TOMASZ BABNIS

THE IMAGE OF THE IRANIAN WORLD

IN THE ROMAN POETRY OF THE IMPERIAL AND LATE ANTIQUE AGES

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Tomasz Babnis

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On the cover: The Arch of Galerius, detail: Galerius attacks Narseh (front); Plate of Peroz I hunting argali (back). Source: public domain

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Patri meo
Matthiae Babnis
Primo linguae Latinae magistro

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Introduction

The rule of Augustus (31/27 BC – 14 AD) constitutes a watershed in the history of Rome. During over forty years of his reign, the *princeps* completed the process of transition from republican to monarchical system, although to the last days of his life, he tried to preserve the semblance of Rome as the Republic "reborn" after a period of civil wars. Transformation of the Augustan Age affected many spheres of life, changing not only the political and social reality, but also the universe of values, fine arts and literature, and creating a system that was to last for several centuries. Some tendencies seen in this period were developed further after Augustus' death, influencing significantly various aspects of life, among others, Roman poetry, which is the main topic of this study.

Since the emperor was undoubtedly the most important and powerful person in the state, Latin poetry of this era became even more closely associated with the ruler than it was the case under Augustus. Juvenal' famous words *Et spes et ratio studiorum in Caesare tantum* (Iuv. VII 1) reflected the reality of the Roman Empire and the trends the satirist could observe in his times were further intensified in Late Antiquity with an unprecedented elevation of the person of the ruler after the Diocletian's reforms. Unsurprisingly, then, in the case of the poetical image of the Iranian world (strongly connected with the public sphere and, hence, with subsequent rulers), the figure of the emperor usually became the focus of poets' attention, resulting in frequent panegyrical statements. Simultaneously, the works of Augustans, treated as a literary canon, were often used and appropriated in order to serve new purposes, however, the new realities meant that the work of the authors of the Imperial era differed significantly from the earlier era. Thus, change and decline, mentioned in the title of famous book by Gordon Williams, indeed manifest themselves in the poetry of the Imperial and Late Antique Ages.[1]

[1] Williams 1978. See also Alfonsi 1984; Ahl 1984.

Late Antiquity differed in many respects from the times of the Early Empire, the fact also affecting the literature of the time, in which certain key transformations of the era were reflected. The new reality of the Roman world (including the literature, which was different from the earlier one) was shaped under the influence of both general political, social and economic processes (the crisis of the state overcome after Diocletian's centralizing reforms, barbarian pressure, the Christianization of the empire, changes in the economic organization of cities and villages) and new intellectual and cultural currents. Late Antiquity, then, straddles, so to speak, antiquity and the middle ages:[2] while continuing the old traditions, at the same time it heralds the new civilization of Mediaeval Europe. The boundaries of this era have been set very differently by scholars, but with regard to Latin poetry, which is the subject of my interest, the criterion of preservation seems particularly important.

Due to the state of preservation of Latin poetry of the Imperial era and the small number of surviving works of the 2nd and 3rd centuries (in which, by the way, Iranian themes do not actually appear), the first part of the present study discusses mainly poets of the 1st century. Following the chronological order, the first will be Manilius and minor poets of the Neronian Age (Chapter 1), Seneca (Chapter 2), and Lucan (Chapter 3). The Flavian Age with its intensive literary production will be discussed in the next chapters, focused on Statius (Chapter 4), Valerius Flaccus and Silius Italicus (Chapter 5), and finally Martial and Juvenal (Chapter 6). Admittedly, the latter two poets were active also in the time of the Antonines, but they were, nevertheless, strongly embedded in the Flavian literary environment. After Juvenal, who died around 130, there were few outstanding Latin poets, although there were many important prose writers active at the time, to name only Aulus Gellius or Apuleius. A revival in this field coincided with the overcoming of the so-called "crisis of the 3rd century" and with the reforms of Diocletian with which the Empire entered a new phase of its life. As regards the period of Late Antiquity, Claudian and Sidonius deserve special attention due to a much greater number and originality of their references to the Iranian world. For this very reason, they are given individual chapters (8 and 10, respectively), whereas other relevant authors are discussed collectively in chapters concerning the literature of the 3rd and 4th centuries (Chapter 7), the 5th century (Chapter 9), and the 6th century (Chapter 11). Every chapter ends with a partial conclusion. These corollaries are summed up again in the final Conclusions section.

