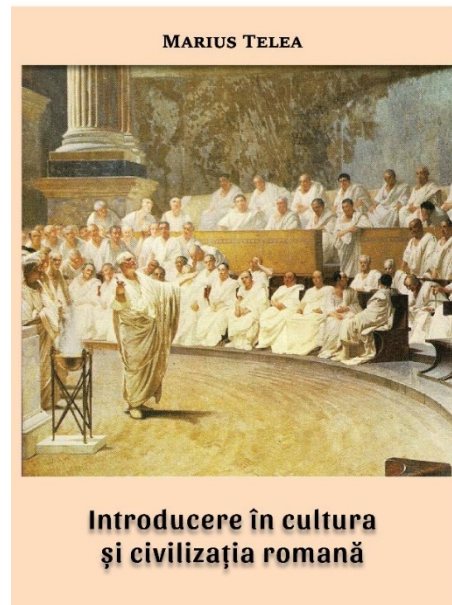


Book Review:

Marius Telea, *Introducere în cultura și civilizația romană*, [Introduction to Roman Culture and Civilisation], Alba Iulia, Editura Reîntregirea [Reîntregirea Publishing House], 2021, 246 p.

The work of PhD Associate Professor Marius Telea, *Introduction to Roman Culture and Civilization*, deals with the most critical aspects of the Roman Empire so that the reader has the opportunity to know as well as possible all the details of this grandiose Empire, which marked the history of our civilisation. The book is structured in eighteen chapters, and the relatively consistent appendices (over a hundred pages) facilitate the reader to understand Roman culture and civilisation as well as possible.

In Chapter I, entitled “From the City-State to the Roman Empire. Periodisation of Roman History”, the author makes a foray into the history of ancient Rome, tracing the main eras of the history of the Roman state: the era of royalty (753-509 BC), the era of the Roman Republic (509-27 BC), the era of the Principality and Dominated (27 BC-476 AD). Thus, throughout its history, Rome became a Mediterranean state (developed around the Mediterranean Sea) and soon, a universal one. As the author says, it included almost all of the world then. In fact, at one point, the Roman Empire was officially called “The World” (Gr. *Οικουμένη*, lat. *Orbs*). The Roman Empire became the most significant known state in history through successive conquests, occupying huge areas on three continents. With an area of 33,000,000 km² and



a population estimated between 60,000,000 - 100,000,000 inhabitants, the Roman Empire stretched from the North Sea to the Sahara desert (the Roman province of Mauretania) and from the British Peninsula (the Roman province of Britannia) to the Euphrates River and the Persian Gulf.

Chapter II presents the Roman institutions and magistrates. The whole system was constituted in such a way as to prevent any excess of personal power. The magistrate, as elected by the people, was only their representative to act on their behalf. Also, he had to account for his release from office.

In the third Chapter, the author presents the army, which played a significant role in the development of the Roman Empire. The Roman army was divided into legions, and each legion was divided into ten cohorts. The number of soldiers in a legion varied between 4,200 and 6,000, all Roman citizens.

Classes and social strata, but also class conflicts, are presented in Chapter IV.

Finally, agriculture is presented in Chapter V. It was the occupation most valued by the Romans, who always considered themselves a people of peasants. Since ancient times, the main wealth of Italy was the fertility of the soil. A characteristic feature of Roman agriculture was the permanent struggle between small and sizeable agrarian property. Also, in this chapter, the author presents agricultural tools, fertilisers, and the cultures practised by the Romans.

In the sixth Chapter, the crafts practised by the Romans are presented. Among these are mentioned: the processing of metals, leather, ceramics, glass, and other crafts.

Chapter VII presents our commercial activity. Thus, due to its geographical position, located approximately 20 km from the seashore and crossed by the Tiber River, Rome could only remain within the heavy traffic from the western basin of the Mediterranean Sea. Also, Rome was at the intersection of great trade routes, which led far into the interior of the Italian Peninsula. Throughout its history, after the Romans turned the Mediterranean Sea into a Roman lake, trade intensified, both by sea and through the network of very well-developed and maintained roads.

In Chapter VIII, the author describes the homes of the Romans.

Finally, Chapter IX presents the diet of the Romans.

Thus, from what has been presented, we can ascertain that during the more than ten centuries of development of Roman society, there have been specific changes regarding the moments during the day when the Romans had their main meals. Added to this is that most of the time, people's occupations largely determined their eating and resting time. That is why some were the mealtimes of those from the urban environment and others for those from the

rural environment. As for the essential foods, at the beginning of Roman history, the diet was frugal, but it became varied over time, and the way of preparation was very different from ours.

The clothing of the Romans is described in Chapter X.

The family is introduced in Chapter XI. It was, for centuries, the foundation of Roman society, appearing as a subdivision of the gens after it went through a long process of disintegration due to the emergence and development of private property. In its beginnings, and for a long time afterwards, the family was dominated by the omnipotence of the head of the family (*pater familias*) over the wife and children and the slaves he had under his control. He exercised this power over people and their goods, even the wife's dowry. Towards the end of the Republican era, men's rights underwent many essential changes to mitigate its rigours from the beginning.

On the one hand, these transformations occurred as a result of the transformations that the Roman society and the Roman state went through, in general, but also under the influence of more liberal conceptions regarding the relationships between family members coming from Greece. In the imperial era, a radical change was reached in the relationship between the father and his sons, based more on affection and respect, sometimes going as far as excesses of goodwill and weakness towards their children, who began to do what they wanted with their parents. Also, this chapter describes the upbringing of children in the family, marriage, divorce, celibacy, family holidays and funeral rites.

Chapter XII, entitled "The Organisation of a Day", presents us with the division system of a day and night, the daily schedule of the Romans, the baths, and the evening meal (*cena*). Thus, if, in the beginning, the baths had the sole purpose of hygiene and physical health, they became more of a pretext for worldly life and a preparation for the evening meal, the main meal of the day. There was a striking contrast between the frugality of the meal taken by the farmers and small artisans from the city and its variety and abundance in the case of the rich, who sometimes turned it into an actual event.

The entertainment, games, and shows of the Romans are presented in Chapter XIII. Also, in this chapter, religious celebrations, performances (*ludis*), gladiator fights and theatrical performances are presented.

In Chapter XIV, the author presents the education of the Romans. Through its form of organisation and its content, education in Rome had a pronounced class character. According to the historical tradition transmitted by Titus Livius, the oldest educational institution in the Romans would date from the middle of the 5-th century BC. He states that in the Roman Forum, there were also some schools among the stalls of all kinds of sellers. Secondary education appeared only in the middle of the 3-rd century BC, under the leadership of a *grammaticus* -

teacher. He started at the age of 12. In the secondary school, education was more complex. For four years, the primary subjects were the Latin language and literature, but also Greek, and their study was mainly based on the texts of poetic works. Notions of history, geography, physics, and astronomy are also taught, but not as an end, so students can better understand literary texts. The efficient spirit of the Romans disregards these areas. At the beginning of the 1-st century BC, a higher education led by a rhetor orator also existed in Rome. Hence the name of the school of rhetoric or eloquence was given to it. This education was followed by young people from wealthy families, indispensable for a political or legal career, which required excellent oratorical skills. He was mainly in Greek. As a general rule, this form of education was followed by young people who wore the *toga virilis* (16-17 years old) and studied until around 20. In the beginning, this cycle of studies also took place in the Roman Forum, but this education took place in special rooms set up like a small amphitheatre starting from the imperial era. At the same time, schools of any grade were gradually transformed into state schools with the mission of training officials devoted to the imperial power. Some emperors granted material support, subsidies, and other favours to the heads of schools and the teachers who worked there.

The religious life and cults of the Romans are presented in Chapter XV. The religion of the Romans in the first centuries of their history was presented in the primitive form of animism. Over time the Romans worshipped many gods, but the Roman religion never took a stable form. Substantial changes had occurred in the evolution of their religious life since the 2-nd century BC when certain foreign philosophical and religious currents began to penetrate here. Due to some disastrous events and serious social problems, the population lost its trust in the official divinities, causing a spiritual restlessness and, in this context, new forms of religion appeared: the Orphic, Dionysian and Eleusinian mysteries. Even now, many Greek divinities entered, who managed to enter the Roman religious pantheon. These Eastern cults also brought certain moral concepts missing from the official Roman religion. With all the prohibitions and restrictive measures, they imposed themselves and settled in the Roman world. The Roman Senate and the College of Pontiffs had to admit foreign divinities and cults, but only by formally integrating them within the official cults, keeping them under control and imposing certain conditions on them. Among these, the first was that foreign divinities and cults could not benefit from public honours reserved exclusively for the official cult. With the expansion of the Roman Empire and the crystallisation of the concept of the state, religion increasingly entered the service of the authorities. However, with all the vigilance of the College of Roman Pontiffs, most citizens neglected the official cults more and

more, approaching the cults that preached moral concepts that promised them salvation. However, the ordinary people continued to practice the domestic cult: to honour the protective gods of the family, the field, and the crafts.

