The Language of the Parthians Living in the Roman Empire

Berta González Saavedra

(Complutense University of Madrid)

Juan Antonio Álvarez-Pedrosa

(Complutense University of Madrid)

Abstract: During the last years of the Republic, the image that the Romans had regarding the Parthian population was that of threat and hostility (Cicero's Letters). However, the relationship between the two peoples changed over time, and in Tacitus and Suetonius's texts, we find that the Parthian characters are treated individually. This is due to the fact that, from 30 BC to AD 180, some members of the Arsacid Royal Family lived in Rome as hostages, while members of other royal families from the East were hosted in the capital of the Empire. The reason for this "people exchange" was to build friendship treaties and to forge links between the Roman Republic and Empire and the royal families of the Eastern kingdoms. However, it is clear that this was used by the Roman Empire to highlight its political superiority over the Parthian Kingdom, because no member of the Roman Imperial Family was hosted elsewhere.

But which language was spoken in these encounters? Did the hostages leave any trace of their mother tongue in Rome? What do we know about the many emissaries sent by the Romans to negotiate with the Parthian Kingdom? In this paper, we will try to analyze the contexts of the linguistic exchanges we can find in the authors of that period, combining them

with other information available to us, such as inscriptions and archeological data, in order to reconstruct the linguistic contacts in a multilingual community.

Keywords: Language Contact, Parthian Kingdom, Roman Empire, Parthian, Greek

Introduction

One of the most interesting and lesser-known contacts between the Romans and other peoples during the Republican and Imperial periods was established with Parthians, an Iranian people who formed the Parthian Kingdom. At its peak, the Parthian territory stretched from Asia Minor to the Punjab Plain in India.

The Parthian Kingdom commenced in 247 BC when Arsaces I founded the Arsacid Dynasty after conquering the satrapy of Parthia, and it ended in AD 224 when Artabanus IV died at the hands of Ardashir I, the founder of the Sassanid Dynasty. This chronology aligns perfectly with the rise of the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire. This raises the question of whether there were linguistic encounters between the two peoples and what their nature was.

The structure of the Parthian Kingdom was more like an association of states with a king for convenience, depending on the time (Wiesehöfer 2001, 145). This leads us to think that the relationship between Parthians and Romans could never have been one of equals, since, for the Roman mentality, the homogeneity that they sought to impose would never be equivalent to the diversity of peoples and cultures under the protective umbrella and the scope of influence of the Parthian Kingdom.

Like other Eastern monarchies, the Parthian Kingdom was obliged to balance the control they exercised over the cities they administered with the trust they placed in these structures, which generated the wealth that they collected in the form of taxes (Álvarez-Pedrosa 2022a, 123). In return, the cities received protection to maintain their autonomy.

Linguistic Context

Given the extent of the Parthian Kingdom over more than four centuries, we can confirm that many languages were spoken in the territories they controlled (Wiesehöffer 2001, 117). It is worth noting that the structure of the kingdom made it essential to negotiate with each of the cities that were administered autonomously, which meant that its administration had to be linguistically flexible. In this regard, the persistence of Greek and Greek-speaking populations in urban communities was closely associated with the relations established between the court and the large cities it controlled (Dąbrowa 1994; Grajetzki 2011).

We might think that Parthian was the most widespread language in the kingdom, but the testimonies we have of this language do not allow us to affirm this. We only have a few

written testimonies of Parthian dating to the period of the Parthian Kingdom that include ostraca from Nysa, legends on coins minted under the Parthian kings (especially from the second half of the first century AD), a bilingual Greco-Parthian inscription on a statue of Heracles discovered in 1984 in Seleucia on the Tigris, a small fragmentary inscription in Behistun of one King Vologeses (perhaps Vologeses V or VI, from the late second century AD), and the inscription of Artabanus IV from Susa, dated to AD 215. Of course, Avroman parchment III and a small annotation on the back of parchment I are written in Parthian.[1]

Although the language of the royal family was Parthian (Álvarez-Pedrosa 2022a, 117), there have been coins recovered from Media, Armenia, Mesopotamia, and Susiana that bear Greek legends (Wiesehöfer 2001, 118-119). This supports the notion that Greek held prestige within the territory, which is not surprising given the continued presence Greek populations in main capitals. The Greek influence and language are also reflected in reports about the "Hellenization" of the Parthian and Armenian courts.[2]

However, the use of Greek at the Parthian court went beyond merely cultural origins. Plutarch (*Crassus* 32.2) states that many members of the Parthian royal family were born to Milesian and Ionian courtesans. Indeed, the Parthian kings could speak Greek with complete fluency, as Philostratus has reported (*Apollonius* 1.32). Another piece of evidence is the account concerning Vardanes's father, Artabanus II, who had to resolve a dispute in 21 BC between the Greek magistrates in the city of Susa over the election of a certain Hecataeus as treasurer after he had failed to meet the regulatory deadlines. According to an inscription hosted at the Louvre (Rougemont 2012, 25-36), he did so in perfect Greek. This testimony reinforces the idea that the Arsacid princes already spoke fluent Greek when they arrived in Rome and needed no further language education during their stay within the heart of the Roman Imperial Family (Álvarez-Pedrosa 2020, 16). To these two testimonies we can add a third: a gruesome scene in which Crassus's head is used as a prop in a performance of Euripides's *Bacchantes* at the Parthian court. In fact, Plutarch (*Crassus* 33.2-7) relates that Orodes II had a good knowledge of Greek and its literature, while his ally, the Armenian Artavasdes, composed tragedies, speeches and historical works in Greek (Álvarez-Pedrosa 2022a, 119).

It is true that Philostratus's testimony could be considered a literary device, but classical authors tend to silence the interpreters and do not give details of the communication in multilingual contexts (Mairs 2011, 66). Therefore, the observation that King Vardanes could speak at least two languages achieves a high degree of plausibility (Álvarez-Pedrosa 2020, 16).

---

[1] For details, see Álvarez-Pedrosa 2022a, 118.

[2] The Parthian-period love for Greek language and literature extended to high-quality works of art inspired by Greek mythology and tragedy: the most notable case is the rhytons of Nisa discovered by Pugačenkova and studied in depth by Masson and Pugačenkova (1982) and later by Pappalardo (2010).

As Mairs (2011, 66) states, it may be inconvenient or even embarrassing to mention that an interpreter was used. Therefore, those historians who recount complex military engagements and diplomatic encounters between groups who spoke different languages can be forgiven for not making explicit every time the use of interpreters.

In the following pages, we will examine linguistic contacts between the ambassadors sent to Rome and the Roman authorities, as well as the treaties signed between the two peoples. It should be noted, nonetheless, that we cannot determine the language in which these contacts were made. However, we will try to complete the picture of the linguistic situation of the Parthians during the Roman Empire through other clues. To achieve this, we will break down the data available to us, transmitted not only by Greek and Latin authors, but also by other sources such as monetary inscriptions and epitaphs, as well as some other direct documents. In other words, using Muysken's (2010, 268) table modified by Álvarez-Pedrosa (2021, 106-107), we use the worst data (McDonald, 2017) to reconstruct the specific scenarios of linguistic contacts that occurred between the Parthian Kingdom and the Roman Empire.

Discussion

Let us now turn to the situations in which we have evidence of linguistic contacts between Roman and Parthian peoples. To do so, in chronological order, we will compile the mentions of situations recorded by historians. We will analyze them and, subsequently, use other materials to determine the nature of these contacts.

Linguistic Contacts at the End of the Republic

Although the date for the beginning of the kingdom was the death of Alexander the Great, we do not hear of direct contacts between Romans and Parthians until 96 BC. In that year, the relations between the Roman and Parthians began, as L. Cornelius Sulla was appointed propraetor and governor of the Province of Cilicia (Hackl 2010, 56). The sources for this first direct contact between Romans and Parthians are Plutarch and Cassius Dio, who tell us about the treaties that were established between them. Until that time, the eastern Roman provinces were constantly threatened by Mithriades VI, king of Pontos (Hackl 2010, 56). Sulla succeeded in bringing about a relationship of collaboration and friendship between the Romans and the Parthians (συμμαχία καὶ φιλία; Plutarch, *Sulla* 5.9), although the Roman Senate considered the Parthians to be a client state, under the label of "*amicus ed socius populi Romani*" (Hackl 2010, 57). Indeed, this would be the treatment that, at least in words, the Parthian kings would receive, as the Romans preferred to speak of friendship and not servitude (Braund 1984, 12).

