

# **ANTIQUITY, HISTORY TEACHING AND THE MULTICULTURALIST CURRICULUM<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

This article discusses the Teaching of Ancient History from the perspective of the multiculturalist curriculum. As it admits the plurality of identities and cultures, the multicultural approach has been incorporated into the school environment through the curricula. In face of the various forms of inequality and social exclusion existing in Brazilian society, adherence to a multiculturalist curricular proposal in History Teaching represents the recognition and appreciation of cultural, ethnic-racial and gender diversity. We are interested in highlighting the compatibility between multiculturalist theories and the teaching of Ancient History.

## **Keywords**

Ancient History; curriculum; History Teaching; multiculturalism.

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## **Resumo**

Este artigo discute o Ensino de História Antiga dentro da perspectiva do currículo multiculturalista. Por admitirem a pluralidade de identidades e culturas, o enfoque multicultural tem sido incorporado ao ambiente escolar por meio dos currículos. Ante às variadas formas de desigualdade e exclusão social vigentes na sociedade brasileira, a adesão a uma proposta curricular multiculturalista no Ensino de História representa o reconhecimento e a valorização da diversidade cultural, étnico-racial e de gênero. Interessa-nos ressaltar a compatibilidade entre as teorias multiculturalistas e o Ensino de História Antiga.

## **Palavras-chave**

História Antiga; currículo; Ensino de História; multiculturalismo.

## Introduction

The recent publication of the Base Nacional Comum Curricular, the national curricular common base, added new chapters to the discussions, effervescent since the 1980s (Funari, 2010), on the teaching of Ancient History in Brazilian basic education. In response to the changes brought about by the new referential, scholars working in different regions of the country, through articles (Funari, 2015), manifests (Tacla; Lima, 2015) and thematic dossiers<sup>3</sup>, elucidated the possible social, political and epistemological losses arising from a teaching of History restricted to the historical experience of the Brazilian national State. The importance of antiquity in schools, aiming at the formation of critical sense, the exercise of citizenship (Funari, 2004) and respect for diversity (Funari, 2020), in fact, has already been demonstrated elsewhere and justifies the presence of ancient societies in Brazilian's school curricula of the 21st century.

Free of its original colonialist and Eurocentric content (Silva, 2017), the contemporary History of Antiquity has reacted in a favorable way to the social demands of democracy, inclusion, coexistence and diversity (Funari, Carlan; Silva, 2020). The contribution of feminist and post-colonial theories resulted in the production of an Ancient History focused on the historical experience of women, the enslaved, homosexuals and other marginalized social groups (Garraffoni, 2008). Even specific concepts, which were once used as imperialist features, have been replaced by terms that value ethnic and cultural exchanges in Antiquity, such as: cultural hybridity, miscegenation and creolization (Funari; Garraffoni, 2018: 250).

## The Multiculturalist School Curriculum and the History of Antiquity

Aimed at recognizing and valuing diversity within societies, multiculturalist social theories are the result of cultural studies and the processes of fragmentation of social identities in progress since the second half of the 20th century (Canen, 2000). Globalization, the decolonization processes and the proliferation of different social movements have challenged the stability and naturalness of national, ethnic-racial, social class and gender identities (Hall, 2006). Cultural hierarchies, sometimes admitted as natural, also came to be recognized in their arbitrariness in the societies of the present (Canen, 2000) and the past (Funari, 1989).

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, the dossier about the teaching of Ancient History in the *Revista Mare Nostrum. Estudos sobre o Mediterrâneo Antigo*. (USP). N°08. 2017.

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Multiculturalist theories made discussions on cultural diversity extended to other domains, including education, thus extrapolating the scientific space of Anthropology (Silva, 2005: 86). Admitted to the post-critical school curricula, multiculturalism has proposed, at school level, a formation that respects diversity and multiple cultures. In addition to the apology for coexistence, the reflection on how differences are constructed, their subordination to unequal power relations, was also taken into the daily lives of schools within the curriculum produced under this referential (Silva, 2005: 89).

