

**Statement prepared by the supervisor of Marco Alampi relating to his studies and
dissertation entitled “The cult of *Sol Invictus* in Late Antiquity”
submitted in 2021 at the Institute of Greek and Latin Studies**

I. Overall evaluation of PhD studies

Although enrolled for doctoral studies in the academic year 2015/16, Marco Alampi spent at our Institute of Greek and Latin Studies also the previous year 2014/15 as an exchange student from the University of Durham, after he had completed his master studies at the University of Roma Tre where he obtained this degree with the highest mark and received a very enthusiastic recommendation from Professor Arnaldo Marcone. All of this contributed to his smooth passing the following admission exam at our institute.

His studies took then six years during which especially these activities of his I must commend:

- participating at eight international both classics and religious studies conferences during the first four years of his studies (including the one when he was the exchange student),
- winning two internships, one from the Erasmus+ Programme to cover his one year (2016/17) studies at the Faculdade de Letras, Universidade de Lisboa under Prof. Nuno Rodrigues and another one from the Hermann und Else Schnabel Stiftung to cover his three-months sojourn at Hamburg University in 2018,
- teaching the course “Late Antiquity Roman History” for Erasmus students arriving at our university in summer semester 2015.

In following, on the other hand, I find some reserves:

- publication activity – one published paper and one review when compared to the amount of conference papers turn out to be rather an untapped opportunity to improve one’s skills for presenting a scholarly text; and the more so that a paper once submitted to the AUC Philologica indeed received negative peer reviews which, however, were at the same time highly instructive, yet an attempt to really exploit them has practically not been made,
- preparation for some (not all!) of the exams passed was a bit underestimated.

What I must stress, however, is that these reserves were not due to anything for what Marco Alampi should be rebuked. His efforts and concern about improving his possibilities to conduct his research were always exemplary. Perhaps a not always good judgement of what his energies should be braced for played its role. And what I must also admit, is that of lesser help than desirable was also an inexperience of his tutor.

II. Overall evaluation of the dissertation

The topic of his dissertation was chosen by Marco Alampi himself. I remain persuaded that it can contribute to current scholarship, yet precisely the kind of presentation of this contribution is what should be improved as detailed in the next section.

III. Comments relating to the dissertation

Here I would like to add some remarks concerning the process of emergence of Marco Alampi's dissertation. As he was busy with his exams, conferences, and internships during the earlier years of his studies, the bulk of the dissertation was written in those later. The single parts were being sent to the tutor who offered his feedback especially by adding commentaries to the text. Within these commentaries especially following three recommendations were repeated.

The formal aspect of the work must not be neglected. The references both to sources and modern authorities must be uniform throughout the whole work and the other rules observed as well. Concerning this aspect of the work in its present state I must state that it is far from perfect, but still, considerably better than in previous versions I have commented.

Further, the objective of the work must be explicitly set up, the explanation clear and well structured, the contribution plainly identified. Yet unfortunately, right here, in my opinion, many reserves still remain:

- the objective of the work is not easy to comprehend, especially because one is surprised that a work dealing with the cult of the *Sol Invictus* in the Roman Empire should be a desideratum – Marco Alampi was therefore recommended to include a discussion of the works of his predecessors and point out the deficiencies of their works, but the discussion is covered by only one paragraph (p. 10-11) and, for example, the conclusions are not confronted anywhere,
- the explanation is minimalistic, often a shift to another point of interest would be clearer, if it were introduced somehow, the authorities are nearly always referred to without any explanation of what these references serve to, their opinions are not confronted as if there were no disputes among specialists etc.,
- the actual structuring of the text does not at all help to understand the explanation – this was, to be fair, a “last minute” recommendation, but yet more it seems just also now; further, some paragraphs are colossally long, stretching over many pages,
- one point not previously observed by the tutor is to be added here – the chapter in which the literary sources are discussed contain passages which naturally belong rather to the explanation proper in later chapters, in which, on the contrary, the literary sources are rather rarely exploited – perhaps due to their deficiencies it is just, but the reader thus often misses a direct confrontation of the various kind of sources,
- the contribution of the work is nearly not identified at all, and so only a highly interested specialist is able to recognize it; but there are observations which seem to be important, especially concerning the “tendency towards monotheism” under Commodus (p. 57-58), the emergence of the god *Sol Invictus Elagabal* (p. 85), or the impact of the Severan period which is detected throughout – if these are contributive somehow, they should be clearly presented as such and emphasized once more among the conclusions.

And the last but not least: the level of English must be at least satisfactory which eventually proofreading by a native speaker must guarantee. Marco Alampi declared that his work would be proofread by one. Nevertheless, many problematic formulations remained in the work, including constructions that were explicitly identified by the tutor as such.

IV. Any questions for the defence

The questions formulated here need not necessarily be dealt with during the defense, but should it in the end turn successful, then I would like to know:

1) What exactly is Marco Alampi's opinion on the historicity of alleged deeds of Elagabalus described at the p. 36-37 which some suspect to have been fabricated as an indirect criticism of Constantine. From the explanation it seems that Marco Alampi opts for the historicity of Elagabalus' deeds but rejects that a comparison with those of Constantine would fit. But is this, eventually, well compatible with what is observed elsewhere, namely that Elagabalus endeavoured to respect Roman tradition?

2) Whether Marco Alampi considers Titus Tattius a historical person datable to any specific period? At the p. 43-44 he ascribes him to the tradition and announces an explanation later; this comes at the p. 84-85, but very laconically with only a not commented reference to a modern authority.

3) At the p. 91 I am surprised by this comment on Severus Alexander: „on religious matters, the emperor favored Christianity, as her mother Julia Mamaea.“ In the footnote once more a mere reference to the authority does not provide any explanation. So, based on what can be claimed that Alexander favoured Christianity?

V. Conclusion

The research presented by Marco Alampi in his dissertation deserves attention. In the present state, however, the dissertation cannot, in my opinion, attract as much attention as desirable. With regard to Marco Alampi's enthusiasm and his effort to collect as many resources as possible and to gain a feedback from an audience present at so many international conferences I am persuaded that this is not what he himself would welcome. The dissertation needs reworking.

Therefore, I provisionally classify the submitted dissertation as *failed*.

26 November 2021

Ivan Prchlík