As per Livy's account, the Parthians themselves made the request for the treaty of friendship (Titus Livius, *Periochae* 70.7), given that the Parthian Kingdom was already very extensive and had no reason to establish a client relationship with Rome (Hackl 2010, 57). This relationship, however, proved unstable due to Armenia's continued threat to

Rome's client states and the attempts to control the region, which ultimately led to the Mithridatic Wars.

After a turbulent period, when Pompey was the senior commander in the East (66 BC), he decided to follow the diplomatic route to deal with Armenia (Titus Livius, *Periochae* 100). A certain balance was thus achieved between Rome and the Parthians thanks to Pompey's actions, but these relations were still weighed down by the Armenian question and Pompey's desire to restructure the whole of the East, given that the threats were numerous (Hackl 2010, 61). During his time as governor of the province of Syria, he organized several meetings with the Parthians, in particular with Phraates III, in order to secure their help in maintaining control over the area of Gordiene and Armenia.

Cassius Dio (*Roman History* 36.45.3) informs us about this attempted alliance and mentions the mediation efforts between the Parthians and the Armenians to address the situation in Gordiene (Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 37.5.1-7.5; see also Appianus, *Appiani Historia* I, *Mith*. 106.501; Plutarch, *Pompey* 39.4-5). Later, Pompey tried to enlist the support of Orodes II at the battle of Pharsalus (Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 41.55.2-4), but to no avail. Despite the fruitlessness of this request after the defeat at Pharsalus, Pompey planned to flee to Parthian territory and take refuge there (Lucanus, *Civil War* 8.359-439; Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 42.2.5-6). From a passage in Plutarch (*Pompey* 79), we know that he not only knew the Greek language, but could write it. Thus, we assume that if Pompey thought that taking refuge in Parthian territory was a good idea, it is because he could communicate with the inhabitants, most likely in Greek.

Aulus Gabinius succeeded Pompey as governor of Syria from 57 to 54 BC and soon was persuaded by Mithridates III, king of Parthia (expelled by his brother Orodes II) to attack the Parthians and not the Arabs, although Ptolemy XI of Egypt, who had been dethroned, tried to persuade Gabinius to attack the Alexandrians and not the Parthians (Appianus, *Appiani Historia* I, *Syr*. 51.257-260; Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 39.56.1-4).

After him, it was M. Licinius Crassus, one of the members of the first Triumvirate at that time, who held the office of governor of Syria. In 54 BC, he attacked the Parthian Kingdom, crossed the Euphrates, ravaged and plundered Mesopotamia, and occupied numerous cities in an attempt to become a new Alexander (Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 40.12.1-13.2; Plutarch, *Crassus*). An embassy was sent by Orodes II to Crassus asking him the reasons for the war against the Parthians. Meanwhile, he prepared Surena to receive the Romans in case Tigranes (in Armenia) should convince them to attack (Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 40.16.1-3). Moreover, Abgarus of Osroene broke a treaty of friendship signed with Pompey and deceived the Romans, who were caught in an ambush in which Crassus's son was killed (*Roman History* 40.20.1-21.3).

Crassus was later killed, deceived by Surena in Carras, who wanted to speak to him without intermediaries on the pretext of signing a peace treaty (Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 40.26.1-27.4). Plutarch narrates approximately the same, to which he adds that, in

the meeting between Surena and Crassus, there were some mixed-race Greeks whom the latter greeted in Greek (*Crassus* 31).

What is interesting about these testimonies in which linguistic contacts took place between Romans and Parthians is that it is not specified in which language they communicated. From Plutarch's passage, however, we can confirm the presence of the Greek element as a language of communication, possibly without interpreters, given that the meeting between Surena and Crassus was, explicitly at Surena's request, without intermediaries.[3]

As for the direct Roman sources of the time, the first mentions of the Parthians are by Cicero and Caesar, witnesses to the disaster of Carras (53 BC), although the texts in which the Parthians are mentioned are dated after Carras. In these Roman sources, the Parthians are treated in a general way, and it is primarily Cicero who considers them an indeterminate threat in the East (González Saavedra 2019). Due to the defeat at Carras, the Euphrates ceased to be the natural border between Rome and the Parthian Kingdom as Orodes II invaded a large part of the Province of Syria and claimed it in its entirety as a reward. However, he failed to secure the full claim of the territory (Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 41.55.2-4).

The relations between Romans and Parthians remained strained. The resentment caused by the Roman defeat was a strong motivation for Julius Caesar in 46 BC to consider a military campaign against the Parthians (Appianus, *Appiani Historia* II, *BC* 2.100.459). However, the Parthian position remained strong as Rome faced the Civil War after Caesar's death and the establishment of the Second Triumvirate. The Parthians took the opportunity to invade Syria and Palestine (Hackl 2010, 64). During the period between 40-38 BC, only through the joint efforts of Antony and Ventidius Basus were the Parthians pushed back. However, it did not fully restore the previous status quo, including the Euphrates border, nor did it succeed in recovering the insignia that Crassus had lost at Carras.

The Reign of the Julio-Claudian House

During this period, various princes imbued with Roman culture were used as a political experiment by the Romans, but they failed as vassal kings. Unfortunately, we are only informed about the cultural nature of these political experiments, although the linguistic environment surrounding them remains largely unexplored. We will try to reconstruct it using the data transmitted through different sources at our disposal. As a consequence, the situation with regard to the Parthians changed radically after Augustus, and practically

---

[3] As we shall see later, Greek is one of the languages mastered by the Parthian elite. Therefore, if Crassus greets the two Greek characters in Surena's army in Greek and the meeting between Surena and Crassus takes place without intermediaries, we can assume that Greek was the language of the negotiation.

every Julio-Claudian emperor had his own candidate for the throne of the Parthian Kingdom.

Augustus (27 BC - AD 14), the first emperor of Rome, tried to consolidate a policy of peace both internally and externally so he propagated the idea that it would favor Rome to accept the dualism of two great powers on both sides of the Euphrates; he seems to have made use of a threat of invasion by the Parthians, which allowed him to regain the border already established before Carras, and the lost insignia (Hackl 2010, 67). On the other hand, he would have to show firmness in the face of possible partial aggression and, in principle, show himself to be the stronger partner in a test of strength that was to be mainly diplomatic. This way, the Parthians would have to accept peaceful coexistence through good behavior, even if the relationship was never between equals (Hackl 2010, 66), as Augustus himself recounts (*Res Gestae* 29).

To mitigate the disappointment this might have caused among the Romans, the Parthian Kingdom now appeared to be a foreign power that could not be reconciled with the Roman nature and therefore could not be integrated into the *Imperium romanum*. On the contrary, Rome had to guard against being corrupted by the East, as had happened with the Greeks and Macedonians and the degenerate Roman Antony, as seen in the *Excursus* on the Parthians (Lucanus, *Civil War* 8.363-349) possibly taken from Titus Livy (Hackl 2010, 66).[4]

In fact, as Cassius Dio acknowledges (*Roman History* 53.33.1-2), it is the Parthian kings themselves who turned to Augustus to mediate between them in conflicts over the throne. Therefore, he took advantage of it to claim the eagles of Crassus. Indeed, one of the strategies of the diplomatic policy pursued by Augustus involved the presence of Parthian hostages at the Roman court, a means of submission previously used by Rome[5], which Augustus himself recounted in his work, transforming it into a favor of friendship (*Res Gestae* 32). His grandiloquent words, in which Roman superiority is evident, contrast with the treatment which they actually received (Dąbrowa 1987, 63).