What, then, would be the merits and possible limits of the teaching of Ancient History conceived from these references? Emma Dench (2005: 07-11), for example, problematized the projection of post-colonial theories for the History of Antiquity: these perspectives, argues the scholar, represent modern social ambitions and projects and would not find correspondence in ancient societies, in which it is expected to be shown a historical reflection of these same desires (Dench, 2005: 08). In this way, it seems opportune to question: how, for example, the History of the Roman Empire, characterized by wars of conquest, enslavement and execution of foreign peoples, could be taught from the references of peaceful and respectful coexistence between heterogeneous civilizations and cultures?

Despite its widespread use by the Roman emperors, the apology for oppression and extermination, however, could only be forcibly considered unique or hegemonic. On the contrary, perspectives favorable to integration and coexistence can also be evidenced in the textual tradition and material culture produced in the Roman Empire of the first centuries. A well-known speech by Emperor Claudio regarding the admission of Gauls to the Senate, registered in an inscription from Lyon (CIL XIII, 01668), for example, is favorable to the incorporation of foreigners, especially Gauls, and the consequent ethnic heterogeneity in the formation of Roman society since ancient times (Funari; Duprat, 2019).

Admitted under the historical perspective of the inventory of differences (Veyne, 1983), both discourses can be explored in the school environment with the objective of stimulating, on one hand, the reflection on power relations and social projects of inclusion and exclusion, in the past and in the present. On the other hand, the teaching of Ancient History also highlights the harmful consequences of discourses of domination and social exclusion.

## The Roman Empire: between oppression and coexistence

Beginning in the middle of the third century BCE, the Roman imperialist undertaking over Italy and other Mediterranean territories, the construction of an *imperium sine fine* recommended by Virgil, continued uninterruptedly until the government of Hadrian (117-138 CE), when this emperor was forced to abandon part of the territories under Roman jurisdiction in regions of Mesopotamia, Armenia and Assyria (Birley, 1997: 133).

Even though the cooptation of the elites and the progressive granting of citizenship allowed a wide integration of peoples conquered by the Romans (Funari, 2006: 56), the Roman imperial expansion was marked by invasions, wars, repression or conquests against Gauls, Celts, Britons, Germans, Carthaginians, and other Mediterranean civilizations. The complex relationship between Romans and Jews, in particular, constitutes an opportune example to be worked on in Ancient History classes.

Fragmented into different sects (Chevitarese, 2006), Jewish populations were integrated into the Roman Empire in the second half of the first century BCE. Despite Pompey's interest in the region, it was only in 40 BCE, in response to the invasion of Judea by Parthian troops, that the Romans established, with Herod, their definitive dominion over the territory (Goodman, 2004). Despite the alleged condescension of the Romans in relation to Jewish customs, a characteristic that Martin Goodman (2004: 12) called *multicultural tolerance*, several revolts, practices of social banditry and other forms of contestation against the Roman domain were undertaken by the Jews between the centuries I and II of the Common Era (Crossan; Reed, 2007).

The incompatibility between the imperial cult and Judaism resulted in episodes of tension between the Jews and the Roman government: in the year 39 of the Common Era, for example, under the government of Caligula, an altar dedicated to the imperial family would have been destroyed by the Jews in Jamnia. The emperor, in response, ordered the construction of a statue of him, represented in the manner of the god Jupiter, to be installed in the Temple of Jerusalem: this sanctuary would also be converted to the Roman imperial cult (Barret, 2008: 135). Under the threat of a social revolt, Gaius Caesar, through diplomatic channels and thanks to the performance of the governor Publius Petronius, would have been deterred from this endeavor (Funari; Silva, 2019).

