Summary of the doctoral dissertation

The goal of this dissertation is to analyze the elegies of Propertius, a 1st century BC Latin poet, as a political statement. My main argument is that in his poems Propertius created an original concept of a Roman citizen. This poetic construct is based on the poet’s criticism of the ideal vir vere Romanus which was established through tradition and promoted during the reign of Augustus. To prove the main argument of the dissertation, I take into account the whole body of Propertius poetic work, not only the political elegies of book 4, the dominant theme of which are Roman traditions, religion, history and politics from the earliest times to the Principate. I also analyze the elegies of books 1–3 which concentrate on the elegiac mistress, Cynthia. In the first chapter (Civis Romanus), before the main analysis, I reconstruct the ideal vision of the Roman citizen of the late Roman Republic and first years of the Principate. I identify two significant civic principles, virtus and pietas, as the most fundamental components of this ideal. The analysis in the second chapter (Civis Amoris) shows that Propertius constructed the elegiac lover in opposition to the Roman civic model. I also point out that the notions of the Roman ethos have their counterparts in the love elegies, so for example instead of virtus militaris, pietas erga patriam, libertas we have militia amoris, pietas erga puellam, servitium amoris. In this context I prove that the elegiac motif praeceptor amoris has a solid Roman basis – in the Latin literature popularizing the ideal of a Roman citizen. Because the ideal vision of a Roman citizen (civis Romanus, synonymously vir vere Romanus) was the “initial matrix” for Propertius in creating his elegiac lover, I called him civis Amoris. In the third chapter (Tirocinium adulescentiae civis Amoris) I prove that the reason of the anti-Roman attitude of the Propertian figure is teenage rebellion, which causes social disintegration of the adolescent. By interdisciplinary analysis which takes into consideration both the ancient sources and the recent research in psychology, I point out that Propertius depicted the elegiac lover as a typical adolescent (iuvenis Romanus): the elegiac lover leads an easy and carefree life giving himself into love, and disregarding values and social norms. Finally, after breaking up with the girl, he normalizes his behavior in terms of social and ethical responsibilities. An attentive analysis, however, explains that the adolescence of the elegiac character and his refusal of the traditional norms and values are a guise, which Propertius carefully arranged. The poet orchestrates the apparent renunciation of the elegiac lover’s lifestyle and his acceptance of the prevailing value system. Cynthia’s former lover (amator Cynthiae), a rebellious adolescent in love, has changed now, but only superficially, into a lover of Rome (amator Romae) and he is now a subject of book 4. In the last chapter of the dissertation (Civis Romanus Augusti?) I carry out cautious analysis of the elegies of book 4. Here I prove that the theme of those elegies is only superficially an expression of Propertius’ support for the politics and achievements of Augustus as a Princeps Civitatis (the first citizen of the State), who represented the ideal of vir vere Romanus and fulfilled the Roman civic values. Amator Romae is yet another guise created by Propertius in order to criticize the ideal vision of the Roman citizen and Augustus who was the embodiment of this ideal. In that way I find a common denominator to interpret both the love elegies of book 1–3 and the political poems of book 4 and I prove that a homogeneous interpretation of all the elegies in political context can be carried out: corpus Propertianum is a carefully constructed project that the poet arranged from its very beginning to the end by single principle: a skeptical attitude toward the model of the true Roman (vir vere Romanus) reinforced through tradition and officially promoted by Augustus. Through this criticism Propertius presented his own vision of the Roman: civis Amoris wants to be free and live without obligations and pressure. He disregards all the duties and restrictions imposed by the state and the authority. He ignores the tradition, pays no attention to official religion, avoids the participation in war, and abandons pro-civic education and carrier. He rejects all social and political norms based on rivalry, imperialism and materialism.