This policy, established after the return of the insignia lost by Crassus at Carras (Strabo, *Geographica* 6.4.2 and 16.1.28, and Suetonius, *De vita* 21.3), is recognized as a success of the Romans in influencing the choice of kings in the area.[6] Possibly dynastic instability among the Parthians was one of the trump cards played by Augustus to keep the

---

[4] This idea of the depravity of the Persians is very old, possibly becoming a cliché in the Greco-Roman world. The first news we have of the critical view of the Persian court is transmitted by Ctesias of Cnidus, who gives an image of the Achaemenid court as a space dominated by Queen Parisatis and her circle of eunuchs and not by the king (González Saavedra and Álvarez-Pedrosa, forthcoming).

[5] According to Titus Livy (*Periochae* XLII 19), it was Ariarathes IV who first sent his son to Rome for education just before the Third Macedonian War broke out (Braund 1984, 9).

[6] In fact, as we shall see below, Rome placed or tried to place several members of the royal family (from different genealogical lines) raised in Rome on the Parthian throne, especially during the reign of Augustus.

Parthian throne under control. Furthermore, due to the dynastic ups and downs of the Arsacid family, the hostage-princes would serve as candidates to be sent back to reign with the guarantee that their time in Rome and their entirely Roman education would render them loyal allies. Such was the case with Vonones, Tiridates and Meherdates, although the success was not guaranteed (Álvarez Pedrosa 2020, 15).

Although not explicitly mentioned by Parthian sources, the advantages for the Parthian royalty do appear in Tacitus (*Annales* 2.1.2), faithful to his style of reflecting all the perspectives involved. Sending their sons as hostages served multiple purposes: it strengthened friendship and simultaneously protected the Parthian kings from potential intrigues at their court, as the kings feared that their enemies and rival claimants to the throne might eliminate the crown princes.

If Augustus treated the Parthian hostages in the same way as his own family, it is not surprising that this residence at the Roman court entailed the education of the princes. In fact, as Suetonius (*De vita* 48) indicates, Augustus assigned tutors to the young hostage-princes and even devoted special attention to those who were mentally deficient; Augustus treated the hostage-princes as if they were members of his own family, which can be understood as Augustus's propaganda (Álvarez-Pedrosa 2020, 16).

Relations between the two peoples were so fluid that it was during the reign of Augustus that the Parthians presented ambassadors to the Senate for the first time. Moreover, as part of the policy of control, Augustus mediated and intervened in the disputes over the throne between the Parthian candidates. As a result of this mediation, Tiridates himself was granted asylum in Rome, which gave the Romans the first opportunity to maintain friendly diplomatic and social contacts with a prominent Parthian for a long period of time (Hackl 2010, 67). This is reflected on the coins he minted upon his return.[7] His son, in turn, became a Roman citizen and was in command of the *ala parthorum* as shown on his tomb stone (*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum (CIL)* III 8746).

He was not the only Parthian hostage to obtain Roman citizenship, as evidenced by other epitaphs written in Latin and dated to the reign of Augustus: *CIL* III 8746, *CIL* VI 1799 and *CIL* XI 137. The first inscription pertains to another son of Tiridates, who not only became a Roman citizen but, like his brother, entered the Julian family. The second inscription refers to two sons of Phraates IV, so that Augustus would grant his dynastic line the right to claim the throne (Thommen 2010, 436). In the second inscription, it is interesting that each of Phraates's sons is mentioned as *regum regis f(ilius)*, "s(on) of the king of kings". In the filiation of the two princes, we see the recognition of the title used by the Parthian royal family of Persian origin.

---

[7] Sellwood's Type 55/7-9, the reverse of which reads ΒΑΣΣΙΛΕΩΝ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ ΕΥΕΡΓΕΤΟΥ ΑΥΤΟΚΡΑΤΟΡ(ΟΣ) ΦΙΛΟΡΩΜΑΙΟΥ ΕΠΙΦΑΝΟΥΣ ΦΙΛΕΛΛΗΝΟΣ, "[coin] of the King of Kings Arsaces, benefactor, autocrator, friend of the Romans, revealed, friend of the Greeks" (Keller 2010b, 627).

The last of these refers to a Parthian citizen taken prisoner, possibly by Antony, whom Augustus freed, gave Roman citizenship (and named him Julius) and settled in Ravenna, where this epitaph was found (Thommen 2010, 437). As Gardthausen (1906, 849) stated, Ravenna was a city of the great fallen from foreign lands who had found refuge with the Romans.

It is true that the Parthian royals knew Greek. However, as demonstrated in the sociolinguistic study carried out by Álvarez-Pedrosa (2020), the language chosen by the Parthian hostages for their epitaphs reveals their self-representation. The use of Latin instead of Greek could be interpreted as a deeply significant linguistic choice. This suggests that the language of communication between the Parthian hostage-princes and the Romans in Rome might have been Latin (Álvarez-Pedrosa 2020, 17).[8] This factor, along with others like the shape of the tomb on which the inscription was found (for instance, a round tomb in the case of *CIL* XI 137, indicating his belonging to the Roman elite), serves as evidence of acculturation. These elements demonstrate the Parthian royalty's desire to integrate themselves into their surrounding environment (Álvarez-Pedrosa 2020, 26). However, it is crucial not to overlook the fact that the sons of Phraates continued to hold their father's title as "King of Kings", which shows that "the Romans recognized the system of titles of the Parthian kings, an essential element within the political propaganda of the Parthian Empire" (Shayegan 2011, 41).

From the period of Tiberius's reign (AD 14-37), we find the first indications of the consequences of Augustus's hostage policy, which led to a cultural conflict. His occurred despite the Hellenization and Romanization processes taking place. In fact, Vonones was installed as the king of the Parthians by Tiberius after being raised as a hostage in Rome and not familiar with many Parthian customs (Tacitus, *Annales* 2.2; see also Gonnella 2001). Consequently, he faced a poor reception in his homeland. Although the people initially welcomed the new ruler with enthusiasm, this was followed by a sense of national embarrassment due to the cultural conflict caused by the new king's overly Roman customs, easy approachability, and spontaneously benevolent manner. These traits starkly contrasted with the solemnity expected from Parthian kings (Dąbrowa 2014). It seems that the problem was that Vonones had a scant appreciation of the core values of Parthian identity, namely hunting, horse riding and endless banquets, elements of identity that dated back to the Achaemenid period (Álvarez-Pedrosa 2022a, 120). There may also have been some linguistic conflict due to his retinue's almost exclusive use of Greek at court (Tacitus, *Annales* 2.2).

Furthermore, Flavius Josephus (*Jewish Antiquities* 18.46-47) narrates the Parthians' sense of humiliation in accepting a king imposed by a foreign power. Moreover, he highlights the contempt that arose due to Vonones's prolonged time as a hostage.

---

[8] This observation corresponds to the analysis to our third inscription, but it can also be extrapolated to apply to the other two inscriptions.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that Vonones I reigned for about five years, which was not bad at all compared with the duration of his predecessors' reigns. It seems clear that the cultural clash with the Iranian world contributed to his deposition by Artabanus II in AD 12 (Gregoratti 2012).

On the other hand, we must consider that while Tiberius aimed to maintain the diplomatic approach established by his predecessor, he also sent Germanicus to the East in AD 18 to once again assert Rome's weight (Hackl 2010, 69). This action forced Artabanus II to re-establish friendly relations with Rome, ultimately arranging a meeting with Germanicus on the Euphrates (Tacitus, *Annales* 6.36.1-37.4). Vonones was banished from Syria to Cilicia at his request and died soon after. Shortly afterwards, Germanicus died too and the whole peace treaty with Artabanus came to nothing. However, the esteem in which the Parthians held Germanicus was so great that on the day Artabanus II became aware of Germanicus's death, he neither hunted nor administered justice (Suetonius, *De vita* 5[9]).

As a consequence of this failure, Tiberius presented another candidate to the Parthian throne, another son of Phraates IV - Phraates V - to challenge Artabanus II. Phraates V, accustomed to a comfortable life in Rome, died of an illness shortly after his arrival in the East (Tacitus, *Annales* 6.31.2). Later, Tiberius chose a third prince raised in Rome as a hostage (Tacitus, *Annales* 6.37.4), Tiridates III, the grandson of Phraates IV. This prince was successful in overthrowing Artabanus II, with Vitellius's support. Once again, the Parthians trusted in the humanity inherent to his Roman education as opposed to the cruelty of Artabanus, inculcated by his education among the Scythians (Tacitus, *Annales* 6.41.2).

