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ROMAN ANTIQUITY AND INTERCULTURALITY

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Abstract

Interculturality, seen as a social experience of diversity, has always existed. It has existed since ancient times, when the expansion of a great empire brought together different peoples, different mentalities and implicitly, more cultures.

In our approach, we want to present interculturality through the prism of a great state of antiquity, the Roman state. The historical context, more often than not, brought the dialogues between people of different cultures to a higher stage and generated positive results. And this was due to Roman civilisation and culture.

Keywords: *interculturalism, cultures, ancient civilisations.*

From the point of view of the concept it defines, interculturality belongs to the last decades of the new contemporary time and is a result of globalisation, of cosmopolitanism. Representing contact between cultures, the term interculturality can often be translated as a dialogue between different peoples, between different ethnicities, emphasising their permanent interaction. But interculturality, seen as a social experience of diversity, has always existed. It has existed since ancient times, when the expansion of a great empire brought together different peoples, different mentalities and implicitly, different cultures.

In our approach, we want to present interculturality through the prism of a great state of antiquity, the Roman state. The historical context, more often than not, brought the dialogues between people of different cultures to a higher stage and generated positive results. And this was due to Roman civilisation and culture.

Emerging at the convergence of the Etruscan, Latin and Sabine settlements on the banks of the Tiber, Rome was to rule almost the entire inhabited world of antiquity for several centuries. The Roman state slowly began to conquer the surrounding rural settlements, developing an undisputed dominance both on the Italian peninsula and throughout the continent. This created a political context for the creation of an exceptional material civilisation and culture.

The urban expansion of ancient Rome is triggered by the Etruscan kings. The reforms initiated and carried out by Servius Tullius change the shape of society through a new, democratic division of social classes. The uprising of 509 BC puts an end to kingship, from which time a republican Rome develops with specific magistracies and the consulate as the form of government.

Despite moments of political or social crisis, such as the dictatorships of Camillus or Sulla, the Roman republic preserved its structures and lasted until the time of Caesar. Caesar's military leadership prepared the way for the establishment of the camouflaged monarchy of Octavianus Augustus at the end of the 1st century BC, after the Battle of Actium (31 BC).

The establishment of personal rule as a result of the civil wars also meant the end of the civil wars. Augustus built his power under the pretence of preserving republican institutions. But the real authority did not belong to the Senate, but to a single person called the *Princeps*. Augustus insisted that his authority be developed by unanimous consent, *consensum universorum*. The founder of the Empire, Octavianus Augustus, and his successors had the supreme patronage, although the old social organisation is maintained and even strengthened. Monarchical structures were formed and developed on a foundation - republican institutions.

This period from the end of the 1st century BC and throughout the 1st century AD was unquestionably the height of Roman civilisation. The flourishing of urban life, the material and spiritual development of society, the relative institutional stability are features that mark this culminating phase.

Thus, "The Roman Empire ranks 25th in the list of the largest empires, with 5 million square kilometres in 117 under the reign of Emperor Trajan, covering 3.36% of the earth's surface. It held territories in Europe, North Africa

and West Asia. The Latin phrase *imperium sine fine* (empire without end) expresses the ideology that there are no limits in time and space for the Roman Empire. In Vergilius' poem, *The Aeneid*, the Roman people were predestined by the god Jupiter to rule mankind. This claim of universal mastery was renewed and perpetuated when the Empire came under Christian rule in the 4th century. In addition to annexing large regions during the empire's growth, the Romans were also highly skilled sculptors of the environment, directly altering geography. For example, entire forests were cut down to provide enough wood for an expanding empire. Roman expansion was initiated from the time of the Roman Republic in Spain, Greece, Tunisia, Egypt, Turkey and present-day France, conquered by the 1st century AD. During the reign of Emperor Augustus, a map of the known world was displayed to the public in Rome, with all the regions mapped by geographers, surveyors and cartographers of the time such as Strabo. After Augustus' death, his achievements were recorded in the *Res Gestae*"².

I have offered the above quotation to highlight the greatness of an ancient state which, through all its administrative, social and cultural levers, but above all through the policy of its conquests, brought together different peoples, diverse elements of civilisation. Moreover, the Romans built an empire in which diversity produced a permanent cultural dialogue. Of course, as in any ancient state, there were episodes of bloody conquest and forced subjugation. But here, in this approach, we want to look at the Roman state through the prism of the interculturality it permanently created.