Moderation and diplomacy, however, were not enough to avoid the revolt carried out between the years 66 and 70 of the Common Era. Fostered by

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less wealthy social strata, the rebellion against Rome and its domination over Judea resulted in the massacre of the population and the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem (Guarinello, 2013: 146). In the following years, the Roman victory over the Jews was celebrated in different supports by the emperors Vespasian and Titus:



**Image 01<sup>4</sup>:** Sestertius coined in Rome, in the year 71 of the Common Era, under the rule of Vespasian, commemorating the Roman victory over Judea. **Obverse:** Bust of Vespasian, laureate and facing right. **Inscription:** IMP (erator) CAES (ar) VESPASIAN (us) AUG (ustus) P (ontifex) M (aximus) TR (ibunicia) P (otestas) P (ater) P (atriae) CO (n) S (ul) III. **Translation:** Emperor Caesar Vespasian Augustus, Pontiff Maximus, (coated with) tribunic power, father of the country, three times consul. **Reverse:** Representation of a Jewish woman, on the right, in a situation of mourning. On the left, also under a palm tree, a man made captive, with his hands tied, appears beside his weapons of war. It is interesting to note that the male figure, admitted in this representation as potentially bellicose, is chained. The fact that the female character is represented in freedom, in turn, highlights the assumption that a woman does not require this precaution.

In addition to the economic use, the currency has been thought of as a means of communication used by the issuing authorities to transmit their political messages (Carlan, 2007). In the case of the mintings of the Roman Empire, carried out in Rome or in the provinces, it has been recognized that the various images, symbols, inscriptions and representations associated with the emperors were charged with the task of spreading their conquests, titles and military successes. In this particular case, the mention of *Iudaea Capta* reiterates the opposition to the Jews by the Flavian dynasty

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<sup>4</sup> Inscription: IVDAEA CAPTA. SC (in exergo). Translation: Judea conquered. Reference: CARRADICE, I.A; BUTTREY, T.V. The Roman Imperial Coinage. Vol.02, part I. From AD 69 to AD 96: Vespasian to Domitian. London: Spink, 2007. (159: 71). Photo: *British Museum*.

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(Goodman, 2004; Funari; Silva, 2018). The Romans' triumph over the Jews was also recorded in another well-known monument in the city of Rome:



**Image 02:** Detail of the Arch of Titus depicting the Romans' triumph over the Jews. The presence of the *menorah* refers to the destruction and sacking of the Jerusalem Temple. **Photo:** Wikimedia Commons.

The retaliation for the social seditions led by the Jewish populations, especially with the foundation of the *Colonia Aelia Capitolina* (131 CE), after the Bar Kokhba Revolt (Funari; Silva, 2018), demonstrates a type of political domination in which “There was no a place for regional dissensions in the Empire” (Guarinello, 2013: 146). It is imperative to recognize, moreover, that the official message, conveyed by Roman coins and monuments, also carried with it symbolic forms of cultural domination in relation to the Jews. This example, as already mentioned, can be worked on in the school environment in order to demonstrate, at present, the harmful consequences arising from ethnic, cultural and / or religious intolerance.

Despite the range of discourses conceived under the aegis of social exclusion, the teaching of Ancient History and of the Roman Empire, in particular, can also be done based on references that are favorable to coexistence between different cultures. We assume that the material culture of daily practices (Funari, 2003), as they are not submissive to the official messages conveyed by the emperors, can make this finding evident, including what regards the Jewish populations.

Although dated from the 3rd century BC, a funerary inscription from North Africa, as an example, allows us to observe a cultural exchange between a man of Jewish origin and Roman funerary practices:

D(is) M(anibus) S(acrum) / Iudas I/cos(itanus) m(onumentum) v(ivum fecit?).

Consecrated to the gods manes. Judas, the Icositan, made in life this monument.

**Date:** 271-300 CE. **Location:** *Africa proconsularis*. **Reference:** *L'anée Épigraphique*. 1978, n°834. p.247.

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As demonstrated by Lassère (2005: 265), the name Judas would have become common among Jewish populations since the activity of its namesake Macabeu. Although it may result from the reuse of funerary *stelae* produced in a standardized manner by professionals in this field, the use of the dedication *D (is) M (anibus) S (acrum)* in Jewish epitaphs allows us to verify that the Jewish communities, also due to the diaspora, shared the cultural references of other Mediterranean societies (Lassère, 2005). As Márcio Teixeira-Bastos (2019) observed:

In North Africa, as can be seen, the invocation to the Dii Manes was a normal response to the death of a loved one, even among segments of North African Jews. It is not, therefore, a question of the Jews merely diluting themselves identically among Romans in North Africa (pagans and / or Christians), but rather of different degrees of appropriation and hybridization of the non-Jewish symbolic corpus by North African Jews, who had their own cultural traditions, more hybrid and with their own Jewish identity associations (Teixeira-Bastos, 2019: 351).

