**Tomasz Babnis MA Kraków, 5 XII 2020**

**Jagiellonian University in Kraków**

**Faculty of Philology**

**“Image of the Iranian world in the Roman poetry**

**(3rd century BC – 6th century AD)” – Summary**

The subject of my dissertation is the image of the Iranian world in the extant corpus of Latin poetry written between 3rd century BC (with Plautus as the earliest poet) and 6th century AD (with Venantius Fortunatus as the latest author). Until now this huge corpus has not been thoroughly analysed as a whole from the point of view of the references to the Iranian world. These references have been examined only within the scope of particular literary periods or individual poets. Moreover, the considerable part of scholarship on this topic was written several decades ago. Meanwhile because of the great importance of the Roman-Iranian relations and comparatively high frequency of these references in the Roman poetry this subject needs detailed philological research including also the historical context.

Using the term “Iranian world” I mean three empires: Achaemenian Persia (6th–4th century BC), Arsacid Parthia (3rd century BC – 3rd century AD) and Sasanian Persia (3–7 century AD), as well as other Iranian peoples, even if they were not related to those empires in a given time. With the reference to such a large-scale research subject the term “Persia” would be too limited, whereas the term “Iran” – appearing only since the 3rd century AD and, what is more, completely absent from the Latin sources – could be treated as inadequate and anachronistic. In my dissertation I use the notion of the Iranian world trying to find the best term for the entire geographical-cultural area that interests me. This term is applicable also to the issues relating to a greater whole, not only to individual empire or people.

The dissertation consists of an introduction, a chapter devoted to the history of the relations between Rome and the empires of Parthians and Persians, four main chapters on the poetry of four consecutive literary periods (Republican, Augustan, Imperial and Late Antiquity) and concluding remarks. The main chapters are made of an analytical part and a partial conclusion. The chapters III–V are divided into sections in which I examine the work of individual poets. A bibliography (with the division into primary and secondary sources) is placed at the end of the dissertation.

In the introduction I put forward the scope of my dissertation (in terms of subject and chronology), as well as the methodology I applied. Since the object of my study are original Latin texts, I found the philological method the most suitable. It consists in the analysis of given passages of the Roman poetry from the point of view of the use of references to the Iranian world. The analysis takes into consideration three levels: structure, content and wording. Furthermore, I make use of comparative method, consisting in comparison individual pieces of information, *topoi* and opinions within the scope of the work of an individual poet and a given literary period, as well as in the whole corpus of the extant Roman poetry. This should enable us to understand better the position of those motifs in Latin poetry and to discover the recurrent patterns referring to those motifs. I make use of historian’s technique so as to specify more precisely the context of the creation of these works (especially the Roman-Parthian and Roman-Persian relations) and to value the credibility of information about the Iranian world that the poets gave. The passages investigated in the dissertation are presented in the chronological order, so as to emphasise the link between them and individual events and to indicate the influence that earlier poets exerted on their followers. This pattern of organizing the source material was adopted from the book “Die Parther in der augusteischen Dichtung” by Michael Wissemann.

The first chapter is dedicated to the history of the relations between Rome and Parthian and Sasanian empires. The first Roman-Parthian contacts took place at the beginning of the 1st century BC: both states encountered each other in Asia Minor. Initially, the mutual relations were peaceful but the Roman expansionism caused conflicts in the region of Armenia and Mesopotamia. The most important of them was the unsuccessful Crassus’ campaign resulted in defeat in the battle of Carrhae (53 BC). During the period of Roman civil wars Parthians invaded the eastern provinces of the Republic, which brough about Roman retaliation. Romans were anxious to take revenge for Crassus’ death but Augustus, having taken power in the Republic, decided to solve the Parthian problem peacefully, concluding a treaty in 20 BC. Although in subsequent years Roman-Parthian relations resembled a “cold war”, the Augustan peaceful settlement was to last (with the exception of a “substitute war” in Armenia in Nero’s times) until the reign of Trajan. Since the times of this emperor Romans have been making frequent invasions of Parthia but – despite some great achievements – were unable to subordinate it permanently.

When in the 3rd century AD the Parthian dynasty were overturned by Persia-based Sasanians up-to-date relations between Rome and the Iranian world changed radically. Persians adopted an aggressive policy, invading repeatedly Roman eastern provinces. The campaigns conducted from time to time by Romans (the expedition of Julian the Apostate in 363 AD being the most important one) did not changed the situation considerably. The frontier between two empires ran through Armenia and Mesopotamia and neither of the states was strong enough to strike a decisive blow to the enemy. After exhausting wars of 3rd and 4th centuries, in the following century both empires maintained peaceful relations, which were caused by the necessity of responding to other external threats. Differently, the 6th century was again the period of frequent conflicts culminating with a great war from the beginning of the 7th century in which Persians initially conquered the greater part of the Eastern Roman Empire, but eventually were defeated in 627 by the emperor Heraclius. Exhausted by this conflict Rome and Persia were unable to fight back Arab invasion of the Middle East that took place soon. This invasion deprived the Roman Empire of Syria and Egypt and destroyed the Sasanian state. Muslim conquest of Persia is a clear turning point that ends the centuries-long period of the relations between Rome and the Iranian world.

The second chapter is devoted to the Iranian motifs in the poetry of Republican or pre-Augustan age. The poor state of preservation of this poetry as well as lack of intensive relations with Parthian state were the reasons why the body of data collected in this chapter is rather modest. It encompasses the works of a few poets only (Plautus and Catullus being the most important) and the collection of *fragmenta*. The poets discussed in this chapter made use especially of the motifs taken from Greek literature, i.e. referring to Achaemenian empire. Many of them (e.g. motif of Persian wealth or the story of the unusual Xerxes’ crossing from Asia to Europe) have become the core of later poets’ repertoire. However, it is impossible to point out any motifs that were adopted directly from the poets of Republican age by their successors.