It is known that from conquered territories that were at a higher level of civilisation, the Romans took what they lacked. For example, after the conquest of the Greeks, the entire pantheon of Greek gods, the so-called Olympian gods, became part of the Roman pantheon, the deities having changed names but having the same functions. And so, the Romans gained the first anthropomorphic gods of their religion.

In other conquered areas, such as the Dacian region, for example, the Romans imposed their administrative, political and cultural superiority. The conquest of Dacia became Trajan's greatest victory. On 11 June 106 Dacia was proclaimed a Roman province with a new capital, Ulpia. Trajan would not leave Dacian territory until a year later, in 107, after the consolidation of the Roman position. The spoils of war that will be sent to Rome are immense: 50 000 fighters, 165 tonnes of gold, 331 tonnes of silver, large herds of cattle. Dacia was a territory that could not be lost, thousands of settlers from all over the Roman world would rush into the rich province bringing with them the Roman social organisation: "*Traianus, victa Dacia, ex toto orbe Romano infinitas eo copias hominum transtulerat, ad agros et urbes colendas*"³.

In Rome the celebrations in honour of the triumph of Trajan last 123 days. They are attended by 10 000 gladiators and more than 11 000 wild animals are killed. The tax for the year 106 is abolished, each taxpayer is given 650 dinars (an unheard-of amount), the coins *Dacica* and *Dacica capta* are minted. Among the monuments testifying to the war with the Dacians, the Trajan Column, built by Apollodorus of Damascus in For and inaugurated on 12 May 113, is impressive.

Roman foreign policy remains offensive, with the emperor continuing to show concern for the empire's borders. On the domestic front, Trajan continued to integrate the provinces, supervised justice, encouraged trade and maintained the same cordial relationship with the Senate.

And continuing with Trajan's actions, we can offer other elements that today fall under the term interculturality. Thus, the spoils of war taken from Dacia "allowed at least for a certain time to compensate for the haemorrhage of gold which he channelled to the Parthians and the Far East"³. Trajan annexed the kingdom of the Arabs, managing to build a road between the Syrian frontier and the Red Sea. In 114, he invaded Armenia and reached the Persian Gulf two years later.

The provinces he created, Mesopotamia and Assyria, mark the time of the Empire's greatest expansion (115), but these conquests were not lasting. Trajan's illness worsened and he left the front, leaving Hadrianus in charge of Roman Asia; on his way to Rome, at Selinus on the Cilician coast, the emperor died on 9 August 117.

His unexpected end creates a dangerous vacuum in Rome's leadership. Imperial continuity would be saved by his wife, Plotinus, who sent two letters: one to the senate declaring that the emperor had adopted Hadrianus on his deathbed; another to Hadrianus himself advising him to take over the imperial prerogatives. Trajan's body was laid to rest, contrary to Roman law, in the sacred precincts of the Empire's capital, Rome.

From the vast area of Roman history, we have exposed only the period of Trajan's reign for at least two reasons: one concerns the contact of the Romans with the inhabitants of Dacian territory and the insertion, even if timid,

² Apud https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imperiul_Roman, accessed on 16 March 2023.

³ Eugen Cizek., *Istoriografia latină în Enciclopedia civilizației romane*, Bucharest, 1982, p. 54.

³ Pierre Grimal, *Civilizația romană*, traducere, prefață și note de E.Cizek, Bucharest, Editura Minerva, 1973, vol. II, p.78.

of some elements of interculturality, and the other reason translates into the maximum extension of the borders of the Roman state at the beginning of the 2nd century AD.

For in the following period, in the 3rd, 4th and 5th centuries AD, Roman civilisation began its inevitable descent, brought about by the dissolution of the slave order, to whose fate it was directly linked.

The exploitation of the great Roman estates was no longer carried out by slaves, but by free peasants - colonists. In the West, the Roman state is crumbling, losing its power under the blows of the invaders, while in the East a new civilisation is born, the Byzantine one, a continuation of the Roman Empire, but only on certain dimensions.

Conclusions

Whether it is achieved by obligation or by mutual understanding, interculturality easily finds its place in the genesis of civilisations, in the space of universal states such as the Roman one. Considered to be *the city founded for ever*, as the historian Titus Livius called it, ancient Rome is a landmark in universal history. Having been destroyed in the course of time, the Roman state has survived through the peoples who drew their lifeblood from it, through institutions, through culture, through modern languages based on Latin, through religions, in other words, through the elements of interculturality that have passed from ancient times to the present day.

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