In a larger context, which would allow us to include the production of the *Septuagint* and its later use by the early Christian communities, it is worth recognizing that the use of the Greek language by the Jewish communities enabled their contact with Greek conventions and even institutions that were readily assimilated. In addition to the well-known religious texts, and works like those of Flavius Josephus (37-c.100 CE), this cultural amalgam is observable in epigraphy: as an example, we present a funerary inscription engraved on white marble found in the Monteverde Catacombs in the beginning of the 20th century:

ἐνθάδε κεῖτε Ἀπερ ἄρχων / Καλκαρ[ησι]ῶν ἐν εἰρήνῃ ἢ κύ/μησις [...]ω [ἐποι]ήσῃ  
Ἰοῦ<λ>ειο-/ (Menorah)-ς (Menorah).

**Date:** Séculos III-IV CE.

**Dimensions:** 26 x 60.5 x 2 cm.

**Reference:** NOY, David. *The Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe*. Volume 2. The city of Rome. Cambridge: University Press, 1995. N°69, p.60.

Here lies Aper, *archon* of the Calcaresians. In peace [his/your?] sleep. Julius (had this) made for

The inscription of the Jew Aper, even with a late dating, uses the Greek word ἄρχων (*archon*) to refer to the position occupied by the individual registered in the epitaph. Coming from the context of the Greek poleis, the title of *archon* is recurrent in numerous Jewish inscriptions and can also be seen in New Testament texts, in the Pauline Letters, in the four canonical gospels and in the Acts of the Apostles. As in the inscription, its use occurs to designate secular authorities and also from the Jewish scope itself:

But we speak the wisdom of God hidden in mystery, which God predestined before the centuries for our glory, which none of the chiefs (τῶν ἄρχόντων) of this world knew. For if they had known it, they would not have sacrificed the Lord of

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glory (1Co. 2: 07-08. Based on the translation by Frederico Lourenço. Emphasis added).

And behold, a man named Jairus, who was head of the Synagogue, came to meet him (ἄρχων τῆς συναγωγῆς). Falling at the feet of Jesus, he begged him to come into his house, because he had an only daughter, about twelve years old, and she was dying. And when he was going there, the crowds pressed him (Lc. 08: 41-42. Based on the translation by Frederico Lourenço. Emphasis added).

It was in dialogue with a multicultural historical context and fluid identities, therefore, that ancient Judaism developed and often reinvented itself. Also due to its condition of culture in the diaspora, the opening of Judaism to other cultural references demonstrates a project of society different from that reproduced in Roman monuments, characterized by celebrating the war, enslavement and execution of other peoples.

### Final Considerations

Made based on political criteria, the selection of knowledge that students should (or should not) learn at school is always linked to the question about what type of citizen is to be formed for a given society (Silva, 2005, p.15). Because they take to the classrooms the reflection about the arbitrariness of cultural hierarchies, multiculturalist school curricula proved to be favorable to inclusion, diversity and democracy.

Despite occupying a limited space in most of Brazilian's current curricular references, the teaching of Ancient History, represented in this article by a brief case study on Jews in the Roman Empire, seems to be fully compatible with multiculturalist school proposals. It cannot be expected, as previously believed (Silva, 2005), that a school curriculum is capable of extinguishing the social contradictions, inequalities and conflicts of a given society. However, as Paulo Freire (2000) has already observed in his comment on the murder of the Pataxó indigenous Galdino Jesus dos Santos: "If education alone does not transform society, neither does society change without it".

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