

SUMMARY OF DOCTORAL THESIS

Bartosz Jan Koloczek

“History in Roman erudite literature (to the 6th century AD)

– an analytical and comparative study”

Doctoral Supervisor: dr hab. Stanisław Turlej

Kraków, 11.06.2018

The approach of the ancient Romans to the past used to be looked only through the prism of historiographic sources. What is often overlooked is how the past was viewed outside the context of historiography, how history was perceived by people dealing with other fields of knowledge: grammarians, antiquarian writers, authors of textbooks, agricultural, rhetoric or even engineering treatises, why authors of such writings referred to ancient events and figures, how and to what extent.

These writings, due to their specialized character, rarely have enjoyed the interest of historians, though they often use in their practice information, quotations, digressions and historical allusions provided by erudite authors. Nevertheless, to Varro we owe, for example, the concept of Rome as a city of seven hills, to Frontinus information about the time and circumstances of the Roman waterworks, to Pliny the Elder a series of data on the Roman state treasury at the crucial moments of its history, to Gellius information on the subject of ancient Roman laws, chronology of authors and their works, finally to Censorinus we owe the foundations of the chronology of the ancient world (e.g. the Egyptian Sotic Cycle). Lack of knowledge of the context of such data, their objectives and the intention of a given author is a serious difficulty in their reliable assessment and use. As a consequence, the aim of the study is to analyse a wide selection of over twenty of the most representative and well-preserved Roman (Latin) erudite writings (scientific, professional, utilitarian) to examine if we can see in them the existence of regularity in referring to the past and whether it is possible to put forward more general conclusions about the credibility of these authors as a source for historical research.

Particularly wide chronological cadre from the oldest known works of the republican period to the sixth century AD is aimed at better illustrating the evolution of the discussed literary genres, the continuity of certain views and narrative methods, as well as highlighting a certain separateness of the discussed type of literature. The main subject of the dissertation, however, is history (understood both as the past and as a human reflection on the past).

The dissertation is a critical study of erudite works, the main method of my research is therefore a philological method – a comparative analysis of the selected paragraphs of the various erudite texts in terms of their use of historical material, as well as other fragments of these writings that allow us to better understand their layout, character and purposes. The historian's workshop was used by contrast to embed the circumstances of the erudite texts in the context of historical processes taking place in the Roman state and in an attempt to assess the credibility of the historical information they provide.

In the course of my research, I came to the following conclusions. The influences of the antiquarian current in erudite literature turned out to be particularly important. The main features common to the authors under its impact may include the tendency to diachronic recognition of history, the search for the oldest and most diverse sources, the desire to reach different points of view and interpretative possibilities, leaving their evaluation to the reader, interest in microhistory, aversion to traditional historiography and her subjects, and finally, the strong orientation to the Roman cultural context, which is also a common feature at all for many of the preserved erudite works. The consequence of the attachment of many authors to the *Romanitas* is their more or less moralizing attitude, or, more broadly speaking, ideological attitude. In this context, the study of the distant past, or nurturing the memory of it is closely associated with its idealization, the theme of a sense of Roman identity, continuity of tradition, or, as we observe, for example, in relation to the works of Pliny the Elder and Aulus Gellius, the desire to emphasize their cultural superiority towards other nations, especially the Greeks, the justification for Roman imperialism, to emphasize the pride of being a Roman. In many cases, a similar approach is related to the narrowing of historical interests and the objective use of history to achieve the main purpose of the work. Then it becomes one of many tools of argumentation, it is reduced to a collection of historical exemplifications, illustrations or digressions that diversify reading, and therefore are treated by their authors with less involvement, which is already closely related to the factual correctness of the information and its source value for contemporary researchers. However, noticing this type of similarities, common themes, fashions, sometimes even methodologies, though helpful in research, hardly can replace the analysis of a specific work.

Bartosz Koloczek