As evident from these passages by Tacitus, the cultural conflict is presented as a dichotomy between urban and nomadic lifestyle, reinforcing what the Romans saw as a natural opposition between civilized and barbaric societies (Álvarez-Pedrosa 2022a, 121). His Roman education and fluent Greek contributed to Tiridates III's popularity in the city of Seleucia on the Tigris, which had a Greek-speaking majority (Tacitus, *Annales* 6.42.1). The rest of the story (Tacitus, *Annales* 6.44) suggests that Tiridates's failure was due to his overdependence on the security promised by the political control of the deeply Hellenized cities in Mesopotamia, whereas in reality, the Parthian power traditionally resided much further East, where tribal bonds were much stronger (Gregoratti 2012). For someone raised in Rome, this was almost incomprehensible.

Tiridates's reign did not last long either, and Artabanus II, who had received his education among the Scythians, followed a similar approach by sending his son Darius as a hostage to Rome during the reign of Tiberius (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*. 18.96-106 tells us that this action was carried out under the pressure from Tiberius himself). Darius was a friend of Caligula. This historical passage is described by Flavius Josephus in terms of

---

[9] It is noteworthy that this is the only passage in Latin literature in which the Parthian king is referred to by the title "*rex regum*", an aspect that, although common, was avoided by Roman writers.

friendship (φιλία), which gives us an idea that Artabanus II saw the need to enter into a relationship similar to that of his predecessors if he were to remain on the throne.

During Caligula's short reign (AD 37-41), we also learn about the presence of a Parthian prince, the aforementioned son of Artabanus II, at the Roman court, if we interpret the inscription "*Darius rex*" found on the lead pipes at Nemi (Morpurgo 1931) as an ambition whereby Prince Darius should claim his father's throne (Leone 2000). Although he never became king, we can interpret this inscription in terms of a desire for socio-cultural integration in his Roman exile, as well as the inscription *CIL* 14.2216 (Ricci 1996, 571-573), which can also be attributed to Darius (Álvarez-Pedrosa 2022a, 120).[10] However, the fact that a Parthian prince had a temple built in a place as closely linked to the origins of Rome as Nemi indicates to which extent the princes were immersed in the Roman culture (Álvarez-Pedrosa 2022b, 113), regardless of the fact that the mythical origins of the sanctuary of Nemi were linked to the Greeks and the East in general (Pasqualini 2007). Furthermore, it shows that his personal and economic situation was not burdensome as he had sufficient funds to support a major building project (Álvarez-Pedrosa 2022b, 113). At the very least, Darius served as a propaganda tool for Caligula in the episode where the latter intended to recreate Xerxes's passage across the Hellespontus on a bridge built between Baiae and Pozzuoli (Suetonius, *De vita* 19; Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 59.17; see also Lerouge 2007, 148).

During the reign of Claudius (AD 41-54), there were also Parthian candidates for the thrones of Armenia and the Parthian Kingdom. In the case of the former, it was Mithridates (Tacitus, *Annales* 11.8.1-11.9.1). Regarding the Parthian throne, Claudius chose Meherdates, a Roman-educated candidate (Tacitus, *Annales* 12.11.3: *alumnus Urbis*), as a successor of Vardanes, who had been assassinated. He was a counter-king of Gotarzes II, and once again history was repeated: Meherdates, grandson of Phraates IV and son of Vonones, was easily fooled by Abgar of Edessa, because he depended for his well-being on the comforts provided by an urban life (Tacitus, *Annales* 12.12.3).

It is true, on the other hand, that Gotarzes II tried to maintain relations with Rome in his usual terms of "*amicitia*" and "*societas*", as Tacitus records (*Annales* 12.10.2) in the speech that some Parthian ambassadors delivered to the Senate. However, these terms, typical of Roman propaganda, may have been used by Gotarzes's own envoys to plead before the Senate to let him remain on the throne (Hackl 2010, 71). In his reply (Tacitus, *Annales* 11.1-3), Emperor Claudius spoke of Roman superiority and of the obedience the Parthians owed them, and furthermore exhorted Merherdates to lead a gentle and just government. Moreover, he again stressed the Roman desire for peace, and once again defended Augustus's policy of conciliation.

Meherdates's end was not as expected and, once he crossed the Euphrates, was seized by Gotarzes II, who mutilated him (Tacitus, *Annales* 12.11.3-14.3). According to

---

[10] For more information on the interpretation of this inscription, see Thommen 2010, 439-440.

Hackl (2010, 71), this episode showed that the policy of the Roman-bred candidates, the diplomatic route, was coming to an end and that, if the Romans wanted to make a difference, they had to use the levers either in further direct military action, or in the conquest of the Parthian vassal states, or a combination of both approaches.

Finally, during Nero's reign, the same policy initiated by Claudius persisted, maintaining the Parthians on defense until the fall of the Arsacids (Hackl 2010, 72). In this case, it was Corbulo who was in charge of reorganizing the easternmost territories of the Roman Empire, which bordered on those of the Parthian Kingdom. Initially, he focused on securing supremacy in Armenia, where Nero also tried to place his own candidate. On this occasion, it was Prince Tigranes V, another hostage who had lived in Rome (Tacitus, *Annales* 14.26.1). As before, the history of failure caused by cultural conflict was repeated: the Armenians welcomed him at first but then despised him for being a foreigner and for having been subjected to the humiliation of being held hostage, as Tacitus reports (*Annales* 15.1; see also Álvarez-Pedrosa 2022a, 121).

During this period, there were frequent negotiations between the Romans, and Parthians and after the clashes for the control of Armenia armistices took place. Cassius Dio tells us of three meetings: 1) in AD 61 (*Roman History* 62.20.2-4), an armistice between Corbulo and Vologeses I; 2) in AD 62 (*Roman History* 62.21.1-4 and 62.22.1-4), an armistice signed by Corbulo and Vologeses I on the Euphrates; 3) in AD 63-4 (*Roman History* 62.23.1-4), when they signed a new treaty at Randeia. Tacitus, for his part, informs us about a first encounter in AD 54, when Nero forces Corbulo to restrain Vologeses I, who has entered Armenia (*Annales* 13.6.1-7.2; 9.1) and also of the coronation of Tigranes on the Armenian throne (*Annales* 14.25.2-26.2).

However, we should not lose sight of the fact that Nero had a special respect and admiration for the Parthians, the result of "populist" policies. Proof of this is that, after the emperor's death, three individuals pretended to be him, known as the false Neros, and all connections to the Parthians. In fact, one of them even ended up as a refugee at the Parthian court (Tuplin 1989). The sympathy of the Parthians toward Nero lies in the fact that, thanks to the emperor, the Parthian kings gained control of the province of Armenia, and in turn Nero made peace with them and gained control of the two provinces, since the Parthian king of Armenia was to be crowned by Rome. A further sign of this sympathy is that, after his death, king Vologeses tried to establish a cult of the emperor (Suetonius, *De vita* 57).

The Flavian Dynasty

During this dynasty, the interests and problems of the Roman Empire were no longer primarily located in the East, but in Germania, the lower Danube, and Judea. However, this shift in the focal points of the Roman's concerns does not mean that the Parthian Kingdom was strengthened, but quite the opposite (Hackl 2010, 73). In fact, there is historical evidence suggesting that Vologeses I asked Vespasian for help due to of the imminent

threat from the Alans, but the latter refused to provide help (Josephus, *The Jewish War* 7.244-251; Tacitus, *Histories* 4.51). This event, which might seem unimportant, was used by Vespasian to commemorate the fifth consulship of his son Domitian on gold coins dated AD 77 or 78 (Keller 2010a, 593-594). On the reverse of the coin, there is a quotation from the Augustan coinage, which commemorated the return of the insignia in 20 BC. Although the image of the kneeling Parthian is adopted, the legend is omitted. The indication of the fifth consulship of Domitian, which is depicted and named on the obverse, dates this coinage to AD 77/78. This revival of this Augustan coinage should be understood in this light, as it signals the Roman claim to supremacy and recalls Augustus's diplomatic success (Keller 2010a, 594). Domitian interpreted the Parthian legation asking for help against the Alans as a gesture of submission and, at the same time, promised another success over the Parthians with this coinage, which, however, did not come about due to his father's restrained policy.