It is obvious, that the poetical image of the Iranian world was strongly influenced by the changing relations between Rome and Parthia (and later Persia), as tensions between the two powers often found resonance in literature. The Augustan settlement with Parthia in 20 BC

[2] On the concept of Late Antiquity, see esp. Brown 1991; Vogt 1993; Cameron 2012; Mitchell 2015. In the English-speaking world, Peter Brown's book, first published in 1971, played a special role in spreading the perception of Late Antiquity. It provided the impetus for an in-depth study of this era, which, as a result, ceased to be treated as a time of decline and fall.

established the nature of the relationship with the Arsacid state for a long time. Despite some minor controversies resulting from Roman attempts to place a friendly candidate on the Parthian throne, the peace continued until the Armenian War in the times of Nero and even this conflict was actually a proxy war, in which Rome, formally, did not fight Parthia. The treaty of Rhandeia in 63 AD opened another period of peaceful relations which ended abruptly with the great war of Trajan. This conflict did not give Rome the control of Parthia, but began the long period of wars between both empires lasting virtually 100 years. Unfortunately, the bad state of preservation of Roman poetry from the 2nd and 3rd centuries makes these conflicts (which were mostly Roman triumphs with capturing the Parthian capital, Ctesiphon, three times) unrecorded for us. When the Sasanians toppled the Arsacids in the 220s, Rome had to face a much more aggressive enemy than before. The 3rd century brought Romans many failures, but with Diocletian's assumption of power, the tide turned and it was the Roman Empire that had the upper hand until Julian's debacle in 363. Henceforth, the mutual relations of both powers became more peaceful and diplomacy began to play a greater role. The periods of peace alternated with war, but neither side was able to win a decisive victory. Although at no time was the conquest of Persia within Rome's reach, poets foretold the imminent triumphs and a quick subjugation of the eastern neighbor. It was so even though, after the split of the Empire in 395, the Latin-speaking West was completely cut off from Persia and Western Roman Empire lost any contact with the Sasanian Empire. The lack of political and military contacts was not tantamount to the end of the presence of Iranian motifs in poetry but could not fail to affect it. They were employed even after the fall of the Roman Empire in the West; the last references to the Iranian world in ancient Latin poetry appears in the *oeuvre* of Venantius Fortunatus at the end of the 6th century. Soon, anyway, the Sasanian Empire fell prey to Muslim conquerors, which wound up the centuries of mutual relations between the Iranian and the Mediterranean worlds. After the Muslim conquest, the Iranian world became part of the Caliphate, which dramatically changed its perception in Europe, putting an end to the previous way of presenting Iranian themes in literature.

The post-Augustan period of Roman poetry is surprisingly understudied as regards the references to the Iranian world. Although their total number is much greater in the Imperial and Late Antique Ages, they did not become the object of in-depth research. This period lacks a monograph comparable with Michael Wissemann's *Die Parther in der augusteischen Dichtung*, which is a basis for the study of these problems in the Augustan Age. Important monograph *Fremdenbild und Politik. Vorstellungen der Römer von Ägypten und dem Partherreich in der späten Republik und frühen Kaiserzeit* by Holger Sonnabend covers only a part of the time in question and discusses the Imperial poetry insufficiently. Allusions to various Iranian motifs are scattered across a number of texts written from the 1st to the 6th century and to date, no scholar has made any serious attempt to collect and analyze them, though, obviously, these references were discussed individually in many papers and books, especially

commentaries. However, even if some texts have been studied in this regard, others have been left behind, which resulted in many innovative allusions not being taken into consideration in the earlier research, even though they often have quite striking elements.

