they exist only in the imagination, taking seemingly implausible forms, and sometimes straying into the realms of fantasy. This brief survey intends to establish the state of the art regarding a similarly marvellous thing that has never been seen, except in the

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\*Corresponding author: Marta Milazzo, Università degli Studi di Milano Statale,  
E-Mail: [marta.milazzo@unimi.it](mailto:marta.milazzo@unimi.it)

margins of papers and essays. Arthurian scholars might at some point have come across a mention of the so-called ‘Onomasticon Arthurianum’, a title which refers to the project to create ‘a name catalogue of the entire *corpus* of medieval Arthuriana, comprising works written in more than ten different languages over a period of five centuries and preserved in a staggering number of manuscripts’.<sup>1</sup> The ‘Onomasticon Arthurianum’, in this form, was conceived in the late 1960, but it can be traced back well before that, and has at least partly been up-dated and implemented since. The aim of the present contribution is to give a brief account of both the earliest and the most recent developments in Arthurian onomastics<sup>2</sup>.

The vastness and complexity of such a field of research emerges immediately. The *matière de Bretagne*,<sup>3</sup> according to Jean Bodel’s well-known formula, constitutes one of the main axes around which the West has built its myths and identity. To engage with Arthurian literature means taking into account a wide geographical-literary space that we usually identify, not without problems, with Europe.<sup>4</sup> The Arthurian tradition and its various offshoots, initially conveyed in oral form, was committed to writing in almost every European vernacular. As Leah Tether and Johnny McFadyen note in the recent *Handbook of Arthurian Romance*,<sup>5</sup> ‘these many and varied (re-)writings are revealing in that they offer tangible evidence for a wide, cross-border, cross-cultural and interlingual interest in the key themes associated with Arthuriana’. Indeed, it is certainly no coincidence that the need for

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1 Robert Ackerman, *An Index of the Arthurian Names in Middle English*, Language and literature, 10 (Stanford-London: Stanford University publications, 1952), p. XI. On this work, see *infra*. The present state of the art is limited to medieval Arthurian narrative literature only. Genres and traditions not related to this domain are therefore excluded. Where necessary, reference will be made to critical works that lie outside these limits, but such references aim neither to be systematic nor complete.

2 A state of the art regarding Old French onomastic instruments can be found in Adeline Latimier-Ionoff, *Lire le nom propre dans le roman médiéval*, Recherches Littéraires Médiévales, 28 (Paris: Garnier, 2019) pp. 75–80 and in Christine Ferlampin Acher and Fabienne Pomel, “[Car] par le non conuist an l’ome” (Conte du graal, v. 560) : études sur le nom propre dans la littérature médiévale’, in “Par le non conuist an l’ome”. *Études d’onomastique littéraire médiévale*, ed. by Christine Ferlampin-Acher, Fabienne Pomel and Emese Egedi-Kovács, Antiquitas – Byzantium – Renascentia, XLIII (Budapest: Collège Eötvös József ELTE, 2021), pp. ix–xliii (see pp. xix–xxi).

3 Jean Bodel, *La chanson des Saisnes*, ed. by Annette Brasseur, Textes Littéraires Français, 369, 2 vols. (Geneva: Droz, 1989), I, vv. 5–11, v. 7.

4 In using the concept of ‘literary space’ and the related, complex issues, reference is made to Alberto Várvaro, ‘Storia delle letterature medievali o della letteratura medievale? Considerazioni su spazi, tempi e ambiti della storiografia letteraria’, in Alberto Várvaro, *Identità linguistiche e letterarie nell’Europa romanza*, Studi e saggi, Fuori collana 8 (Roma: Salerno Editrice, 2004) pp. 245–55, especially p. 253.

5 *Handbook of Arthurian Romance. King Arthur’s Court in Medieval European Literature*, ed. by Leah Tether and Johnny McFadyen, De Gruyter reference (Berlin-Boston: De Gruyter, 2017), p. 1.

cooperation has been evoked several times in this regard, as far back as the seminal *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, the *Collaborative History* conceived by Roger Sherman Loomis, which in turn reflects the ambitions of the International Arthurian Society, founded in 1948 to encourage just that kind of collaboration.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, more than other literary traditions, the Arthurian tradition presents a robust comparative vocation. While each specific instance of Arthurian literature must, of course, be approached according to its specific horizon, each must also be interpreted as part of a common lexicon. How can we arrange such a rich tradition in a satisfactory way? How can we correctly identify the relationships between texts? And how can we set up effective, efficient tools for this purpose?

## 1 Onomastics and the Arthurian tradition

For the founders of our discipline who sought solid evidence to assess texts and their mutual relationships, literary onomastics – ‘the study of names in literary texts (with ‘literary’ defined as broadly as possible)’<sup>7</sup> – provided convincing answers to questions regarding the identification and circulation of the matter of Britain. An onomastic perspective contributes to an appropriate evaluation of texts according to their intertextuality, a critical element, fully at play in Arthurian literature.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, onomastics often allow for verification of the relations between various traditions.<sup>9</sup> Together with other evidence, onomastics can be the final piece in the

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<sup>6</sup> *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages. A Collaborative History*, ed. by Roger Sherman Loomis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959). This influential book was one of the first results of the founding of the *Société Internationale Arthuriennne* (SIA), by Loomis, Jean Frappier and Eugène Vinaver. The book has been updated by the series *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages (ALMA)*, published by the University of Wales Press. ALMA, also published with the support of the Vinaver Trust, aims to encourage the study of Arthurian literature in all languages, and now consists of seven volumes, divided by languages (in chronological order: *The Arthur of the Welsh; the French; the Germans; the English; the Iberians; the Medieval Latin Literature; the Celtic Languages; the Low Countries*).

<sup>7</sup> The quote is taken from the *Journal of Literary Onomastics* home page <<https://soar.suny.edu/handle/20.500.12648/1972>> [accessed 21 October 2023].

<sup>8</sup> The bibliography in this field is vast. For the present purposes, reference is limited to Theodore Ziolkowski, ‘Figures on Loan. The Boundaries of Literature and Life’, in Theodore Ziolkowski, *Varieties of Literary Thematics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1983) pp. 123–51 and Wolfgang G. Müller, ‘Interfiguralität. A Study on the Interdependence of Literary Figures’, in *Intertextuality*, ed. by Heinrich F. Plett, *Research in Text Theory*, 15 (Berlin-New York: de Gruyter 1991), pp. 101–21.

<sup>9</sup> Verification that, far from proposing purely literary onomastic parentage, must take into account a multiplicity of factors including a text’s socio-cultural context, the history of the tradition, production environments, the production-copying-fruition cycle, and so on. The critical frame of

puzzle regarding a character's identity. If a character does not only act similarly in two romances, but also bears a similar name, he may indeed be one and the same character. Onomastics, when supported by critical and linguistic-etymological investigation, for instance, makes it possible to postulate that *Careticus* in the *Historia Regum Britanniae*, *Cadwagan Vras* of the Welsh *Mabinogion*, *Garadue* of Biket's *Lai du Cor*, *Carados* of the *Première Continuation du Perceval* constitute literary representations of the same character and not cases of homonymy.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, proper names, which are often linguistically conservative, can resist translation: in the form of *calques*, they can be transferred in full from one language to another (from Old French *Joieuse Garde* to Italian *Gioiosa Guardia*), or covered with a coat of linguistic patina (from Old French *Biaus Descouneüs* to English *Lybeaus Desconus*) and such proper names suggest direct contact between two texts in two different languages. Within multilingual textual traditions, proper names such also make a significant contribution to the reconstruction of a text's linguistic stratification, and to the identification of the complex relationships between direct and indirect witnesses. All these aspects are considered by Francesco Carapezza, who notes that:

Il 'nome nel testo' si offre insomma a svariati tipi d'indagine critica ma costituisce al contempo un *locus criticus* in senso tecnico, essendo il nome proprio soggetto per sua natura a varianti formali, variazioni intenzionali, occultamenti, fraintendimenti ed errori di copia che ci possono informare sulla storia della tradizione e della ricezione del testo in esame.<sup>11</sup>

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reference within which onomastic investigations must be situated is of course that of material philology, for which see at least the three fundamental contributions by Giorgio Pasquali, *Storia della tradizione e critica del testo* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1934), George Thomas Tanselle, *Literature and Artifacts* (Charlottesville, Virginia: Bibliographical Society of America, 1998) and Guglielmo Gorni, 'Filologia materiale, filologia congetturale, filologia senza aggettivi', *Modern Language Notes*, 119/1 (2004), 108–19.