The Antonine Dynasty

The situation of stability, which had hardly changed since the time of Nero, altered during the reign of Trajan, who tried to become a new Alexander the Great by waging his own campaign against the Parthians. The reason for the war, according to Cassius Dio (*Roman History* 68.17.1-3), was that Osroenes I had placed a successor on the Armenian throne without Rome's approval. However, the war was preceded by negotiations, as evidenced by coins dated between AD 113 and 114. These coins feature Trajan on one side and the legend "*rex parthorum*" on the other, along with an image of a corseted Eastern man imploring Trajan, showing the *clementia Augusti* (Keller 2010a, 594-595). Soon after, these coins were replaced as other mints issued coins that presented more recent actions of Trajan in war against the Parthians, such as the coins commemorating the victories over Armenia, Mesopotamia, Parthia and the submission of their kings (Keller 2010a, 597-602).

Although one of the consequences of this war was the creation of the Province of Armenia (Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 68.19.1-20.4; 18.3b-23.2) and the Roman Empire had never been as extensive as in Trajan's time, in reality the economic and social costs of the conquest of the East proved not to be worth it and, in fact, cost Trajan his own life (it should be noted that he died in Cilicia in AD 117). However, to avert the threat of reconquest by the Parthians, Trajan had appointed a shadow king from the house of Arsacid - Parthamaspates - who could not hold out for long (*Roman History* 68.30.1-3, 75.9.6). This adventure ended with the unsuccessful attempt to invade Hatra (*Roman History* 68.31.1-33.2).

As a consequence of this policy, Hadrian, Trajan's successor, renounced the new provinces, but retained at least some territories as Roman client kingdoms. In addition, he tried to reach an amicable settlement with the Parthians, which lasted more than three decades, partly because the Parthians themselves had to deal with their own conflicts (Hackl 2010, 73). In fact, there are abundant Palmyran caravan site inscriptions from this

period that attest the friendly terms between Rome and the Parthians during the reign of the emperors Hadrian and Antoninus Pius, and also by the existence of a temple in Vologesias devoted to the cult of the Roman emperors (Wiesehöfer 2001, 146; Zehnder 2010, 381-401).

Furthermore, coins were struck during Antoninus Pius's reign to commemorate Parthia as a Roman province (Keller 2010a, 602-603). One such coin, a sestertius, belongs to a large series of bronze coins issued in Rome in the second year of Antoninus Pius's reign and depicting Roman provinces. Each of the provinces depicted holds a wreath in the right hand, the shape of which varies between a crown and a basket, probably containing a crown. Parthia is depicted with a quiver and a bow as attributes in her left hand. The Parthian Kingdom was included in these series as a neighboring land, which at least in Rome's state propaganda was considered a subordinate territory, celebrating the rise to power of Antoninus Pius (Keller 2010a, 603).

Under Marcus Aurelius, Parthians again had little room for maneuver in confronting Roman power. Thus, Vologeses IV managed to reestablish Parthian rule over Armenia, overpower the Roman governors of Cappadocia and Syria, and succeeded in conquering the states of Orshoëne, Nisibis and Adiabene - which had been clients of the Parthians before and then shifted to Roman control under Trajan and Hadrian - to secede from Rome (Hackl 2010, 74). Faced with this situation, the emperor entrusted the campaign to Lucius Verus, who achieved great success, despite a plague epidemic. However, since the main objective of the Romans was to take possession of a fortress and a transport junction at an important crossing of the Euphrates, they basically left the urban institutions of the Parthian period in place and merely reinforced their military presence (Hackl 2010, 74).

Evidently, from this victory over the Parthians, coins were also minted, on which the iconography used was similar to those which we have seen on those of Hadrian. In this victory, a new title is attributed to L. Verus, that is, *Parthicus Maximus*, who is shown riding over a fallen enemy. This iconography can be traced back to one of Trajan's victory coins after the conquest of Dacia, already used by Lucius Verus for the earlier success in Armenia (Keller 2010a, 605).

Severe Dynasty and the End of the Parthian Kingdom

The Parthians no longer dared to attack until the Roman turmoil, following Emperor Commodus's death, offered them a favorable opportunity to regain their lost territories.

Septimius Severus, the emperor, who reigned after the year in which five emperors reigned (AD 193), launched his own campaign against the Parthians. The attack was conducted in two phases due to other conflicts. At the end, it was again the city of Hatra that held out. For twenty years, the Parthians remained quiet, but the situation changed under Artabanus V, who had taken over part of the Parthian Kingdom and was considered extremely hostile to the Romans (Hackl 2010, 75).

Thus Caracalla (AD 211-217) was forced to undertake his own campaign against the Parthians. He is said to have requested Artabanus's daughter to provoke a cause for war on the basis of her refusal (Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 17.1.1). He then invaded Adiabene and went as far as Arbela, where he plundered and razed the royal tombs. If the war did not continue, it was because he was assassinated in AD 217 by his successor, Macrinus. The latter tried to continue the campaign against the Parthians but was defeated by Artabanus in a skirmish at Nisibis and was subsequently forced to sign a peace treaty (Hackl 2010, 76). Shortly afterwards, the Parthian Kingdom fell to the Sassanid Kingdom.

Macrinus's son, who was proclaimed Augustus in AD 218 by Macrinus himself, also fled to Parthia when his father was defeated at Carras. He certainly died before reaching his target, but this gesture confirms that relations between the two peoples were not totally hostile, despite the clashes over control of the region.

From all these emperors we have coins with the legend "*Victoria parthica*", which, according to Keller (2010a, 612), demonstrates the hope of victory by underlining Roman superiority. With the victory coins of Lucius Verus, the victory over the Parthians is only presented allegorically, without going into further detail about the historical events and this trend also continues on the coins of the Severi successes and corresponds to a general development to present the victories of the Roman emperors more and more as universal victories (Keller 2010a, 612).

Overview of the Meetings between Parthians and Roman Emperors

In the preceding sections, we could appreciate that relations among various members of the Parthian courts, including their kings and their delegates, were very frequent throughout the empire. Indeed, even if implicit, linguistic contacts between Romans and Parthians were very frequent, and the nature of these contacts leads us to classify them into two main groups: purely strategic contacts resulting from wars (meetings to recover territories and exchange prisoners, and the signing of armistices), and diplomatic contacts resulting from the cultivation of closer relations including stays of Parthian princes at the Roman court. From the scant information available to us, it can be inferred that the first meetings were probably conducted in Greek. This is based on the fact that the Parthian court was proficient in Greek, and Greek was also part of the Roman education. It should be noted, however, that we cannot exclude the presence of interpreters to facilitate communication.

The second meetings, on the other hand, seem to have taken place in Latin as well, since those members of the Parthian officials who had lived in Rome showed high levels of acculturation, as we observed in the previous sections.

It is worth noting that the former can be traced along the Roman Empire, whereas the latter corresponds almost exclusively to the Julio-Claudian dynasty.

Greek as the Language of the Parthian Kingdom

To complete the picture of the linguistic situation of Greek in the Parthian Kingdom, let us now shift our focus to the Greek presence within the Parthian territory. For this, we should first distinguish between urban and non-urban areas.

Greek Language, Literature and Culture in the Cities

First of all, we may consider that a significant cultural role was played by authors who wrote in Greek in the Parthian Kingdom. In fact, the cities in Mesopotamia were home to an educated Greek-speaking population that produced some fascinating - albeit highly fragmentary - testimonies of their learned and literary use of Greek. An example of this is Apollodorus of Artemita, who probably lived in the first half of the first century BC and wrote the *Parthica* in at least four books. A fragment of the *Parthica* has been quoted by Athenaeus, while several references can be found in Strabo (Álvarez-Pedrosa 2022a, 121-122). It is also plausible that Isidore of Charax (AD 1) shared the same fate, as he composed a short work titled *Stathmoi Parthikoi*, "The Parthian Stations", an itinerary of the route from Zeugma on the Euphrates to Alexandria of Arachosia.