The present monograph is intended as a continuation of my earlier work, *The Image of the Iranian World in the Roman Poetry of the Republican and Augustan Ages*, published in 2022, hence the structure is based on the same methodological principles.[3] I examined the entire extant corpus of Latin poetry in order to find and analyze references to the Iranian world, focusing on their structure, content, and wording. I wanted to find the recurring patterns and examples of the utilization of earlier traditions, trying to trace the development of the image of the Iranian world in the Republican and Augustan Ages, from Plautus to Ovid. I have dubbed this earlier time the "period of creation," whereas the later centuries, from Manilius to Venantius Fortunatus, could be called the "period of continuance," since the main outline of the Iranian world was rather retained, basing on the vision developed in the Augustan Age. Neither the political and military changes (complete with the takeover of power by the Sasanians), nor the Christianization of the Roman Empire in the Late Antiquity resulted in a thorough transformation of the inherited model, though, naturally, these factors influenced many details to be found in the analyzed poems, resulting in the development of two, not fully separate, branches of the literary image of the Iranian world. I would like, then, to make an attempt to synthesize the entire accessed literary material, making use of the methods of both classical philologist and historian.

In my previous study, I owed much to Paul Goetsch's theoretical concept within which he listed six roles of the identity of the Other in literature.[4] In this work, I tried to apply it to the Imperial and Late Antique poetry too, additionally finding some important differences between the above-mentioned "period of creation" and "period of continuance." In this respect, tradition and innovation intertwined, leading to the creative dialogue of Roman poets with their predecessors, primarily the Augustans, treated as literary classics.

While discussing the references to the Iranian world in the works of subsequent poets, I quote a relevant passage in Latin and then carry out its analysis in the context of the poem it is taken from. This structural arrangement (used earlier, e.g., by Michael Wissemann) helps, in my opinion, to extract in the most precise way the pieces of information relevant to my analysis, and at the same time it facilitates reading, since the analytical segment is put right after the lines in question. In order to standardize the text, I decided to differentiate the letters *u* and *v*, and to start the quoted poetic lines with capital letters, regardless of the practice in the editions I made use of.

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[3] For more detailed description of methodology, see Babnis 2022: 9–20.

[4] Goetsch 1998 (esp. 186–187).

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I am very grateful to everyone who contributed to the present study. First and foremost, I have to express my greatest thanks to Professor Antoni Bobrowski, who was the supervisor of my research and made a great number of corrections and suggestions on its earlier stages. His help and encouragement were invaluable throughout the entire period of my research on this topic. I would like to give a special mention to Professor Dariusz Brodka, who died untimely during my work on this book. I owe much to his help, kindness and his in-depth knowledge of the Late Antiquity. I owe a debt of gratitude to my colleagues and friends who helped me to improve this work with their suggestions, corrections, ideas, and constructive criticism: Wojciech Duszyński, Agnieszka Dziuba, Tomasz Gacek, Łukasz Halida, Bartosz Kołoczek, Jake Nabel, Kinga Paraskiewicz, Ewa Skwara, Malte Speich, Michał Stachura,Stanisław Śnieżewski, and Anna Wasyl.

This book is dedicated to my Father, Maciej Babnis, who was my first Latin teacher and whose *Pater noster* was the first Latin I had ever heard. Without his encouragement and instruction, I would have never written this, or any other, book.

Chapter 1

Manilius and minor poets of the Neronian Age

Marcus Manilius, poet and astrologer active in the second decade of the 1st century AD, is a rather obscure figure. His only extant work is the five-book poem *Astronomica*. Manilius belonged to the well-established ancient literary tradition of describing the starry sky. Though such themes were present as early as the works of archaic poets (esp. Hesiod), it was only in the Hellenistic Age that they became the main subject of entire poems. Case in point is the most influential work of that kind, *Phaenomena* by Aratus (3rd century BC), a poetic paraphrase of the astronomical treaty of Eudoxus of Cnidus. The *Phaenomena* inspired a number of Latin authors: it has been paraphrased by Cicero, Varro Atacinus, Germanicus and, later, by Avienius. Aratus exerted a significant impact on Manilius as well, but the latter was active in the period in which the topic of sky and stars became politically important and linked with the imperial ideology, to mention only the Ovidian *Fasti*.[1] Manilius' poem exhibits some features typical of the literary fashion of the Tiberian Age. This period was marked by the departure from the tendencies representative of the Augustan literature as well as by taking up difficult and erudite topics and fondness for *curiositas*.[2] Belonging to the didactic epic, the *Astronomica* fits well into this literary pattern due to elements making up the learned character of the poem.

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1 Manilius wrote his epic in the period of a great interest in astrology on the one hand, and the attempts of Augustus and Tiberius to constrain it as an art posing a threat to their power, on the other. On the political context of the *Astronomica*, see Bajoni 2004; Volk 2009: 127–173; Lowe 2014: 50–51. The role of astronomy in the *Fasti* is particularly emphasized by Christopher Martin (1985).

2 In this respect Manilius' work is justly called "the epic of transition" by Lee Fratantuono (2012: 9). On the literary trends of the Tiberian Age, see Alfonsi 1984: 4–9; Dziuba 2004: 9–11.

Among them, one could list, e.g., various historical and geographical catalogues, giving the poet an opportunity to mention also peoples and events related to the Iranian world.[3]

In his poem, Manilius did not refer to the present state of Romano-Parthian relations at all, though in the second decade of the 1st century AD (the most probable time the poem dates back to), Rome attempted to interfere in the affairs of its eastern neighbor, e.g., supporting pro-Roman claimant Vonones I. However, as many as four times, Manilius mentioned Graeco-Persian Wars of the 5th century BC. Discussing them, he exposed the element of naval warfare, especially the Greek victory in the battle of Salamis. The first of these remarks can be found in the final part of Book 1, in the catalogue of eminent men who earned their fame on earth and now continue to live among the stars:

Quique animi vires et strictae pondera mentis
Prudentes habuere viri, quibus omnis in ipsis
Census erat, iustusque Solon fortisque Lycurgus,
Aetheriusque Platon et qui fabricaverat illum
Damnatusque suas melius damnavit Athenas,
Persidos et victor, strarat quae classibus aequor;
Romanique viri, quorum iam maxima turba est
(Manil. I 771–777)

The ancient philosophical tradition (esp. the Stoics) granted great men a place in the world of heavenly bodies, an opinion famously discussed in Scipios' dream in Book 6 of Cicero's *De re publica*, Manilius followed suit (possibly even imitating Cicero[4]) and next to Solon, Lycurgus, Plato, and Socrates, he also mentioned Themistocles among Greek *prudentes viri*.[5] He is referred to as *Persidos . . . victor* (l. 776), for his name does not fit into hexameter. The poet put emphasis on the magnitude of the Persian fleet, showing it as a particularly important element to show Themistocles' greatness. The Athenian is also listed as the last character and the only military commander in the Greek part. He is followed by many famous Romans

[3] On Manilius, see Hübner 1984; Cytowska, Szelest 1992: 30–35; Piętka 2005: 120–159; Volk 2009. On the reception of Aratus, see Bielecka 2016; Glauthier 2017. On astronomy and astrology of the Imperial Age, see Hermann 2001; Komorowska 2004.

[4] As suggested by Alexander MacGregor (2005: 57). See also Volk 2009: 137–161; 226–251.

[5] Basing on another reading of the text (*qui* instead of *quae* in l. 776), Alexander MacGregor (2005: 48) suggested that instead of Themistocles, Manilius mentioned Alexander. To my mind, however, Themistocles suits better to the content of the catalogue, since naval victories were of little account in the context of Macedonian's achievements, whereas they were the greatest claim to fame of the Athenian leader. Additionally, the mention of Themistocles is more consonant with the characters of Plato and Socrates, since all of them were Athenians.

(*maxima turba*, l. 777), among whom successful generals are most numerous. Manilius included many more Romans than Greeks, however members of other nations, e.g., Persians, are totally excluded from the possibility of enjoying such a posthumous honor. Iran-related topics can only be found within more detailed description of Greek characters, whereas the choice of Themistocles enabled Manilius to proceed more smoothly from Greek philosophers and legislators to Roman generals.[6]

Each book of the *Astronomica* has its own *prooemium*. In those opening Books 2 and 3, Manilius exposed the originality of his poem (*Vestros extendere fines* / *Conor*, Manil. III 3–4), contrasting it to the works of other authors.[7] In the beginning of Book 2, he invoked his literary predecessors writing on the sky and stars, while in the *prooemium* of Book 3, he set himself apart from the earlier tradition by means of *recusatio*, i.e., listing the epic themes he was not willing to take up (Manil. III 5–30). Among them, he also mentioned the Persian Wars:

> *nec* ***Persica bella profundo***
> ***Indicta et magna pontum sub classe latentem***
> ***Immissumque fretum terris, iter aequoris undis****;*
> *Non regis magni spatio maiore canenda*
> *Quam sunt acta loquar.*
> (Manil. III 19–23)

Topics rejected by Manilius would be more suitable for heroic epic, whereas he intended to undertake a more complicated task, which was to put the difficult, truly technical astronomical issues into hexameter (a similar idea was expressed in Propertian elegy III 5). The Persian Wars had already been discussed (*Persica bella . . . indicta*, l. 19–20) and for the poet they make up, along with other subjects of that kind, an *opus . . . simplex* (l. 30), unworthy of attention. Contrary to the passage from Book 1, instead of the battle of Salamis, Manilius made use of the stock-image of the spectacular breaking of the laws of nature, i.e., the crossing of the Hellespont and sailing through the channel built near Mount Athos.[8] In these lines, Manilius mentioned Alexander together with Xerxes.[9] The names of both rulers are not specified, but, interestingly, the Roman poet called the former *rex magnus* (l. 22), corresponding to the Greek

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6 MacGregor 2005: 47–48; Volk 2009: 163.

7 In the *Astronomica*, the emphasis on the poem's innovation interfuse with the topos *omnia iam vulgata*, the idea that all the topics have already been taken up by the earlier poets. This is a significant issue from the point of view of Manilius' self-presentation and his relation to his predecessors, see Volk 2009: 197–215.

8 Manilius seemed to be influenced by Lucretius, though they differed significantly in their philosophical opinions. One should note that both referred to the same event from the history of Persian Wars and neither mentioned Xerxes' name. Cf. Babnis 2022: 35–37.

9 On relation between these two rulers, see Bridges 2015: 119–125.

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Abbreviations
ANRW – Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt
CAH – Cambridge Ancient History
CHI – Cambridge History of Iran
EI – Encyclopedia Iranica
PLRE – Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire

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Summary

The present book is dedicated to presenting the image of the Iranian world emerging from the extant Roman poetry of the Imperial and Late Antique Ages. The scope of the source material stretches, thus, from the astronomical work of Manilius (1st century AD) all the way to the poems of Venantius Fortunatus (c. 530 – c. 600), covering almost six centuries of the development of Latin literature. My aim is to investigate which motifs were referred to by Roman poets, which patterns can be noticed in those texts, which elements were mentioned most often, what relations can be observed between these references and the historical, geographical, social or religious realities, and finally, what function these references serve within the scope of entire poems or parts of texts extracted from longer works. I am also interested in the "genealogy" of these motifs: their origin and how they were employed by the poets of subsequent periods. I aim at examining the degree of consistency of the overall image created from references scattered throughout the works of various authors and its changes in the course of time.

Generally speaking, the issue of the Iranian world (seen in its broadest sense as encompassing the great empires of Persia and Parthia along with their component parts, as well as other Iranian peoples, even if they were not linked to these states in a given period) and its relations with Rome did not really rise to a prominence in the works of Latin poetry. However, gathered together, the references to the Iranian motifs make up a considerable material worthy of a detailed analysis. To date, these issues have been discussed only partially, either as a part of greater wholes when both Latin and Greek poetry was considered together or in the analyses of individual authors. Furthermore, some passages from poetry have been surprisingly omitted and considered apart from others, whereas traditional and Christian poetry has not been included almost at all. However, without the full source material, the analysis cannot be complete and the conclusions are not sufficiently well-grounded. This is why I searched through the entire extant corpus of Roman poetry in order to find all possible mentions of Iranian topics. Throughout the book, I embraced the following structural arrangement (taken from

the seminal monograph by Michael Wissemann): the passages containing relevant references are quoted in Latin and then analyzed in detail.

The poetry of the Imperial and Late Antique Ages can be legitimately called a "period of continuance," in which Roman poets developed the repertory of motifs inherited from their predecessors of the Republican and, especially, Augustan Ages. These motifs came primarily from Greek sources (traditions about the Achaemenid Empire treated as a shared cultural heritage) but also from Roman-Parthian relations at the end of the Republic and in the Augustan Ages. Contrary to the earlier period, the Imperial and Late Antique poets did not draw so much from the history of mutual relation between Rome and its Iranian neighbor. The war in Armenia during Nero's reign was an exception, while the wars of the 2nd, 3rd and 4th centuries left virtually no trace in poetry. It does not mean that the Roman policy towards Parthia and Persia found no resonance in literature. However, rather than clear references to the facts, the authors preferred to make vague allusions and allotted more space to future plans and wishful declarations of conquests than to actual events (even if successful). After the so-called Constantinian shift and the Christianization of the Empire in the 4th century, a new way of perceiving the Iranian world emerged: as an area to be 'conquered' by the new faith. In the works of Christian Roman poets, some other motifs, taken from the Biblical tradition, can be found, accounting for a significant broadening of the scope of topics related to Iranian issues. At the same time, however, the traditional imagery of the Iranian world did not vanish but coexisted with the new one for several centuries.

My study has been designed in the following manner. In the Introduction, some basic aspects (methodology, state of research, preliminary assumptions) are discussed. The main body of the book is divided into eleven chapters concerning specific periods and authors. Chapters 1–6 are devoted to the Imperial literature, while chapters 7–11 to the Late Antique literature. Some of them are dedicated to individual, particularly important authors, others to longer periods. Chapter 1 concerns the poetry of Manilius and the poets of the Neronian Age. The two authors that have their own chapters here are Seneca (Chapter 2) and Lucan (Chapter 3). The next part of the book is dedicated to the Flavian literature: to Statius (Chapter 4), Valerius Flaccus and Silius Italicus (Chapter 5), and Martial and Juvenal (Chapter 6). The authors of the 3rd and 4th centuries are placed together in Chapter 7, whereas Claudian is discussed separately in Chapter 8. Chapter 9 describes the poets of the 5th centuries jointly, with the exception of Sidonius Apollinaris (Chapter 10). The poets of the 6th centuries up to Venantius Fortunatus are under discussion in Chapter 11. Every chapter ends with a partial conclusion. These partial corollaries are summed up again in the final Conclusions section. The arrangement of the analyzed material respects the chronological order so as to link more clearly the poets' statements with the political events between Rome and Parthia, to reveal patterns changing over time and to indicate the influence of certain poets on some others (Claudian's influence on Sidonius being a case in point). Three poets, Lucan, Claudian, and Sidonius, should be listed here as

those who devoted the most space to Iranian topics in their works, significantly surpassing their predecessors in terms of specificity of their description of relevant ideas.

The image of the Iranian world emerging from Roman poetry can be compared to a mosaic made of numerous pieces, which, however, are often monotonous due to the tendency to repeat the motifs known from earlier sources. Obviously, it was not a slavish imitation and a lot of innovative and fresh ideas are to be found in some authors. Generally, though, some topoi were reappearing throughout centuries, as the ubiquitous motif of Parthian mastery in the use of a bow. This observation leads us to another significant problem: the image of the Iranian world in Latin poetry seems to be a purely literary creation built on the basis of earlier writings rather than a true knowledge of the Iranian world. This naturally led to numerous misunderstandings and distortions, which was additionally enhanced by the antagonistic relations between Rome and the Arsacid and Sasanian Empires. The poets picked such elements from the literary sources that they found surprising and exceptional, different from the norms accepted in the Roman world. This explains the frequent mentioning of the Parthian fighting tactic, Oriental peculiarities or exotic wild nature. The poets' knowledge of the Iranian world taken from literature was neither profound nor particularly reliable. It came down to the acquaintance with a small group of, usually stereotypical, themes and motifs. Neither history nor geography nor ethnography of the Iranian world were really known to Roman authors, though they tried to employ them to a limited extent. Therefore, the Iranian peoples were generally indicated as hostile to Rome, sometimes fierce and dangerous, sometimes cowardly and effeminate. This inconsistency, stemming from the division of barbarians into Northern and Eastern, did not bother Latin authors. In this respect, the description of the Iranian world did not differ significantly from that of other Eastern nations. This resulted from the fact that, generally speaking, Latin poets perceived the ancient Iranian empires as a part of the fabulous, abundant but also corrupt and immoral East, which should be given a wide berth in order to avoid "polluting" Romans and their ancestral morality and religion. In this way, they were able to justify Roman failures in conquering the Iranian rival.

Why, then, did Romans mentioned the Iranian motifs so frequently? Importantly, this tendency appears in various literary genres and no explicit link between a given motif and a specific literary genre or period can be traced, which means that this perception of the Iranian world was fairly pervasive and stable (this is also confirmed by the selection of motifs). It seems that, apart from the fondness for literary tradition and erudition, it followed from the Roman penchant for treating Persian, Parthians and other Iranian peoples as a mirror in which Romans could look at themselves, obtaining the corroboration of their own identity and superiority over other nations. In a way, the references to the Iranian world found in Latin poetry, often vague or patently anachronistic, could be seen as a form of discussion about the Roman world, its identity, values, virtues and worldview, as it may be seen in Lucan's perception of Parthia perceived as an antithesis of the good Roman Republics from the days of yore. For

Latin poets, then, the Iranian peoples were not important as such, but only to the extent a reference to them concerned Romans. It allowed Romans to look at themselves from a different perspective and to understand better what it meant to be a "true" Roman.

Keywords: Roman poetry, Ancient Iran, Parthia, the Sasanian Empire, Roman-Parthian relations, Roman-Sasanian relations, Orient in Roman poetry, Roman policy in the East, Roman perception of foreigners

The present work is dedicated to presenting the image of the Iranian world as it appears in the works of Roman poets of Imperial and Late Antique Ages, that is, from 14 AD until the end of the 6th century. This time can be viewed as a period of continuance, when Roman authors developed the motifs inherited from their predecessors (especially from the Augustan Age). The term the "Iranian world" encompasses here not only the great empires (the Achaemenid Persia, the Arsacid Parthia and the Sasanian Empire) but also their component parts as well as other Iranian peoples. Thus, the book aims at reconstructing the broadest possible picture of the civilization that became the mightiest enemy of the Graeco-Roman world for over a millennium.

The author offers a new approach to this complex issue linking the techniques of both classical philologist and historian in his analysis of the chosen poetical passages found in the extant corpus of Roman poetry. Thus, on top of the works of great poets, like Lucan or Claudian, the source material also includes authors like Manilius, Flavian epics or Christian poets of Late Antiquity. This way, the work strives to introduce new sources (to date omitted in the scholarly discussion) and broaden our knowledge of the place the Iranian world took in Roman poetry, demonstrating how it differs from the image known from Greek literature and inherited from Roman classics.

The book hopes to make a contribution to our better understanding of both Latin poetry and the Roman perception of foreign nations in general, taking into consideration the changes observed in the relevant literary tradition under the influence of such factors as the Christianization of Rome and the division of the Empire.

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