In the third chapter I carry out the analysis of the poetry of the Augustan age. References to the Iranian world were treated more manifestly in this period, which made later poets to exploit the motifs and patterns developed by the Augustans. This particular importance of the Iranian issues stemmed from the intensive relations between Rome and Parthia during the period of Roman civil wars and during Augustus’ reign. The works of Vergil, Horace, Propertius and Ovid is examined the most thoroughly in this chapter. Among the most important elements characteristic of Augustan poets we should indicate a clear emphasis on the hostility of the Iranian world towards Rome and on the role of military motifs (especially the Parthian tactics based on the mastery in archery and horse riding). Until 20 BC Augustan poets often raised the question of war against Parthia in order to revenge for Crassus’ defeat. However, after this date they used to emphasise alleged subordination of Arsacid empire to Rome instead. It should be noted that the Iranian issues were linked closely with the policy of Augustus: the poets raising them had to take a stand on this policy, either praising or criticising it. Among the laudatory utterances it was the issue of the recapture of standards lost in war with Parthians that came first. The *topoi* known from earlier literature were used as well, e.g. the motif of wealth and monarchical regime, “typical” for the Iranian world, or references to the Persian Wars, that were treated to some extent as an anticipation of later Roman-Parthian conflict. The Augustan age should be treated as a key period in terms of developing the model of depicting the Iranian world in the Roman poetry. This model was moulded above all by earlier Greek tradition of description Achaemenian empire and Roman-Parthian relations in 1st century BC. The pattern shaped by these two factors was adopted by the poets of later centuries.

The fourth chapter contains the analysis of the works written in the Imperial age. Because of the state of preservation of this literature I focused mainly on the authors of the 1st century AD, from Manilius to Juvenal, who was active in the 2nd century too. I have not found any references to the Iranian world in the works of later poets up to the end of the 3rd century. The poets of the Imperial age used mainly those Iranian motifs which can be found in the poetry of their Augustan predecessors. The image of Iranian world was still connected with Roman politics and issues referring to the military sphere came to the fore, the Roman-Parthian war in Armenia in the times of Nero is a case in point. The uniqueness of Lucan’s *Pharsalia* should be noted in this respect, since it is the only work of Latin poetry, in which such a great significance is attached to Iranian issues (some of them appear for the first time, e.g. the issue of Parthian sexual customs). Those topics were used by Lucan as a device of criticism of Nero and such critical remarks can be discerned in the poetry of Seneca too. On this occasion Parthian monarchical regime became a topic by dint of which Roman autocracy could be criticised. On the contrary, the poets of the Flavian age (69-96 AD) used the Iranian motifs to praise the emperor Domitian. Panegyrical tenor of such references could have been seen already in the times of Augustus but intensified significantly in the Imperial age. One could argue then that the poets of the 1st and 2nd centuries broadened the image of the Iranian world inherited from the Augustan age enlarging it with some new elements. The tendencies of the Imperial poetry were developed further in the works written in Late Antiquity.

In the fifth chapter I analyse the *oeuvre* of the poets active from the end of the 3rd up to the end of the 6th century. In terms of chronology Nemesianus is the first and Venantius Fortunatus the last of them. Thus this chapter encompasses the whole Late Antiquity. Such a division is in line with the important political watershed in Roman-Iranian relations, i.e. with the birth of the Sasanians who overturned Parthian Arsacids. By dint of such a division all the references to the Iranian world made from the point of view of Christian tradition based on the Bible could be included in one chapter. Despite the fact that as a result of the split of the Roman Empire into western and eastern part the relations with Persia became the exclusive domain of the Eastern Empire, the Iranian motifs developed all over the centuries were still present in the Roman poetry. These motifs still concern usually political-military problems but the statements of poets are linked to actual events only to a small extent, since they rather make up panegyrical praise of emperors. Despite this tendency, two poets, Claudian and Sidonius, made an extensive use of the Iranian topics. Among them we encounter some issues that to date have not been exploited, e.g. references to the Median empire. With regard to Christian poets, they employed frequently traditional *topoi* known from the earlier Roman poetry and surprisingly seldom made use of the image of Persia taken from the Bible.

In the concluding remarks I compile conclusions drawn from the analyses of passages of the Roman poetry referring to the Iranian issues carried out in the previous chapters. My conclusions are generally in line with conclusions indicated in the previous philological literature. However, they are based on more thorough and detailed analysis of the source material. The image of the Iranian world emerging from the works, that I analysed in my dissertation, is founded on deep rooted stereotypes rather than on reality. Features ascribed to the Iranian peoples are to a great extent exact oppositions to the advantages which Romans valued in themselves: frugality against affluence, courage against effeminacy, freedom against despotism. Even in terms of military prowess the advantages of the Iranian peoples were shown in such a way that they were perceived negatively in comparison with those of Romans. Specific customs and institutions typical of Persians and Parthians were mentioned precisely because of their distinctiveness from their Roman counterpart. Lack of accurate knowledge of the Iranian world (which resulted in the generalisation of many statements and rather vague perception of the whole Orient, without discerning its diversification) and opinion about the hostility of the Iranians towards Rome prevented the Roman poets from proper understanding Iranian behaviours, rituals and customs. In this respect Romans were very similar to Greeks who treated Persians as a “mirror”, in which they could look at themselves. Thanks to this Romans confirmed their identity and superiority over other nations, e.g. conquering the effeminate East they could prove their courage and military advantage. The references to the Iranian world in the Roman poetry are to be seen – in a sense – as a way of discussing the matters of the Roman world, its identity, values and vision of the world.