We also have information about a geographer from the same city, Dionysius of Charax, who was requested by Augustus to write a description of the East that, according to Pliny the Elder (*Natural History* 6.141), was used as a guide for Gaius Caesar's expedition (Álvarez-Pedrosa 2022a, 122).

Moreover, we know that the service of illustrious rhetors was required among the Greek communities to teach. According to Plutarch (*Lucullus* 22.5), Amphicrates of Athens was one of them. Another one was the Athenian philosopher Archedemus (Plutarch, *Moralia* 605b - *On Exile* 14), who went to the land of the Parthians and founded a Stoic school in Babylon. To sum up, we can affirm that these Greco-Parthian writers document the existence of a far-reaching cultural contract between the West and the Greek-speaking colonies in the interior of the Parthian Kingdom.

We must also consider that many of the cities founded by Greeks during the Seleucid period were settlements that continued to thrive under Parthian rule, although their character was different in this second phase.

As is well known, the first Greek settlements were in Asia Minor and Mesopotamia, primarily driven by the economic opportunities offered by trade in the region. Indeed, trade, which soon expanded beyond Iran, and the Silk Road[11] attracted the Greeks, who settled throughout the whole of the Parthian territory. However, it must be made a basic distinction between cities founded *ex novo*, such as Seleucia on the Tigris, with a predominantly Greek population, among other language communities, and pre-existing

---

[11] Although the beginning of the Silk Road in the strictest sense of the term dates to 128 BC, the more general concept of "Silk Roads" would include all routes to India that formed part of this process (Álvarez-Pedrosa 2017).

cities where Greek-speaking communities settled, creating a colonist-type structure governed by its own laws: such was the case of Babylon and Susa. The latter ones are more interesting from a linguistic point of view because they had a longer, more colored history of contemporaneous language communities (Álvarez-Pedrosa 2022a, 122-123).

For the latter, the use of Greek has been described as a colonial process, since during the Seleucid period, power was held by rulers of Greek origin, and thus Greek would have become the language of the administration of the new kingdom, or at least the language of the ruling elite (Habicht 1958). Nevertheless, Sherwin-White (1987, 4-8) has called this view into question, since the Seleucids continued to use the multilingual system inherited from the Achaemenids for administration. In this regard, for the ruling class, learning Greek was useful in order to prosper at the Seleucid court, but from the point of view of administration, the Seleucids continued to use Aramaic as the *lingua franca*. Therefore, the analysis gets more complicated even further in the Parthian period, because the ruling elite was no longer of Greek origin and thus the idea of a colonist-type imposition can no longer explain the maintenance of Greek within urban and rural contexts (Álvarez-Pedrosa 2022a, 123).

This should not lead us to think that the Greek language had disappeared from the cities, since the Greek communities kept their political sway of urban Greek communities and this could explain why Greek had been the language of choice for coin legends even from the foundation of the Arsacid Kingdom, which this cannot be explained as a simple imitation, but a major political decision (Dąbrowa 2011, 157; 2012, 46). The term φιλελλῆν, struck on coins from the time of Mithridates I (171-138 BC) as another title for the Parthian kings, was intended to ensure the support of the Greek population (Wolski 1983; Wiesehöfer 1996; Olbrycht 2000; Dąbrowa 2011, 1-8, 25-31, 39-47, 66-70).[12] However, after Mithridates II (122-91 BC), the graphic and linguistic quality of Greek on coins began to deteriorate, which cannot only be attributed to the political crisis, but also to the mint workers' gradual loss of linguistic competences of Greek (Álvarez-Pedrosa 2022a, 123). The number of these errors continued to grow over time even in the mints of cities such as Raga and Ecbatana, which during the Seleucid period had been repopulated by Greek-speaking communities (Dąbrowa 2011, 158).

Greek in the Outlying Territories

One of the most significant testimonies that allow us to affirm that Greek was a language also used in the outskirts of the Parthian Kingdom are the Avroman Scrolls, since the two parchments in Greek were not found in an urban context, but in an entirely rural setting (Minns 1915).

---

[12] The title disappeared in AD 23/24, during the reign of Artabanus II, when the power of the Great King was consolidated and Greek communities became an integrated part of the kingdom (Curtis 2007, 24; Gregoratti 2012).

These texts reflect the contract of sale of a vineyard in a small village in Media Atropatene, dated to 24 BC and AD 43/44, spanning two generations. In these texts we can observe that the men who signed the deed of sale and the witnesses who testified to the sale were of Iranian origin and probably did not speak Greek (Álvarez-Pedrosa 2022a, 139). Hence, Greek for them would have been an instrumental language used to validate, sanction and dignify a document. Given the quality of the Greek that appears in the documents, we can think that there were professionals who use templates in which they filled in the information corresponding to the contract in question (González Saavedra 2023) and who would have known not only the language and how to write, but also the dating and customary Greek formulas, as well as the names of the kings and queens (Álvarez-Pedrosa 2022a, 140). These would move throughout the Parthian territory to perform notarial functions. On the other hand, drawing up a deed of sale in Greek would have endowed the transaction with greater legitimacy, indicating a pragmatic motive for its use, given that, as we have seen, it is an urban language that would have spread to the rural outskirts of the kingdom.

Moreover, we must consider that the scriptural material used in these documents reinforces this idea of "officialdom", because the use of parchment in the Iranian domain was probably widespread, but very few examples of this medium from the Parthian period have been preserved. The Babylonian Astronomical Diaries often record that the Parthian king sent letters written on parchment to his Greek citizens. Therefore, the use of parchment or hide is a feature that links the notarial documents from such an outlying place as Avroman to the practices of the royal chancellery of the Parthian Kingdom. (Álvarez-Pedrosa 2022a, 132).

From AD 70 onward, Greek's status as a prestigious language and its legitimacy in legal matters began to decline. Consequently, it was no longer necessary to use Greek when drafting documents like the contracts we have examined. The shift in language preference is evident in the third of the Avroman scrolls, which is written in Parthian. This could indicate that a professional scribe or a notary with knowledge of Parthian was responsible for its creation (Tarn 1929, 53; Potts 2017, 353).

From all this, we can conclude that the multilingualism that we had noted during the first half of the Arsacid period was declining and disappeared by the middle of the first century AD, and that the use of Greek gradually faded away due to a process of enculturation, probably driven by the new political and economic interests of urban communities. From this observation, we can infer that the collaborative system or commonwealth that had prevailed during the entire first part of the history of the Parthian Kingdom started to disintegrate. It is also suggested that there may have been political efforts to incorporate Iranian traditions into institutions and cultural and religious aspects of life during this period, although evidence of such a process is scant (Álvarez-Pedrosa 2022a, 141).

Conclusions

One of the difficulties in conducting a study of historical sociolinguistics is the poor quality of the data available, for as McDonald (2017) points out, we have to make use of a multitude of motley sources that point us to the linguistic contacts that took place in Antiquity and help us to determine their nature.

In this contribution, we have found that between 96 BC and the end conclusion of the Parthian period, there was a series of linguistic contacts between Romans and Parthians. These contacts were of two types: some were directly linked to the confrontations between these two dominant powers, while others were more diplomatic in nature, aiming to establish long-lasting relations between them.

While the former occurred from the end of the Republic through the Roman Empire (encompassing the entire period under analysis), the latter are mainly concentrated during the reign of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. These developments represent a continuation of a diplomatic policy initiated by Augustus, which his successors also considered useful. As Álvarez-Pedrosa (2020, 13) points out, between 30 BC and ca. AD 180, some members of the Arsacid royal family and other Eastern royal families lived in Rome as hostages. This indicates a sort of exchange of individuals as an expression of friendship between states. However, there is no doubt about the political reality behind the Parthian princes' stay in Rome: the Roman Empire frequently employed this strategy to demonstrate its political superiority over the Parthian Kingdom, and notably, the reverse situation never occurred.