In the XVI-th chapter, sciences and technology are presented. In general, Romans' interest in science was reduced. An actual Roman "science" did not exist. In the Roman education system, scientific disciplines occupied a limited place. A genuine interest arose in astronomy, especially among the great Roman personalities (Cicero, Lucretius, Seneca, Pliny the Younger, Julius Caesar, etc.). The scientific concern of the Romans was summed up above all in the compilation of encyclopaedic works. At the head of them are the imposing works of Marcus Terentius Varro (116-27 BC), from the most varied fields, from grammar to agriculture, as well as the massive compilation (in 37 books) of all the scientific notions of the time, entitled *Historia naturalis* by Plinius the Elder (23-79), a work of great authority until the beginning of the modern era. The concerns of the Romans in the field of technique were purely practical, with technology prevailing over technological research. In the technical field - at least in specific fields - the contribution of the Romans was considerable.

First of all, in construction, the Romans were unsurpassed. Thus, regarding the plan of the cities of their military camps (*castra*), their most significant merit lies in the systematisation of the elements borrowed from the Etruscans and then from the Greeks. Certain types of constructions - the vast majority of them public buildings - were invented by the Romans: the triumphal arch, the amphitheatre, the aqueduct, the bridges, the pantheon, the ornate votive column, the villa, etc. The remarkable development they gave to the construction of vaults - a Greek invention perfected by the Etruscans - allowed them to build bridges with huge openings (some even with an opening of 27 or 32 meters). Mastering the same vault technique allowed the Romans to multiply the stairs system and obtain authentic technical performances, as with the spiral stairs inside Trajan's column. The aqueduct also existed in the Eastern civilisations and the Greek world. However, the Romans developed the principle by applying it on a large scale, building aqueducts that reached a length of 100 kilometres.

Roman diplomacy is presented in Chapter XVII. Thus, Roman diplomacy bears the stamp of the lifestyle, pragmatic spirit and military, legal and administrative virtues of this nation of conquerors. In order to maintain the condition of its durability and supremacy for a millennium, the Romans imposed rigour and discipline in everything they undertook.

In Chapter XVIII, the author presents the art of the Romans. In the oldest manifestations of Roman art, elements of the art of the other Italic populations with which the Romans came into contact can be found. The first phase of Roman art constitutes a synthesis of the contributions of these Italic populations.

Especially the Etruscan contribution was fundamental, especially in temple architecture and bronze sculpture.

Moreover, starting from the 6-th century BC, the artistic creation of the Romans evolved, for four centuries, parallel to the art of the Etruscans. Roman art began defining its personality only in the 2-nd century BC. Although the influence of Greek art had made its presence felt a long time before, through the Greek colonists from the south of Italy, after the conquest of the cities of Greece and those of Asia Minor, considerable quantities of monuments of Greek art were brought to Rome (paintings, statues from bronze and marble, columns with splendid capitals, bas-reliefs, etc.). Also, willingly or brought as slaves, many artists, artisans, architects, painters, and sculptors came to Rome. This is also because the Romans considered artistic occupations unworthy of a Roman citizen. Therefore, architecture, sculpture and painting are also presented in this chapter. An art particularly favoured by the Romans and very widespread throughout the Empire was mosaic. The technique and art of mosaic flourished in the imperial era, especially in the Byzantine era.

The three appendices are remarkably consistent and intended to facilitate the reader's access to Roman terms. With a rich bibliography, the present work is also an accurate research tool for those who wish to deepen one of the major topics that the author proposed for analysis and discussion, that of the grandiose and fascinating Roman Empire. Through this scientific work, PhD Associate Professor Marius Telea makes an important contribution to those who want to know the Roman culture and civilisation, which marked the history of humanity.

Considering the contributions made to the field of research, and the logical and analytical thread of the approach, I warmly recommend the book *Introduction to Roman Culture and Civilisation* and congratulate its author, PhD Associate Professor Marius Telea.

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