<sup>10</sup> This example is taken from Margherita Lecco, 'Nome e variazioni onomastiche di "Caradoc Briebras" nella narrativa medievale', *il Nome nel testo*, 8 (2006), 467–78. There are of course differences between these 'Caradocs': each character constitutes a particular instantiation that varies according to the cultural horizon underlying the individual text (see p. 470 on *Cadwagan Vras*). After all, the tense dialectic between tradition and innovation must underpin the reading of any medieval literary work.

<sup>11</sup> This quote is taken from the *preambolo* by Carapezza for the thematic issue of the journal *In-Verbis* dedicated specifically to *Il nome proprio nella letteratura romanza medievale*: see Francesco Carapezza, 'Preambolo', *InVerbis*, 2 (2018), 7–11 (quote from page 8). Also fundamental is the volume "*Par le non conuist an l'ome*", ed. by Ferlampin-Acher et al. (available in open-access <<https://sites-recherche.univ-rennes2.fr/cellam/articles/par-le-non-conuist-an-lome-etudes-donomastique-litteraire-medievale/>> [accessed 15 January 2024]). This volume, divided into four sections (I. *Formes du nom: pratiques sociales et littéraires, du baptême à la transcription et la traduction*; II. *Le nom sous l'emprise de la matière littéraire: le cas de l'onomastique arthurienne*; III. *Mises en œuvre(s)*

Finally, by reversing the perspective (from literature to history), and since historical onomastics often offers precise chronological information, onomastics can help to ascertain details of the diffusion of some subjects with a certain level of accuracy. Numerous cases in point are offered by Pio Rajna's and Pierre Gallais' contributions on the reception of *matière de Bretagne* in Italy and France respectively, as well as by the 'enromancement du nom', a phenomenon acutely identified by Michel Pastoureau.<sup>12</sup>

## 2 Onomastics and *fin de siècle* philology

The issues mentioned above were already clear to the very first generations of philologists and medievalists. In addition to purely academic reasons, there are also cultural-historical implications which account for the development of certain fields of study within the scholarly tradition.<sup>13</sup> This is particularly true for German medi-

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*et en scène du nom: quand le nom fait sens; IV. Onomastique et genre: du coeur au queer*) offers 26 contributions that cover multiple aspects relating to the field of literary onomastics.

12 The subject was particularly important to Rajna. See his analysis in *Romania*: Pio Rajna, 'Contributi alla storia dell'epopea e del romanzo medievale. V. Gli eroi brettoni nell'onomastica italiana del sec. XII e VI' and 'Ancora gli eroi brettoni nell'onomastica italiana del secolo XII', *Romania*, 66 (1888), 161–85 and 355–65; 'Contributi alla storia dell'epopea e del romanzo medievale. VII. L'onomastica italiana e l'epopea carolingia', *Romania*, 69 (1889), 1–69. Gallais's important work – Pierre Gallais, 'Bléhéri, la cour de Poitiers et la diffusion des récits arthuriens sur le continent', in *Actes du VII<sup>e</sup> congrès national de littérature comparée* (Poitiers, 1965), (Paris: Didier 1967), pp. 47–79 – has recently been re-edited in *Journal of the International Arthurian Society*, 2/1 (2014), 84–113. Michel Pastoureau, 'L'enromancement du nom. Enquête sur la diffusion des noms de héros arthuriens à la fin du Moyen Age', in *Les romans de la Table Ronde, la Normandie et au-delà ...*, ed. by Jean-Charles Payen (Condé-sur-Noireau: C. Corlet, 1987), pp. 73–84. By 'enromancement du nom' the scholar defines the practice, widespread from the 13th century onwards, of giving children, mostly sons, Christian names taken from Arthurian romances. Pastoureau has investigated this phenomenon, which is by no means marginal, showing that it is part of the reception of the Arthurian legend that takes place at several levels and in a differentiated manner according to social classes, and includes various Arthurian practices, such as tournaments, rituals, spectacles, etc.

13 Although focused on onomastics, the considerations that follow cannot but refer to the history and development of Romance philology, which has been the subject of numerous studies. For an initial approach, see Stefano Rapisarda, *La Filologia al servizio delle Nazioni. Storia, crisi e prospettive della Filologia romana*, Ricerca (Milano: Mondadori, 2018); Bartsch, Foerster et Cie. *La première romanistique allemande et son influence en Europe*, ed. by Richard Trachsler, Rencontres 64, *Civilisation médiévale*, 7 (Paris: Garnier, 2013); Alexander M. Kalkhoff, *Romanische Philologie im 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert. Institutionengeschichtliche Perspektiven*, Romanica Monacensia, 78 (Tübingen: Narr, 2010); Charles Ridoux, *Évolution des études médiévales en France de 1860 à 1914*,

evalists, who took the lead in compiling indexes and repertories of proper names, as they would soon also do for dictionaries and inventories of all kinds. Onomastics has in fact been a focus of interest of Romantic intellectuals since Wilhelm Grimm's *Die deutsche heldensage* (1867).<sup>14</sup> Similar was the ambitious project of Ernst Förstemann – supported by his close friend Grimm – of the *Altdeutsches Namenbuch*, the first volume of which, dealing with anthroponomy, was printed as early as 1856.<sup>15</sup> One cannot help but notice that the German primacy of literary onomastics in that period is also linked to the complex ideological (re)construction of a national history, a topic evidently beyond the scope of the present investigation.<sup>16</sup> However, Grimm and his companions' cultural-political project also passes into the terrain of historical linguistics, to which onomastics is closely connected.

Outside of Germany and its specific context, Europe saw the compilation of medieval literary onomastic indexes at the end of the 19th century. In Great Britain William George Searle produced the *Onomasticon anglo-Saxonicum* (1897), which shares Förstemann's methodologies and employs both historical and literary sources.<sup>17</sup> France, instead, engaged in the collection of indexes relating to literature: Alfred Franklin's *Dictionnaire des noms, surnoms et pseudonymes latins de l'histoire littéraire du Moyen Âge (1100–1530)* was published in 1875, and is an excellent and purely practical manual, aiming to identify authors referred to by different names.<sup>18</sup> It does

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Nouvelle bibliothèque du Moyen Âge, 56 (Paris: Champion, 2001), together with Françoise Viellard's review, 'Charles Ridoux. Évolution des études médiévales en France de 1860 à 1914', *Bibliothèque de l'école des chartes*, 161/1 (2003), 351–54; Alberto Limentani, *Alle origini della Filologia romanza*, ed. by Mario Mancini (Parma: Pratiche, 1991).

14 Wilhelm Grimm, *Die deutsche heldensage* (Berlin: Ferd. Dümmlers Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1867). The work constitutes an extensive collection of themes, names and critical reflections conducted by Grimm on the various attestations of the heroic German tradition (6th–16<sup>th</sup> c.). The work, notably dedicated to 'Herrn Professor' Karl Lachmann, was nevertheless part of a nationalist reading of the Middle Ages and was not immune to ideological manipulation.

15 Ernst Förstemann, *Altdeutsches Namenbuch* (Brussel and Ghent-London: Nordhausen, 1856), followed in 1859 by a volume dedicated to place names. German repertories collect names from all kinds of sources, ranging from literature (from Caesar and Tacitus' classical historiography to the Nibelungen cycle) to notarial documents.

16 The analysis of these phenomena, only briefly mentioned here, is far from an easy task. To grasp the complexity of the problem and the diversity of critical viewpoints, see both Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afro-Asiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987) and *Black Athena Revisited*, ed. by Mary R. Lefkowitz and Guy MacLean Rogers (Chapel Hill-London: The University of North Carolina press, 1996).

17 William George Searle, *Onomasticon anglo-Saxonicum; a list of Anglo-Saxon proper names from the time of Bede to that of King John* (Cambridge: University Press, 1897).

18 Alfred Franklin, *Dictionnaire des noms, surnoms et pseudonymes latins de l'histoire littéraire du Moyen Âge (1100–1530)* (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1875). Each 'nom', 'surnom' or 'pseudonym' is brought back to the name of the Latin author in lemmatised form. For example, the names 'Abulpharajius'

not include fictional characters and focusses instead on Medieval Latin writers. However, less than a decade later, French vernacular fiction would be investigated as well. Pole position in these endeavours, however, does not belong to France, but Germany: in Greifswald in 1882, PhD candidate Fritz Seiffert defended a thesis entitled *Ein Namenbuch zu den altfranzösischen Artusepen*.<sup>19</sup> The project, directed by Eduard Koschwitz (1851–1904), aimed to produce an onomastic index from a corpus of Arthurian French romances. Koschwitz, a former student of Gröber and Böhmer, was a renowned medievalist with special expertise in Provençal material, who in 1881 was only 30 years old and had only recently started teaching Romance Philology in Greifswald, where he would later become rector, before moving to Marburg and Königsberg. Interestingly, his *œuvre* does not seem to reflect any specific interest in Arthurian literature and the topic may have been suggested by some more experienced scholar he had contact with.<sup>20</sup> A short announcement of Seiffert's thesis was published in the 'Chronique' section of the journal *Romania*: 'Ein Namenbuch zu den altfranzösischen Epen, Teil I ... (von) Fritz Seiffert, in-8°, 45 p. (dissertation, de Greifswald). – Ce n'est ici que l'introduction d'un livre qui doit bientôt paraître; nous en reparlerons. L'idée est bonne, mais l'auteur aurait besoin de plus de préparation'.<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, the editors of *Romania* did not have the opportunity to discuss the thesis again, because the full publication never took place.<sup>22</sup> From what we can reconstruct from the published material, the thesis considered a corpus of fourteen French verse romances from the 12th and 13th centuries, as well as Geoffrey of

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or 'Malatiensis' refer to the entry *Abulfaragius, Gregorius*, an Arab historian and physician; the epithet 'Lux Occidentis' or 'Magister Contradictionum' refers to the entry *Wessellus, Joannes*, a theologian forerunner of Luther, also known by such *surnoms*.

<sup>19</sup> Fritz Seiffert, *Ein Namenbuch zu den altfranzösischen Artusepen, Teil I* (Greifswald, 1882).

<sup>20</sup> Koschwitz was a leading philologist and collaborated closely with eminent colleagues such as Wendelin Foerster. For a complete bio-bibliographical profile, see Max Kaluza and Gustav Thureau, 'Eduard Koschwitz. Ein Lebensbild', *Zeitschrift für Französisch und Englisch Unterricht*, 3 (1904), 385–432 (The journal was founded by Koschwitz himself in 1902). See also Frank-Rutger Hausmann, 'Koschwitz, Eduard', in *Romanistenlexikon: Verzeichnis der im deutschen Sprachraum tätig gewesenen oder aus dem deutschen Sprachraum stammenden Romanistinnen und Romanisten*, <[http://lexikon.romanischestudien.de/index.php?title=Koschwitz,\\_Eduard](http://lexikon.romanischestudien.de/index.php?title=Koschwitz,_Eduard)> [accessed 27 October 2023].

<sup>21</sup> 'Chronique', *Romania*, 45 (1883), 138–44, p. 141. For an idea of the critical aspects of the thesis: 'Dans une digression sur le *Perceval*, il soutient avec raison que la partie composée par Gerbert n'est pas une interpolation, mais une fin indépendante de celle de Manessier, qui commençait au même endroit, et qu'un copiste, en supprimant le dénouement, a intercalée avant celle de Manessier; mais il prétend à tort que Chrétien a composé au-delà du vers 10601 de l'édition Potvin. Nous aurons bientôt occasion de traiter ces questions ici in Chronique' (p. 141).

<sup>22</sup> Nor does there appear to be any further work by Fritz Seiffert, even in the Greifswald University archives: see <<https://ariadne-portal.uni-greifswald.de/?s=Seiffert%20Fritz&cont=&themen=0&type=prs&digi=0>> [Accessed 15 January 2024].

Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*.<sup>23</sup> It is, however, important to acknowledge Koschwitz as having conceived the first onomastic investigation of French Arthurian literature. Although he was a convinced nationalist, especially after events in Alsace and Lorraine, and despite being an honorary member of the 'Vereins Deutscher Studenten', Koschwitz never denied the leading position of medieval French literature over other contemporary canons.<sup>24</sup> In addition, it should be noted that the German professor turned to the then neglected field of romance. Up to that point, medievalist research had concentrated instead on texts with presumed historical relevance such as epics and chronicles, which were important from an ideological and nationalistic perspective, while Arthurian literature had little to offer for these purposes.

In 1904 it was the turn of Ernest Langlois's *Table des noms propres de toute nature compris dans les Chansons de geste*,<sup>25</sup> a publication that did not arise by chance. It resulted from a 'prix ordinaire' announced by the Académie des inscriptions et des belles-lettres in 1899 for a work which would 'relever les noms propres de toute nature qui figurent dans les chansons de geste imprimées antérieures au règne de Charles V'.<sup>26</sup> Including chansons de geste 'de toute nature', the structure of the *Table*, which was imitated by later scholarship, consists of onomastic entries, each of them with variants considered significant, a concise description of the name's referent (character, place, country, etc.), and a bibliographical reference to the point in a text where the name occurs. Langlois also included names that would be expunged from later indexes, such as *Jesus*. The whole project was actively promoted by Paul Meyer and Gaston Paris, the two most influential philologists of the time, who both were members of the Académie.<sup>27</sup> Langlois's *Table* therefore

<sup>23</sup> See the list of 'Benutzte Texte' in Seiffert, *Ein Namenbuch*, p. I.

<sup>24</sup> See Christian Tilitzki, *Die Albertus-Universität Königsberg: Ihre Geschichte von der Reichsgründung bis zum Untergang der Provinz Ostpreußen (1871–1945), Band 1: 1871–1918*, (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2012), pp. 315–16.

<sup>25</sup> Ernest Langlois, *Table des noms propres de toute nature compris dans les Chansons de geste* (Paris: Librairie Émile Bouillon, 1904).

<sup>26</sup> Langlois, *Table des noms propres*, p. V. The winner of the call was, of course, Langlois, who published the results of his research in 1904: thus, the first philologically reliable onomastic repertory of medieval French literature was born. In addition to *Table*, the professor of Walloon and Picardian language and literature in Lille also deserves to be remembered for his *Le Roman de la Rose par Guillaume de Lorris et Jean de Meun*, Société des anciens textes français, 5 vols (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1914–24). On Langlois, see the observations by Gilles Roques, 'Joseph Bédier entre Gaston Paris et Paul Meyer', in *L'Ombre de Joseph Bédier*, ed. By Craig Baker, Marcello Barbato, Mattia Cavagna and Yan Greub, *Études et Textes romans du Moyen Âge* (Strasbourg: Éditions de Linguistique et de Philologie, 2018), pp. 25–59.

<sup>27</sup> In the above-mentioned extract from the 'Chroniques' on Seiffert, they had indeed called the project 'a good idea' (see footnote no. 17). Paul Meyer's review of Langlois's work [Paul Meyer, re-



provides a model for the many onomastic works that follow, and it also serves to expand the cultural horizons of late positivism, which played a significant role in structuring Romance philology.

At the same time, other areas of the academy were also taking an interest in onomastics. In September 1902, the Royal Flemish Academy announced a competition for an ‘Een Onomasticon of Lijst van Persoonsnamen der Middelnederlandsche Letterkunde’.<sup>28</sup> It is not surprising that this project was also set within a nationalist perspective. The individual behind the competition was Willem de Vreese, not only a professor and librarian but also a fervent patriot and leader of the ‘Jong-Vlaamse Beweging’<sup>29</sup> under German occupation in the First World War.<sup>30</sup> The outcome of this competition was somewhat different to what had happened in France. The Reports of the Inspection Commission of the Academy reveal that there was only one candidate: the linguist Charles P. F. Lecoutere, a professor in Leuven. His work left the Commission unsatisfied, who proposed to award him the 600 francs prize only on the condition that he complete and expand his work. There is, however, no trace of what happened to the 600 francs, or indeed to Lecoutere’s work.<sup>31</sup>

Beyond this, what must be emphasised is that the creation of mediaeval onomastic indexes from the second half of the 19th century ought to be understood from the perspective of the needs of the time. The scant interest shown in Arthuriana is due to the fact that it is fictional literature: and for this very reason Koschwitz’s pupil’s pioneering project takes on even more significance.

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view to *Table des noms propres de toute nature compris dans les chansons de geste imprimées*, par Ernest Langlois, 1904, *Romania*, 137 (1906) 130–133] highlights its critical points – which is perfectly in line with the very strict demands of the Parisian philologist (who would require ‘la perfection’ from the *Table*, p. 130). Nevertheless, Meyer’s overall judgement is more than positive : ‘cette table est une œuvre de patience qui est à la fois très méritoire et très utile’, p. 133.

28 ‘Onomastic Index of Anthroponyms in Middle-Dutch Literature’.

29 ‘Flemish Youth Movement’.

30 All the references are taken from Jos A. A. M. Biemans, ‘Willem de Vreese en de Bibliotheca Neerlandica Manuscripta. Over een Vlaamse geleerde en zijn levenswerk’, *Literatuur* 6 (1989), 93–101.

31 See in this respect the information given in the ‘Inleiding’ (‘Introduction’) to the *Repertorium van Eigennamen in Middelnederlandse Literaire teksten (REMLT) – Répertoire des noms propres dans des textes littéraires en Moyen Néerlandais*, Onder redactie van dr. Willem Kuiper, drs. Hella Hendriks en drs. Sasja Koetsier (b.d.) (for which see footnote no. 72) <<https://bouwstoffen.kantl.be/remlt/Inleiding.pdf>> [accessed 07 September 2023].

### 3 The Onomasticon Arthurianum: the announcement

In 1891, we finally reach the *Onomasticon Arthurianum*. In the peculiar *fin de siècle* context we have just outlined, the first – and indeed the only – enterprise of collecting and cataloguing the entire Arthurian onomastic corpus takes place. Besides its classificatory spirit, the analytic and methodological frameworks of the time also favoured the project of creating a multilingual thematic index, and a number of philologists at the time made use of onomastics (and toponymy, specifically) for the reconstruction of the ‘sources’ of certain textual traditions. The use of names for such purposes was already a long-standing practice of the Romantics with Walter Scott paradigmatic in this respect.<sup>32</sup> In a more academic context, the fathers of Romance philology – Gaston Paris and Ferdinand Lot, and, on the Italian side, Pio Rajna<sup>33</sup> – had also dealt with questions of onomastics. In 1891, in the margins of a work on the Grail legend in Middle German, the English folklorist Alfred Nutt optimistically claimed:

Il me semble qu’une des œuvres dont l’étude des romans arthuriens profiterait le plus serait la compilation d’un Onomasticon Arthurianum qui tiendrait compte de l’ensemble des textes tant manuscrits qu’imprimés. Ce serait là une œuvre gigantesque, mais qui pourrait être menée à bonne fin si tous les érudits qui s’occupent de ces études y apportaient un concours actif.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> To give an idea of the casual use with which Romantics employed onomastic data, we may consider some of Walter Scott’s remarks on the Tristanian legend. Scott made onomastics fundamental to his argument that the Arthurian romances had Breton origins: ‘Tristrem is uniformly represented as a native of Cornwall, in which, and in the countries of Wales, Ireland and Brittany, all inhabited by the Celtic race, the scene of his history is laid. Almost all the names of the persons in the romance are of genuine British origin; such as Morgan, Roland Riis, Urgan (Urien,) Brengwain, Ganhardin, Beliaogog, Mark, Tristrem, and Isounde, Ysonde, or Yssylt. The few names, which are of Norman extraction, belong to persons of inferior importance, whose proper British appellations may have been unknown to Thomas [of Erceldoune, the author], and on whom, therefore, he bestows names peculiar to the Norman-English dialect, in which he composed. Such are Gouvernail, Blancheflour, Triamour, and Florentin’, in Walter Scott, *Sir Tristrem, a Metrical Romance of the Thirteen Century by Thomas of Erceldoune called The Rhymer* (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable, 1819), pp. xxvi–vii.

<sup>33</sup> In addition to Rajna’s works cited above, see Gaston Paris, ‘Études sur les romans de la Table Ronde’, *Romania*, 40 (1881), 465–96; Ferdinand Lot, ‘Études sur la provenance du cycle arthurien’, *Romania*, 96 (1895), 497–528 and ‘Études sur la provenance du cycle arthurien (fin)’, *Romania*, 97 (1896), 1–32.

<sup>34</sup> Alfred Nutt, ‘Les derniers travaux allemands sur la légende du Saint Graal’, *Revue Celtique*, 12 (1891), 181–228, p. 228.

It is not by chance that the first reference to the *Onomasticon Arthurianum* appears within the *Revue Celtique*: Celtic studies, in great expansion at the time, made particular use of onomastics. The echo of Nutt's desiderata did not take long to spread: a review dedicated by *Romania* to the issue of the *Revue Celtique* in question highlights the statement and offers words of encouragement:

C'est une idée à laquelle on ne saurait qu'applaudir. Elle avait reçu en 1882 un commencement d'exécution dans la thèse d'un jeune docteur de Greifswald, M. Fritz Seiffert; mais *Ein Namenbuch zu den altfranzösischen Artuspén* est malheureusement resté à l'état d'ébauche.<sup>35</sup>

The issue was therefore important to Paul Meyer and his companions: *Romania* gave wider exposure to Nutt's proposal and at the same time confirmed that Seiffert's work still remained incomplete. The doors were then wide open for a European *Onomasticon*. However, it was American academia that was to pick up the baton. From 1898 to 1905, under the supervision of William Henry Schofield from Harvard, Alma Blount, a young anglicist from Radcliff College, which then was the female counterpart of the all-male Harvard College, worked on the compilation of an index, whose name cannot be explained by polygenesis: the *Onomasticon Arthurianum*. The project is strictly in line with Schofield's academic interests, as an expert in Norse literature, but also a renowned comparatist and founder of the *Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature* series.<sup>36</sup>

Blount's project involved the creation of an onomastic repertory based on a corpus which included all known Arthurian texts at the time. The work, conducted manually, was far too ambitious for one person: Nutt had already indicated the need for shared efforts and coordination. In 1910, Blount surrendered to the evidence and deposited her notes in the Treasure Room of the Widener Library at Harvard University, for the benefit of other scholars. To her great disappointment, the *Onomasticon* was never completed, and Blount ended her academic career in 1935 as an English professor at Michigan State Normal College (now Eastern Michigan University), having never taken up the work again.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Ernest Muret, 'Compte-rendu. Périodiques', *Romania*, 79 (1891), 504–5.

<sup>36</sup> Schofield's works are eminently comparative. See e. g. *Studies on the Libeaus Desconus* (Boston: Ginn & Company, 1895). The *Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature* series, inaugurated by George Santayana's monograph, *Three Philosophical Poets: Lucretius, Dante, and Goethe* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1910), still exists (see <<https://complit.fas.harvard.edu/pages/publications>> [accessed 01 September 2023]).

<sup>37</sup> See *Michigan State Normal College Bulletin*, 24/1 (1934), p. 3, together with the obituary attached to the notes in Widener Library (footnote no. 33). The website of Wheaton College, where Blount received her first university education, dedicates a richly informative tab to the *Onomasticon* and its author. In particular, 'there was professional disappointment at it not being completed, but also

In 2022, the University of Harvard digitised the notes deposited by Blount more than a century earlier.<sup>38</sup> The material is particularly interesting to explore. The scholar left the American library a considerable collection, consisting of more than 23,000 handwritten slips, sorted in alphabetical order. An internal note from 1921 indicates:

Compilation was begun in '98-'99 and has been continued at intervals in the Harvard, Cornell and Chicago libraries and in the British Museum and Bibliothèque Nationale. The lists, both of person and place names were completed for all available printed texts, up to the recent Lancelot publications by Dr. H. O. Sommer, which are yet to be added.<sup>39</sup>

It is probably not a coincidence that the Onomasticon stopped short of including the French prose tradition, which would have led to an extraordinary expansion of the corpus. An extensive preparatory dossier is attached to the onomastic files: the materials, almost all of which are handwritten, include summaries and descriptions of the texts used, bibliographical references, notes taken on flyers, and clippings from newspapers or academic journals. Blount's interest in the manuscript tradition also cannot be underestimated: her research was often conducted directly on manuscripts, as evidenced by her visits to North American and European libraries.<sup>40</sup> Also of great importance is the collection of information to disambiguate cases of homonymy, which are extremely frequent in Arthurian literature: it is in all respects a precise study, carried out with scholarly rigour and methodological attention. The generous digitisation of the dossier makes it possible to observe what the author had on her desk and thus to reconstruct the methodologies and criteria of such portentous manual research which is inconceivable today.

For a long time, Blount's unpublished work was the only reference for Arthurian onomastics. The notes must have benefited from a certain circulation, even if probably only in North America, given that in 1926 Francis Peabody Magoun Jr., the well-known medievalist and professor at Harvard, published an article in the newly

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an understanding of the magnitude of the task, especially for one person', see <<https://recollections.wheaton.edu/2010/05/onomasticon-arthurianum/>> [accessed 03 October 2023].

<sup>38</sup> See 'Blount, Alma, 1866-. [Onomasticon Arthurianum.]. 27271.1.114. Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.', <<https://nrs.lib.harvard.edu/urn-3:fhcl.hough:101867413>> [accessed 27 October 2023].

<sup>39</sup> *Harvard Library Notes*, 4 (1921), p. 74.

<sup>40</sup> The importance placed on dealing with the name in its handwritten materiality is fundamental: Frédéric Duval's recent article accounts for the many problems posed by proper names in medieval texts, see Frédéric Duval, 'Éditer les noms propres', in "*Par le non conuist an l'ome*", pp. 61–90.

founded journal *Speculum* in which he gave the list of the abbreviations employed in the *Onomasticon*.<sup>41</sup> From 1926 onwards, journals made a few cursory mentions of the project, but it would take a quarter of a century, and another world war, before we were to hear about it again in concrete terms.

## 4 Onomasticon Arthurianum: what is there

In September 1949, the Modern Language Association of America, then in its sixty-fifth year, held its annual meeting. Among the various discussion groups, we note the group ‘Comparative Literature III: Arthurian Romances’ (Chairman, Albert W. Thompson, Washington State Coll.; Secretary, Robert W. Ackerman, Stanford Univ.): *The Onomasticon Arthurianum* is at the centre of the group’s business: Margaret Schlauch, a renowned medievalist, discussed the ‘Problems of Compiling a Name-Index for the Old Norse Arthuriana’. The formation of the International Arthurian Society is announced, but above all we read about the ‘Report of the Committee on the Onomasticon Arthurianum’.<sup>42</sup> The content of the Report, which is not further specified, is, however, easy to imagine from later publications. In 1952, with the support of Roger Sherman Loomis and William Nitze, the anglicist Robert William Ackerman, the secretary of the aforementioned group session, published his *Index of the Arthurian Names in Middle English*.<sup>43</sup>

Ackerman’s first aim is to fill the gaps in Blount’s work, which, he argues, neglected Middle English texts.<sup>44</sup> Criteria and methodologies are clearly spelled out: the corpus includes ‘all the Middle English versions of the Arthurian legend except the chronicles’,<sup>45</sup> for a total of 28 texts, taken from around 40 manuscripts and *incunabula*.<sup>46</sup> The names of God, Jesus, religious festivals, days of the week, months and ethnic names are not considered, because ‘none of these could be regarded as of great significance to Arthurian studies’.<sup>47</sup> Every single entry in the *Index* includes, in addition to a brief description, a selection of variant readings, accompanied by

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41 Francis Peabody Magoun Jr, ‘An Index of Abbreviations in Miss Alma Blount’s Unpublished *Onomasticon Arthurianum*’, *Speculum*, ½, (1926), 190–216.

42 ‘Proceedings of the Modern Language Association of America’, *PMLA*, 65/1 (1950), 32–68 (p. 41).

43 Ackerman, *An Index of the Arthurian Names*.

44 Ackerman, *An Index of the Arthurian Names*, p. XII. Little is said to acknowledge the positive aspects of Blount’s work.

45 Ackerman, *An Index of the Arthurian Names*, p. IX.

46 The corpus of texts is taken from John Edwin Wells, *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050–1400* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1916), pp. 27–82.

47 Ackerman, *An Index of the Arthurian Names*, p. XIV.

references to the *loci* of the corpus.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, in keeping with the comparatist perspective from which Ackerman undertook, the work ‘incorporated [...] comments about scribal blunders and connections with other names, especially those in Old French texts’.<sup>49</sup>

Ackerman’s work was also intended as a first step towards the creation of the notorious *Onomasticon Arthurianum*, for which the author offers a complete description.<sup>50</sup> The announcement is however formulated in duly cautionary terms: ‘the present index may perhaps be further regarded as one stage, the first, in an effort to compile an Onomasticon Arthurianum’.<sup>51</sup> Mindful of Blount’s example, Ackerman advocates a coordinated project, but with linguistically distinct units. He also expresses the urgency of dealing with French Arthurian literature, which in his opinion is quantitatively and qualitatively dominant.<sup>52</sup>

Meanwhile, in France, Louis-Fernand Flutre was working on a new resource that would significantly improve the scholarly landscape: the *Table des noms propres avec toutes leurs variantes figurant dans les romans du Moyen Age écrits en français ou en provençal*.<sup>53</sup> Several years earlier, in 1943, the Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres had again announced a prize, this time for the preparation of a list of ‘noms propres contenus dans les romans français et provençaux du moyen âge’<sup>54</sup>: the work would mirror what Langlois had done at the very beginning of the 20th century. The Académie entrusted its project to Flutre, an eminent philologist (with special expertise in the textual tradition of the *Faits des Romains*) but also a scholar with broad horizons<sup>55</sup>. This is all the more so since he would later make

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48 Names that appear more than 40 times are not all registered.

49 Ackerman, *An Index of the Arthurian Names*, p. IX. The author explicitly states the importance of onomastics in a comparative study, which would be ‘unthinkable without carefully controlled studies of proper names’ (p. XI).

50 See footnote no. 1.

51 Ackerman, *An Index of the Arthurian Names*, p. XV.

52 Ackerman, *An Index of the Arthurian Names*, p. XII.

53 Louis-Fernand Flutre, *Table des noms propres avec toutes leurs variantes figurant dans les romans du Moyen Age écrits en français ou en provençal et actuellement publiés ou analysés* (Poitiers : Centre d’études supérieures de civilisation médiévale, 1962). The publication of the long-awaited *Table* came the same year that Flutre retired from the Faculté de lettres of Lyon University.

54 Flutre, *Table des noms propres*, p. V.

55 After having participated in the First World War, Flutre studied at the École Normale Supérieure, then took on a role as an *enseignant* in a number of *lycées* and finally a full professor at Lyons University from 1934 to 1962. His output spans at least a hundred publications, ranging from critical editions (the edition of the *Faits de Romains*, extracted from his doctoral thesis, was published as he began teaching in Lyons) to essays on French Romantic literature, via onomastics. René Debie’s moving obituary honours the breadth of his abilities: see sect. ‘Chronique’, *Revue de Linguistique Romane*, 165–166 (1978), 238–240.

contributions that extend into toponymics and far beyond the boundaries of Romance philology: in 1957, he published two toponymic monographs, one focussed on the Lozère department, the other on the French colonies in West Africa.<sup>56</sup> The result of Flutre's research for the Académie was published almost twenty years after he received the award. The work brings together a vast corpus, comprising more than 200 critical editions of mainly romances (and also 21 *Nouvelles, lais, débats*, the *chantefable Aucassin et Nicolette*, and so on) covering a time span from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The work, although in need of updating, has stood the test of time and remains the reference point for onomastic investigations in Gallo-Romance fictional literature to this day: taking into account all the Arthurian romances, in prose and verse, published at the time, the *Table* is still the most extensive (albeit not the most detailed) tool for the study of Arthuriana in Old French. However, one cannot help but notice that, in the author's extensive preface to the *Table*, there is no mention of American works: neither of Blount, nor of the *Onomasticon*, not even of Ackerman's near-contemporary *Index*.

At that time, Arthurian literature remained a primary focus in Anglo-Saxon studies. To French scholars, by contrast, the *matière de Bretagne* was a matter for Britain. Indeed, the first Arthurian index to encompass French literature would be the work of a British scholar working in Canada. After announcing it as early as 1957,<sup>57</sup> Gerald D. West, Professor of French at McMaster University, published his *Index of Proper Names in French Arthurian Verse Romances (1150–1300)* in 1969, followed in 1978 by a second volume dedicated to the prose romances, given that 'in view of the quantity of texts and the complex and differing nature of the material, a satisfactory result could only be achieved by a separate treatment of verse romances and prose Romances'.<sup>58</sup> West argues that this division according

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56 Louis-Fernand Flutre, *Recherches sur les éléments pré-gaulois dans la toponymie de la Lozère*, Annales de l'Université de Lyon, série Lettres, 30 (Paris : Les Belles Lettres 1957) and *Pour une étude de la toponymie de l'A. O. F.*, Publications de la section de Langues et Littératures, 1 (Dakar : Université de Dakar, Faculté des lettres et sciences humaines 1957). See also reviews by his university colleagues in Lyons: Allix André, review to 'L.-F. Flutre, Recherches sur les éléments pré-gaulois dans la toponymie de la Lozère', *Revue de géographie de Lyon*, 33/1 (1958), 77 and Pierre Gardette, review to 'L.-F. Flutre, *Pour une étude de la toponymie de l'A. O. F.*', *Revue de géographie de Lyon*, 33/2 (1958), 214–215.

57 *Bibliographical bulletin of the International Arthurian Society = Bulletin bibliographique de la Société internationale arthurienne (BBSIA)*, 9 (1957), p. 147.

58 Gerald D. West, *An Index of proper names in French Arthurian verse romances 1150–1300*, University of Toronto Romance Serie, 15 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969) and *An Index of proper names in French Arthurian prose romances*, University of Toronto Romance Serie, 35 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), p. IX. West received his training with Brian Woledge, chair of French at University College, London and then moved to Canada, where he taught French

to form is warranted on practical grounds, but he does not examine the possible drawbacks of such an approach. The Arthurianity of the texts, on the other hand, is discussed here for the first time. West determines that the texts of his corpus must in fact possess 'some justification for the title Arthurian'.<sup>59</sup> He notes for the prose romances in particular:

The prose romances from which the entries in this Prose Index have been drawn are those dealing with Arthur and his associates, Merlin, the Knights of the Round Table, Tristan, and the Grail. I have excluded those works in which Arthur's name occurs, or in which he may even appear in person, if the principal subject matter is non-Arthurian or if the works belong to other cycles.<sup>60</sup>

Beyond the discussion of theoretical issues, West's work displays a good deal of systematic and methodological rigour. His period of focus is well delimited, and exceptions to the norm are duly accounted for.<sup>61</sup> Significantly, the structure of the two *Indexes* is the same as Ackerman's, and the names excluded are also the same.<sup>62</sup> In short, West's work explicitly places itself in the continuity with Ackerman's, cited from the outset as a model. Moreover, the author himself declares that 'it is hoped that the Verse Index and the Prose Index may both be regarded as contributions to the comprehensive Onomasticon Arthurianum'.<sup>63</sup>

The resource presented by this Canadian professor offers detailed and refined onomastic data. Each unit consists of a lemmatized form, followed by all the *varia lectio* for the name, as far as available editions allow to account for it. In the case of verse romances, the readings are presented in chronological order, from Wace's *Brut* to Girart d'Amiens' *Escanor*, but leaving weighty texts such as Froissart's *Meliador* to one side.<sup>64</sup> West notes: 'for the sake of convenience, [...] the romance of Chrétien de Troyes have been grouped together; the same procedure has also been adopted for the Tristan poems, and for the various Continuations de Perceval'.<sup>65</sup> For the proeses, however, the variants are arranged alphabetically because the chro-

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literature. Much of his scholarly career was dedicated to his long and laborious onomastic work, published in the indexes.

59 West, *An Index of proper names in French Arthurian verse romances*, p. X.

60 West, *An Index of proper names in French Arthurian prose romances*, p. X.

61 Such as the presence of Arthurian *lais* in the corpus, which 'includes not only those long poems concerned with the adventures of various Knights of the Round Table, but also the verse texts of the stories of Tristan and the Grail, the fragments, [and] the shorter *lais* which have some justification to the title of Arthurian', West, *An Index of proper names in French Arthurian verse romances*, p. X.

62 West, *An Index of proper names in French Arthurian verse romances*, p. XI.

63 West, *An Index of proper names in French Arthurian prose romances*, p. XIII.

64 For which the reference tool remains, therefore, Flutre's *Table*.

65 West, *An Index of proper names in French Arthurian verse romances*, p. X



nology of these texts, as West rightly notes, is ‘a vast subject requiring perhaps some re-investigation’.<sup>66</sup> Each variant is accompanied by an indication of the verse or page on which it appears in the critical edition; if the name appears more than ten times, the first ‘ten appearances only are recorded’.<sup>67</sup> The descriptions accompanying each onomastic unit are detailed and come with a rich and pertinent bibliography and references to the repertories of Ackerman, Langlois and, to a lesser extent, Flutre.<sup>68</sup> Clever exceptions to the general structure of the *Indexes* (for example, in the treatment of cases of homonymy) mean that the work is not only fully systematic in its approach, despite the considerable volume of texts covered, but also, to use an anachronism, truly user-friendly.<sup>69</sup>

The *Indexes* were greeted enthusiastically even by the most demanding critics. Flutre himself calls West’s work ‘plus qu’une table ou un index, [...] une somme géographique et biographique, une encyclopédie onomastique des œuvres étudiées’<sup>70</sup> and soberly concludes that ‘tout cela fait de l’*Index of proper names in French Arthurian verse romances* un livre complet, précis, bien ordonné, dont on peut en toute sûreté recommander l’usage à ceux qui étudient notre ancienne littérature’.<sup>71</sup>

Despite his hopes, West’s work represents a setback since it also underlines the incomplete status of the *Onomasticon*. In this sense, it is appropriate to shine a light on studies carried out afterwards, such as Christopher W. Bruce’s *Arthurian Name Dictionary*, published by Garland in 1999. The title seems to promise the completion of the long-awaited *Onomasticon*, but it is in fact a quite different project. The dictionary, very rich and easy to consult, is intended as a catalogue of Arthurian characters and not as an onomastic tool. Bruce, a policeman from Cambridge, Mas-

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66 West, *An Index of proper names in French Arthurian prose romances*, p. X.

67 West, *An Index of proper names in French Arthurian prose romances*, p. XII.

68 In this sense, West prefers contributions that account for the *status quaestionis* of the name in question, and the positions of different scholars on the subject. Langlois’ *Table* is used only for prose romances, while Flutre’s *Table*, cited in the bibliography, is rarely used.

69 On cases of homonymy for example: ‘It has been considered preferable usually to keep these names and infringe the rule of strict alphabetical order e. g., the name Brun or Bruns or Brunz (eleven main headings) are given in a group and numbered from one to eleven as though they were all Brun, the first being Brun, the last Brunz. The main heading following immediately after Brunz is Brunamort, and the alphabetical order is resumed’, West, *An Index of proper names in French Arthurian verse romances*, p. XII.

70 West’s thoroughness could not be achieved for Flutre’s *Table*, which was built on a much larger number of texts (221, to be precise), and which moreover belonged to a very different literary and cultural tradition. See also what Flutre himself reports in his review to ‘G. D. West, *An Index of Proper Names in French Arthurian Verse Romances, 1150–1300*’, *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale*, 56 (1971) 401–3.

71 Flutre, ‘G. D. West, *An Index*’, p. 403.

sachusetts, clearly states his research goals, which Norris J. Lacy, in his foreword, accurately summarises as a ‘comprehensive guide to Arthurian characters’.<sup>72</sup> It only takes a quick glance to see the *Dictionary*’s philological limitations: the corpus of texts examined, built entirely *iuxta propria principia*, extends from the Venerable Bede to Alfred Tennyson; names are often ‘lemmatised’ by loosely translating them into contemporary English; variants, when present, are provided arbitrarily; there is no indication of the textual *loci* where the indexed names are to be found. In a recent reflection on mediaeval literary onomastics, Christine Ferlampin-Acher reiterates that the *Dictionary* ‘reste généraliste, laisse de côté de nombreuses figures secondaires, ne prend pas en compte la diversité des formes des noms et mêle onomastique et relevé de motifs, comme l’Épée dans le Perron’.<sup>73</sup> Bruce’s work is, in sum, suited more as a means of satisfying generic curiosity than as a basis of systematic, scholarly investigation.

To complete our *tour d’horizon* on the state of the art, let us consider some tools that are not strictly philological, but may nevertheless prove useful for consultation. The *Dictionnaire des lieux arthuriens* by Goulven Péron and the *Arthurian Place Names of Wales* by Scott Lloyd are dedicated to toponymy.<sup>74</sup> Obviously, these useful and up-to-date resources nevertheless cannot address the problems raised by the particular *status* of a proper name in the medieval text.<sup>75</sup> *A fortiori*, the same considerations apply to the numerous thematic dictionaries dedicated to Arthurian literature.<sup>76</sup> Despite significant contributions and despite the availability of relevant digital resources, the *Onomasticon Arthurianum* therefore remains a chimera: a project often mentioned but as yet still unrealised. Could it ever be achievable?

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72 Norris J. Lacy, ‘Foreword’, in Christopher W. Bruce, *Arthurian Name Dictionary*, Garland reference library of the humanities, 2063 (New York-London: Garland, 1999), p. VII.

73 Ferlampin Acher and Pomel, “[Car] par le non conquist an l’ome”, p. xx.

74 Goulven Péron, *Dictionnaire des lieux arthuriens* (Noyal-sur-Vilaine : Ar Strobinieller, 2013) and Scott Lloyd, *The Arthurian Place Names of Wales* (Cardiff : University of Wales Press, 2017).

75 The specificities of medieval onomastics are many and complex : for a preliminary bibliographical indication, see Pierre-Henri Billy, ‘Nom propre et nom commun au Moyen Âge’, *La Nouvelle revue d’onomastique*, 25/26 (1995), 19–35 and ‘Pour une redéfinition du nom propre’, in *Nom propre et nomination. Actes du Colloque de Brest (21–24 avril 1994)*, ed. by Michèle Noailly (Paris : Klincksieck, 1995), 137–44 as well as Frédéric Duval, ‘Éditer les noms propres’, in *Par le non conquist an l’ome*, p. 61–89.

76 See the *status quaestionis* reconstructed in Ferlampin Acher and Pomel, “[Car] par le non conquist an l’ome”, pp. ixx–xxi, to which one can add Carlos Alvar, *El rey Arturo y su mundo : Diccionario de mitología artúrica*, Alianza tres, 258 (Madrid : Alianza Editorial, 1991).

## 5 Onomasticon Arthurianum: what is not there

Having briefly touched upon the main points surrounding the development of the Onomasticon, it may be useful to draw up an inventory not only of what exists, but also of what is missing. As far as Arthurian literature is concerned, numerous linguistic areas remain unexamined. To make up for these shortcomings, it may prove useful to provide a brief account of those resources which, although not strictly Arthurian, nevertheless constitute an important well of information.

Despite the very rich Arthurian tradition in Middle High German – and despite the early onomastic vocation and the presence of numerous indexes – there does not seem to exist an equivalent to West's or Ackerman's work for German literature<sup>77</sup>. There is, however, a very useful repertory for the Arthurian field, although it relates only to anthroponyms: the *Catalogue of Names of Persons in the German Court Epics*. The *Catalogue's* publication date, 1992, should not be misleading. As the editor Martin H. Jones specifies 'the catalogue [...] which is published here for the first time was compiled by the late Frank W. Chandler and submitted as his thesis for the M. A. degree of the University of London in May 1936'.<sup>78</sup> The broad conception of 'Court Epics' allowed Chandler to include many Arthurian romances in his corpus: 'the term "Court Epic" has been interpreted as widely as possible, embracing all poems which are of sufficient length to be called epics, from the fragments of *Graf Rudolf* to the fifteenth-century *Lorengel*, provided that such poems treat in some way or other with knights and their deeds'.<sup>79</sup> Chandler's index thus con-

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77 A few key references are: Wilhelm Arndt, *Die Personennamen der deutschen Schauspiele des Mittelalters* (Breslau: M. & H. Marcus, 1904); Frank W. Chandler, *A Catalogue of Names of Persons in the German Court Epics: An Examination of Literary Sources and Dissemination, together with Notes on the Etymologies of the More Important Names*, M. A. thesis (London: 1936), later published by Martin H. Jones, *King's College London medieval studies*, 8 (London: King's College Centre for Late Antique and Medieval Studies, 1992); George T. Gillespie, *Catalogue of Persons Named in German Heroic Literature, 700–1600: Including Named Animals and Objects and Ethnic Names* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).

78 Chandler, *A Catalogue of Names of Persons*, p. ix. Only very little information could be retrieved about Chandler, and Jones himself provides none. The thesis is recorded in *A List of English, Scandinavian and German Theses in the University of London*, Hugh Smith and Arthur Thomas Hatto (London: London mediaeval studies, University college, 1939), with no other details but the author and title (p. 34). Before the publication edited by Jones, Chandler's thesis does not seem to have enjoyed much publicity. The work is cited only in the *Supplement* of an onomastic bibliography: see Elizabeth Molnár Rajec, (Munich: K. G. Saur, 1981), p. 40.

79 This is not the case in Gillespie, *Catalogue of Persons*, where, for example, there are entries for 'Arthur' and 'Gabein', but no mention of Tristan. One cannot help but notice that Gillespie's work, also begun at the University of London (under the supervision of Prof. Fredrick Norman, King's College) never mentions Chandler's. See Chandler, *A Catalogue of Names of Persons*, pp. ix–xi.

tains copious and useful data, but its inadequacies must also be noted. Firstly, Jones, Senior Research Fellow in the Department of German at King's College London,<sup>80</sup> merely republishes the thesis, with some bibliographical updates.<sup>81</sup> The sources from which the *Catalogue* is constructed are the late 19th- or early 20th-century critical editions on which Chandler had worked. Moreover, name variants, arbitrarily provided, can only be retrieved through cross-references: for example, the entry 'Gâwân' redirects to the main entry ('see Gawein')<sup>82</sup>, but from the entry 'Gawein' it is not possible to access the *varia lectio* of the anthroponym. These absences are, however, consistent with the objectives of Chandler's thesis, the subtitle of which reads: *An Examination of Literary Sources and Dissemination, together with Notes on the Etymologies of the More Important Names*. Again, one is confronted with an resource focussing more on character than on onomastics: the term 'sources' refers to the cultural horizon, outlined above. At the end of the 1980s, Friedhelm Debus, one of the most authoritative voices in onomastics, announced the start of a research project, to be carried out by computer processing, aimed at collecting all proper names from mediaeval Germanic texts.<sup>83</sup> The initiative does not appear to have been completed. Debus, however, founded the series *Documenta Onomastica Litteralia Medii Aevi (DOLMA)*, in which important monographs have been published: in addition to relevant theoretical acquisitions, each volume also offers rich study material from the *Index nominum*.<sup>84</sup>

Mediaeval Dutch literature, which consists of a more manageable volume of text, benefits from a very useful tool: the *Repertorium van Eigennamen in Middelnederlandse Literaire teksten* or *Répertoire des noms propres dans des textes littéraires*

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**80** Where he taught medieval German language and literature from 1968, until his retirement as Senior Lecturer in 2009. Information is taken from Howard Jones and Martin H. Jones, *The Oxford Guide to Middle High German*, Oxford Linguistics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

**81** As he himself clearly states, concluding: 'the text appears, therefore, essentially as in the original typescript.', Chandler, *A Catalogue of Names of Persons*, p. xii.

**82** Chandler, *A Catalogue of Names of Persons*, p. 101.

**83** *Namen in deutschen literarischen Texten des Mittelalters*. Vorträge Symposium Kiel, 9.–12.9.1987, ed. By Friedhelm Debus and Horst Pütz (Neumünster: K. Wachholtz, 1989). Within the volume the aforementioned project is also announced: see Friedhelm Debus, 'Über ein entstehendes Lexikon der literarischen Namen in deutschen Texten des Mittelalters', pp. 271–86. However, Debus' project seems to omit the Arthurian side: among the onomastic repertories, only Langlois, Flutre and Gillespie are mentioned. For the history of the discipline it might be interesting to mention the dissertation by Isobel Stevens, *Zur Geographie der Matière de Bretagne*, Universität Wien, 1971. The work was supervised by Blanka Horacek, a specialist of Medieval Germanic Literature.

**84** Maria Giovanna Arcamone, specialist in Germanic onomastics, delves into the contributions of Debus and the *DOLMA* series: see Maria Giovanna Arcamone, 'Onomastica letteraria Oltralpe', *il Nome nel testo*, 11 (2009), 183–96, especially p. 189.

*en Moyen Néerlandais (REMLT)*.<sup>85</sup> The *REMLT* includes all literary texts in Middle Dutch from the earliest attestations (13th century) until 1568. The project, coordinated by Willem Kuiper at the Meertens Instituut KNAW in Amsterdam, began in 1992 and is still ongoing, being continuously updated. The extensive and complete repertory (including anthroponyms, place names, names of objects and animals, names of authors) can be consulted online via a simple and intuitive interface. There are no variant readings, as the authors clearly state,<sup>86</sup> but the breadth of references to the most comprehensive onomastic tools, the precision of the textual quotations and the multiple cross-matches make *REMLT* an accurate and reliable resource. The same considerations also apply to the *Diccionario antropónimo del ciclo amadisiano (DINAM)* edited by María Coduras Bruna of the University of Zaragoza.<sup>87</sup> Although centred on the Iberian *Amadis-Corpus*, the dictionary, which can be consulted online, proves to be a useful resource for investigating Arthuriana. Here too, the *varia lectio* of names is not considered, but the rich and up-to-date bibliography given for each onomastic entry provides consistent critical breadth.<sup>88</sup> Coduras Bruna is also the author of a useful monograph, emblematically entitled *Por el nombre se conoce al hombre. Estudios de antroponimia caballeresca*, where the Arthurian onomastic tradition receives some degree of investigation.<sup>89</sup>

A clear map of the scholarly terrain emerges from this bibliographical *tour d'horizon*. Some paths have been comprehensively mapped out, others are only lightly sketched, and others remain completely uncharted. Arthurian onomastics has been well investigated in Middle English and French literature; for other liter-

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85 *Repertorium van Eigennamen in Middel nederlandse Literaire teksten (REMLT) – Répertoire des noms propres dans des textes littéraires en Moyen Néerlandais*, <<http://bouwstoffen.kantl.be/remlt/>> [accessed 04 October 2023].

86 'Het REMLT is géén "naamkundig" of "etymologisch" naslagwerk maar een literair/cultuur-historische encyclopedie die geoptimaliseerd is voor historisch letterkundig onderzoek, maar die zich tevens goed leent voor thematisch en multidisciplinair gebruik' ('The REMLT is not an 'onomastic' or 'etymological' reference work but a literary-cultural-historical encyclopaedia, optimised for historical literary research, but which also lends itself well to thematic and multidisciplinary use'), see <<https://ctb.kantl.be/publicaties/repertorium-van-eigennamen-in-middel nederlandse-literaire-teksten-remlt>> [accessed 12 September 2023].

87 *Diccionario de nombres del ciclo amadisiano (DINAM)*, <<https://dinam.unizar.es/>> [accessed 07 October 2023].

88 Interesting and methodologically valid is, for example, the interactive visualisation of family trees of characters in Amadis cycle.

89 See in particular the chapter 'Un estado de la cuestión de la antroponimia artúrica y amadisiana', pp. 73–86 in María Coduras Bruna, *Por el nombre se conoce al hombre. Estudios de antroponimia caballeresca*, Humanidades, 116 (Zaragoza: Prensa de la Universidad de Zaragoza, 2015). Coduras Bruna's study analyses the anthroponyms of the Amadisian cycle with meticulousness and academic rigour, without, however, renouncing on general theoretical knots.

atures there are reliable tools, albeit subject to certain restrictions, be that genre, theme, or textual tradition; for other areas, however, our map remains blank. The onomastic study of Italian and Norse literature, for example, still contains large lacunae. And yet even the available resources, however praise-worthy, appear today to be in need of updating for a considerable number of reasons. First of all, the substantial increase in editions and bibliographies makes it necessary to consider new texts and traditions, examining, in particular, the many variants present in manuscripts in a more consistent and decisive manner. Besides, it is important to investigate what remains the most neglected chronological period. The 14th and 15th centuries are still largely under-investigated, thus leaving a wide time span uncovered.<sup>90</sup>

It is also worth rethinking the practical principles on which the existing repositories were founded. Indeed, new and emerging technologies offer substantial opportunities that can no longer be ignored: the time has come for Arthurian onomastics to rely on computational tools. Digital data processing makes it possible to extend analyses to vast corpora, which cannot be managed by hand. Linguistic and philological-textual competence clearly remains a necessity, and this can only be offered by a scholar trained in the Humanities: no computer programming can imitate correct interpretation of the *varia lectio*. But the digital humanities make it possible to collect, represent and interpret large quantities of often complex and contradictory data more easily. Projects such as the *REMLT* and *DINAM* – which can be consulted remotely and are completely open-access – are virtuous examples.

To conclude, the digital humanities provide extraordinary opportunities for the creation of precise and sophisticated onomastic databases, which are necessary both to represent little-studied linguistic fields and to replace tools that remain fundamental and methodologically exemplary, but are outdated today.

One cannot help but notice that, despite the innovation which the 20th century brought us in many fields of the Humanities, critical tools in the field of literary onomastics have undergone a very moderate development. It has been said that the compilatory and encyclopaedic efforts, steeped in positivist rigour play a role within the cultural context of the time. The same is true of our own approach to the same problems, even if, in many cases, critical categories have evolved: the present neglect of the term ‘source’ is illustrative of the constitution of a new scholarly

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<sup>90</sup> It is to fill this gap that the project *NOMARTH – L’onomastique arthurienne au Moyen Âge tardif en France et en Europe (1270–1530)* was established. The project, in partnership with the Centre d’études médiévales of the University of Rennes 2, the Centre médiéval université Eötvös Loránd de Budapest et Collège Eötvös József de l’ELTE and the Deutsche Literaturgeschichte (Schwerpunkt Mittelalter/Frühe Neuzeit) is coordinated by Christine Ferlampin Acher. For information, see <[https://www.mshb.fr/projets\\_mshb/nomarth/3293/](https://www.mshb.fr/projets_mshb/nomarth/3293/)> [accessed 15 August 2023].

order. The sheer mention of the term could signal a methodological debt to German positivism and hence prevent any project from receiving funding. Yet, literary onomastics remains firmly rooted in Arthurian medievalism precisely because it bears a huge potential of providing solid data about the circulation of the Arthurian material within a given linguistic and cultural area and at a given time. It is therefore surprising to note the sorry state of the art regarding onomastic resources, especially in view of the vast development of the digital humanities.<sup>91</sup> Most recently, Ferlampin-Acher hoped for the creation of an Arthurian onomastic dictionary, ‘un travail titanesque, nécessairement collectif et numérique’.<sup>92</sup> Almost a century and a half later, we seem to be hearing Alfred Nutt’s words resound. The multiplication of theoretical contributions, the interlinguistic and interdisciplinary perspectives, the co-ordination of engineers competent at philological projects – and *vice versa*, of philologists well-versed in the digital domain –, all contributes to a sense that the time is ripe to complete this undertaking.<sup>93</sup> The importance of cooperation (not only between philologists and computer scientists, but also between philologists of different languages) must be underlined once again. Working on modular architectures, establishing common operational criteria, defining gradually achievable objectives will make it possible to make ‘titanesque’ works much more accessible. Furthermore, sharing good practices can mean significant improvements. In general, a good critical and digital methodology for Arthurian onomastics works for, for instance, both Norse and Italian texts and traditions. The work of some will inevitably fall by the wayside, since implementing methodologies and structures will mean that someone will have to lead the way. Yet undoubtedly, it will mean that many can find a ready-made framework to work with rather than having to work

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91 Such are the premises behind a doctoral research project, conducted by the author of this paper at the University of Padua and supervised by Prof. Giovanni Borriero and Prof. Giorgio Maria Di Nunzio, entitled ‘*Le non fu mie sanz reison. Il nome proprio nel romanzo francese medievale (XII–XV sec.): studi e prolegomeni per il Nuovo Repertorio Onomastico*’. As regards the Repertorio Onomastico, it is a digital tool, built with a modular and integrable architecture, implemented from a selection of romances, namely the corpus of the Medieval French *Roman d’Alexandre*. For methodological challenges faced in the preparatory work and an illustration on the first results achieved, see Marta Milazzo and Giorgio Maria Di Nunzio, ‘The First Tile for the Digital Onomastic Repertoire of the French Medieval Romance: Problems and Perspectives’, in *Linking Theory and Practice of Digital Libraries. 27th International Conference on Theory and Practice of Digital Libraries (TPDL 2023)* Zadar, Croatia, September 26–29, 2023, Proceedings. Ed. By Omar Alonso *et al.*, LNCS 14241 (Springer 2023), pp. 317–323 <<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-43849-3>> [accessed 21 October 2023].

92 Ferlampin Acher and Pomel, “[*Car*] par le non conuist an l’ome”, p. XX.

93 Computational contributions are present (one might even say mandatory) in more and more projects: for instance, the recent XV seminar of ‘Medioevo Romanzo’ (Siena, 23–24 October 2023) specifically considered ‘Filologia digitale e Medioevo romanzo: costi, benefici, prospettive’.

from scratch: sharing is not only possible, but necessary – provided, of course, that a shared language with which to communicate can be established.<sup>94</sup>

In the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* the word 'chimera', in its second meaning, is equivalent to 'an impossible idea or hope'. Under the right conditions, the *Onomasticon Arthurianum* could be more than mere *hope*, or an *idea* appearing now and then in some academic article, but a concrete project, which today is conceptually and technically *possible*.

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<sup>94</sup> Among the many examples available, outside our limited scope here, there is *NordiCon*, a digital database containing medieval Nordic personal names attested in Continental sources (<<https://spraakbanken.gu.se/karp/tng/?mode=nordicon&lexicon=nordicon&show=nordicon:beleg178>>) [accessed 25 October 2023]. The principles that informed the project could also be fruitfully employed for Arthurian onomastics: 'The structure of NordiCon is inspired by other online historical given name dictionaries. It takes up challenges reported on in previous works, such as how to cover material properties of a name token and how to define principles for lemmatization, and elaborates on possible solutions. The lemmatization principles for NordiCon are further developed in order to facilitate the linking to other name dictionaries and corpora', Michelle Waldispüh, Dana Dannélls, Lars Borin, 'Material Philology Meets Digital Onomastic Lexicography: The NordiCon Database of Medieval Nordic Personal Names in Continental Sources', in *Proceedings of the 12th Conference on Language Resources and Evaluation (LREC 2020)*, Marseille, 11–16 May 2020, ed. By. Calzolari *et al.*, online, <<https://aclanthology.org/2020.lrec-1.0.pdf>> [accessed 11 September 2023], pp. 860–67 (quote p. 860).