Although the presence of these hostages who guaranteed that the Parthian (and Armenian) throne would have a candidate chosen (and raised) by Rome is attested until AD 180, the testimonies about this fact belong to the first century (Julio-Claudian dynasty, as we have discussed above under "The Reign of the Julio-Claudian House"). We know that they were integrated into Roman society not only from the testimonies of the authors, but also from inscriptions on their tombs in Latin (such as *CIL* XI 137) and coins minted with terms such as "friend of the Romans" (the coin of Arsaces on which we read ΦΙΛΟΡΩΜΑΙΟΥ, as well as ΦΙΛΕΛΛΗΝΟΣ).

On the other hand, from the Flavian dynasty onward, the emperors did not have the same regard for the Parthians as they used to have in Augustus's time. Augustus sought to maintain a non-belligerent policy, both internally and externally, and therefore considered the Parthians to be a coexisting power that could not be subdued (as evidenced by Augustus's attempts to negotiate). However, from Vespasian's reign onward, this perspective shifted, leading to a series of campaigns in the East aimed to annexing territories and transforming them into provinces. This shift can be seen in the minting of coins, featuring allegorical images of subdued Parthians and legends commemorating victories, albeit briefly after Vespasian's reign. One possible reason for this change in the imperial mindset is that the Parthians ceased be seen as a power almost equal to Rome (as nothing could be considered equal to Rome for a Roman), but as a people that could not be

subdued and annexed. For almost a century, Rome's ultimate aspiration was to indirectly control the Parthian Kingdom.

Further evidence of this altered perspective on the Parthians as successors of an empire lies the usage of the title "king of kings", which was applied to Parthian kings during the Julio-Claudian dynasty but not thereafter. In this context, from the Flavian dynasty onward, Parthians could be viewed less as dignitaries to be respected and more as a people to be conquered.

This shift may have been helped by the gradual decline of Greek usage in Parthian territories from the first century AD onward. This decline may have led to decreased fluidity in communication between the Romans and Parthians. Initially, this was evident in rural areas, as seen in the shift from Greek to Parthian in the Avroman scrolls (with the third one being written in Parthian instead of Greek). Later, this trend extended to cities, as demonstrated by the coins minted at the time of Mithridates II and onward. Furthermore, it should be considered that the emperors after the Julio-Claudian family had not been educated to reign and rule and perhaps the idea of diplomacy was not present when dealing with other peoples and cultures. It should be noted that this cannot be applied to all emperors after Nero. However, we must admit that it played a determining role in the deterioration of relations and the change in the imperial mindset. This factor becomes more apparent from Nero's reign onward, as there was a noticeable increase in emperors with military backgrounds.

References

Álvarez-Pedrosa, Juan Antonio. 2017. "Los Bránquidas en Bactriana. Una diáspora griega en los confines del Imperio aqueménida." In *Del Indo al Egeo. Relaciones culturales y lingüísticas en el interior del Imperio aqueménida*, edited by Juan Antonio Álvarez-Pedrosa, Maria Carmela Benvenuto, and Flavia Pompeo, 63-86. Guillermo Escolar.

Álvarez-Pedrosa, Juan Antonio. 2020 "The Language of the Parthian Royal Hostages in Rome and the Epigraphic Testimonies: the Julio-Claudian Period." In *Word Formation, Grammar and Lexicology. Contrastive, Multilingual and Comparative-historical Perspectives*, edited by Maria Carmela Benvenuto, Jens E. Braarvig, Flavia Pompeo, Adriano V. Rossi, and Velizar Sadovski, 11-26. Baar.

Álvarez-Pedrosa, Juan Antonio 2021. "Babilonia en un contexto multilingüe: las inscripciones griegas del período parto." In *Estudios sobre Orientalística y Egiptología. Nuevas aportaciones de la investigación española*, edited by José Luis Montero, and Lucía Brage, 105-32. Editorial Universidad de Sevilla.

Álvarez-Pedrosa, Juan Antonio. 2022a. "The Avroman Parchments and the Use of Greek in the Parthian Empire." *East and West*, n.s., 3:117-48.

Álvarez-Pedrosa, Juan Antonio. 2022b. "La epigrafía como símbolo de identidad religiosa: el caso de los príncipes orientales en Roma en el siglo I D.C." *Bandue* 14:107-16.

Appianus. 1879. *Appiani Historia Romana*. Vol. 1. Edited by Ludwig Mendelssohn. Leipzig: Teubner.

Appianus. 1881. *Appiani Historia Romana*. Vol. 2. Edited by Ludwig Mendelssohn. Leipzig: Teubner.

Augustus. 1967. *Res Gestae Divi Augusti: es Gestae, Res Gestae Divi Augusti; De Vita Sua*. Edited by John Michael Moore. Oxford University Press.

Braund, David C. 1984. *Rome and the Friendly King. The Character of the Client Kingship*. Routledge Revivals.

Cassius Dio. 1914. *Roman History, Volume I: Books 1-11*. Translated by Earnest Cary, and Herbert B. Foster. Loeb Classical Library, vol. 32. Harvard University Press.

Curtis, Vesta S. 2007. "The Iranian Revival in the Parthian Period." In *The Age of the Parthians*, edited by Vesta S. Curtis, and Sarah Stewart. 7-25. I.B. Tauris.

Dąbrowa, Edward. 1987. "Les premiers 'otages' parthes à Rome." *Folia Orientalia* 24:63-71.

Dąbrowa, Edward. 1994. "Dall'autonomia alla dipendenza: Le città greche e gli Arsacidi nella prima metà del I secolo d.C." *Mesopotamia* 29:185-98.

Dąbrowa, Edward. 2011. *Studia Graeco-Parthica. Political and Cultural Relations between Greeks and Parthians*. Wiesbaden.

Dąbrowa, Edward. 2014. "The Arsacids: Gods or Godlike Creatures." In *Divinizzazione, Culto del sovrano e Apoteosi. Tra Antichità e Medioevo*, edited by Tommaso Gnoli, and Federicomaria Muccioli, 149-59. Bononia University Press.

Gardthausen, Viktor E. 1906. "Die Parther in griechisch-römischen Inschriften." In *Orientalische Studien Theodor Nöldeke zum siebzigsten Geburtstag gewidmet*, edited by Carl Bezold, Band 2, 839-59. Alfred Töpelmann.

Gonnella, Robert. 2001. "New Evidence for Dating the Reign of Vonones I." *Numismatic Chronicle* 161:67-73.

González Saavedra, Berta. 2019. "Testimonios de contactos lingüísticos entre el imperio parto y Roma en Cicerón y Suetonio." Paper presented at the XV Congreso de la Sociedad Española de Estudios Clásicos, Valladolid.

González Saavedra, Berta. 2023. "Comunicar un estereotipo cultural. El caso de *Persa* de Plauto." *Veleia* 40:85-95.

González Saavedra, Berta, and Juan Antonio Álvarez-Pedrosa. Forthcoming. "Nueva perspectiva historiográfica de Ctesias de Cnido a partir de la imagen de las reinas aqueménidas". In *De las arenas de Babilonia a las aguas del Tarteso. Estudios españoles sobre Orientalística y Egiptología II*, edited by Eduardo Ferrer. Editorial Universidad de Sevilla.

Grajetzki, Wolfram. 2011. *Greeks and Parthian in Mesopotamia and Beyond, 331 BC-AD 224*. Bloomsbury.

Gregoratti, Leonardo. 2012. "The Importance of the Mint of Seleucia on the Tigris for Arsacid History: Artabanus and the Greek Parthian Cities." *Mesopotamia* 47:129-36.

Habicht, Christian. 1958. "Die herrschende Gesellschaft in den hellenistischen Monarchien." *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 45:1-16.

Hackl, Ursula. 2010. "Das Panthererreich und Rom seit dem I. Jh. v. Chr." In *Quellen zur Geschichte des Partherreiches*, edited by Ursula Hackl, Bruno Jacobs, and Dieter Weber, Band 1, 56-77. Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht.

Josephus, Flavius. 1885-1890. *Jewish Antiquities*. Edited by Benedick Niese. Berlin: Weidmann.

Josephus, Falvius. 1895. *The Jewish War*. Edited by Benedick Nese. Berlin: Weidmann.

Keller, Daniel. 2010a. "Römische Münzen." In *Quellen zur Geschichte des Partherreiches*, edited by Ursula Hackl, Bruno Jacobs, and Dieter Weber, Band 2, 590-612. Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht.

Keller, Daniel. 2010b. "Arsakidische Münzen." In *Quellen zur Geschichte des Partherreiches*, edited by Ursula Hackl, Bruno Jacobs, and Dieter Weber, Band 2, 613-30. Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht.

Leone, Anna. 2000. "*Darius rex* a Nemi". In *Nemi - Status Quo: Recent Research at Nemi and the Sanctuary of Diana*, edited by J. Rasmus Brandt, Anne-Marie Leander Touati, and Jan Zahle, 29-34. L'Erma di Bretschneider.

Lerouge, Charlotte. 2007. *L'image des Parthes dans le monde gréco-romain. Du début du Ier siècle av. J.C. jusqu'à la fin du Haute-Empire*. Steiner.

Lucanus. 1835. *Civil War*. Edited by Carolus Hermannus Weise. Leipzig: G. Bassus.

Mairs, Rachel. 2011. "*Translator, Traditor*: The Interpreter as Traitor in Classical Tradition." *Greece and Rome* 58:64-81.

Masson, Michail Evgen′evič, and Galine Anatol′evna Pugačenkova. 1982. *The Parthian Rhytons of Nisa*. Le Lettere.

McDonald, Katherine. 2017. "Fragmentary Ancient Languages as 'Bad Data'." *Sociolinguistica* 31:39-56.

Minns, Ellis H. 1915. "Parchments of the Parthian Period from Avroman in Kurdistan." *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 35:22-65.

Morpurgo, Luciano. 1931. "Nemi ed altri edifici romani in Contrada La Valle." *Notizie degli Scavi di Antichità. Atti dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei* :237-305.

Muysken, Pieter. 2010. "Scenarios for Language Contact." In *The Handbook of Language Contact*, edited by Raymond Hickey Malden, 265-81. Wiley.

Olbrycht, Marek J. 2000. "Policy and Royal Propaganda in Parthia: Hellenistic Concepts versus Nomadica and Iranian Tradition under the Arsacids." In *Kulturnoe nasledie Turkmenistana. Glubinnye istoki i sovremennye perspektivy. Materialy k meždunarodnoj naučnoj konferencii, Ašgabat, 10-13 October 2000*, edited by V.M. Masson, 35-38. Ashgabat and St. Petersburg.

Pappalardo, Eleonora. 2010. *Nisa Partica. I Rhyta Ellenistici*. Monografie di Mesopotamia, vol. 12, Missione in Turkmenistan 3. Le Lettere..

Philostratus. 2005. *Apollonius of Tyana, Volume I: Life of Apollonius of Tyana, Books 1-4*. Edited and translated by Christopher P. Jones. Loeb Classical Library, vol. 16. Harvard University Press.

Pliny the Elder. 1906. *Natural History*. Edited by Karl Friedrich Theodor Mayhoff. Teubner.

Plutarch. 1888. *Moralia*. Vols. I and III (*On Exile*). Edited by Gregorios N. Vernardakes. Leipzig: Teubner.

Plutarch. 1891. *Moralia*. Vol. III (*On Exile*). Edited by Gregorios N. Vernardakes. Leipzig: Teubner.

Plutarch. 1914. *Lives, Volume II: Themistocles and Camillus. Aristides and Cato Major. Cimon and Lucullus.* Translated by Bernadotte Perrin. Loeb Classical Library, vol. 47. Harvard University Press.

Plutarch. 1916. *Lives, Volume III: Pericles and Fabius Maximus. Nicias and Crassus.* Translated by Bernadotte Perrin. Loeb Classical Library, vol. 65. Harvard University Press.

Plutarch. 1916. *Lives, Volume IV: Alcibiades and Coriolanus. Lysander and Sulla.* Translated by Bernadotte Perrin. Loeb Classical Library, vol. 80. Harvard University Press.

Plutarch. 1917. *Lives, Volume V: Agesilaus and Pompey. Pelopidas and Marcellus.* Translated by Bernadotte Perrin. Loeb Classical Library, vol. 87. Harvard University Press.

Potts, Daniel T. 2017. "The Sale and Lease of Vineyards in Media Atropatene." In *Bridging Times and Spaces: Festschrift in Honour of Gregory E. Areshian in Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, edited by Pavel S. Avetisyan, and Yervand H. Grekyan, 349-56. Archaeopress.

Ricci, Cecilia. 1996. "*Principes et Reges externi* (e loro schiavi e liberti) a Roma e in Italia. Testimonianze epigrafiche di età imperial." *Rendiconti dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei*, 9th ser., 7:561-92.

Rougemont, Georges. 2012. *Inscriptions grecques d'Iran et d'Asie centrale.* Avec des contributions de Paul Bernard. *Inscriptions of the Seleucid and Parthian Periods and of Eastern Iran and Central Asia*, Part 2 of *Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum*. Vol. 1 of *Inscriptions in Non-Iranian languages*. Lund Humphries.

Shayegan, M. Rahim. 2011. *Arsacids and Sasanians. Political Ideology in Post-Hellenistic and Late Antique Persia*. Cambridge University Press.

Sherwin-White, Susan M. 1987. "Seleucid Babylonia: a Case-study for the Installation and Development of Greek Rule." In *Hellenism in the East. The Interaction of Greek and non-Greek Civilizations from Syria to Central Asia after Alexander*, edited by Amélie Kuhrt, and Susan M. Sherwin-White, 1-31. Duckworth.

Strabo. 1877. *Strabonis Geographica*. Vols. 1-3. Edited by August Meineke. Leipzig: Teubner.

Suetonius. 1908. *De vita Caesarum*. Edited by Max Ihm. Teubner.

Tacitus. 1906. *Annales. Cornelii Taciti Annalium ab excessu diui Augusti libri*. Edited by Charles Dennis Fischer. Clarendom.

Tacitus. 1911. *Histories. Cornelii Taciti Historiarum libri.* Edited by Charles Dennis Fischer. Clarendon.

Tarn, William W. 1929. "A Greek Inscription from Kurdistan (*C.I.G.* 4673)." *The Classical Review* 43:53-55.

Thommen, Lukas. 2010. "Griechische und lateinische Texte." In *Quellen zur Geschichte des Partherreiches*, edited by Ursula Hackl, Bruno Jacobs, and Dieter Weber, Band 2, 1-490. Vanderhoeck & Ruprech.

Titus Livius. 1984. *Periochae*, Part 2 of *Abrégés des Livres de l'Histoire romaine de Tite-Live*. Vol. 34. Edited and translated by Paul Jal. Les Belles Lettres.

Tuplin, Christopher J. 1989. "The False Neros of the First Century AD." In *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History*, edited by Carl Deroux, vol. 5, 364-404. Latomus, vol. 206

Weber, Dieter. 2010. "Parthische Texte", In *Quellen zur Geschichte des Partherreiches*, edited by Ursula Hackl, Bruno Jacobs and Dieter Weber, Dieter, Band 2, 492-589. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Wiesehöfer, Josef .1996. "King of Kings and Philhellen: Kingship in Arsacid Iran". In *Aspects of Hellenistic Kingship, Studies in Hellenistic Civilization VII*, edited by Per Bilde, Troels Engberg-Pedersen, Lise Hannestad, and Jan Zahle, 55-66. Aarhus University Press.

Wiesehöfer, Josef. 2001. *Ancient Persia*. Translated by Azizeh Azodi. I.B. Tauris.

Wolski, Josef. 1983. "Sur le 'philhellénisme' des Arsacides." *Gerión* 1:145-56.

Zehnder, Markus. 2010. "Aramäische Texte." In *Quellen zur Geschichte des Partherreiches*, edited by Ursula Hackl, Bruno Jacobs, and Dieter Weber, Band 3, 175-405. Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht.