

**ENGLISH FOR THE STUDENTS
OF THE FACULTY OF HISTORY**

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EDITURA UNIVERSITARĂ
București, 2012

Colecția FILOLOGIE

Redactor: Gheorghe Iovan
Tehnoredactor: Ameluța Vișan
Coperta: Angelica Mălăescu

Editură recunoscută de Consiliul Național al Cercetării Științifice (C.N.C.S.)

Descrierea CIP a Bibliotecii Naționale a României
VELEA, ARGENTINA

English for the students of the Faculty of history

Argentina Velea, Cristina Athu, Alexandra Moraru. - București :
Editura Universitară, 2012

Bibliogr.

ISBN 978-606-591-431-5

811.111

DOI: (Digital Object Identifier): 10.5682/9786065914315

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Editura Universitară

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B-dul. N. Bălcescu nr. 27-33, Sector 1, București

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www.editurauniversitara.ro

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Distribuție: tel.: 021-315.32.47 / 319.67.27 / 0744 EDITOR / 07217 CARTE
comenzi@editurauniversitara.ro
O.P. 15, C.P. 35, București
www.editurauniversitara.ro

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CHAPTER I

1. ROMAN BRITAIN

The Roman occupation intervened between the coming of the Celt and the coming of the Saxon, and delayed the latter for perhaps two hundred years. Celt, Saxon and Dane came over to slaughter or expel the inhabitants and settle in their place, but the Romans came to exploit and govern by right of superior civilization.

.....
Nor, on the other hand, had the Gauls and Britons an elaborate civilization of their own, like the inhabitants of the Greek and Oriental lands subject to the Romans' way. And, therefore, once the Roman conquerors had glutted their first rage for plunder¹, their main effort was to induce their Western subjects to assimilate Latin life in all its aspects. Their success with the Gauls was permanent, and became the starting point of modern European history. But in Britain, after a great initial success, they had complete ultimate failure. 'From the Romans who once ruled Britain', wrote Haverfield, the great student of the archaeology of the occupation, 'we Britons have inherited practically nothing'.

In the end the Romans left behind them here just three things of value: the first of these would have amused or shocked Caesar, Agricola or Hadrian, for it was Welsh Christianity; the second was the Roman roads; the third, a by-product of the second, was the traditional importance of certain new city sites,

especially that of London. But the Latin life of cities, the villas, the arts, the language and the political organization of Rome vanished like a dream. The greatest fact in the early history of the island is a negative fact – that the Romans did not succeed in permanently Latinizing Britain as they Latinized France.

Julius Caesar won his place in the history of the world by a double achievement – the political renovation of the Roman Empire and its extension into northern Europe. He planted the power of the Mediterranean peoples broad and firm on the north side of the Alps, making Gaul a Latin country for ever.

.....
In order of time, Caesar's work in Gaul was the prelude to his work for the Empire as a whole. And the subjugation of Gaul was only half accomplished when he found himself one day gazing across the Dover Straits. He surveyed the white cliffs like Napoleon, but with other thoughts in his head: for there was nothing to impede a visit to the island and nothing to prevent his safe return; the only question was whether it was worth his while² to make the voyage, with more important work on hand³.

His decision to invade Britain was not taken in the hope of setting up a Roman administration on the spot⁴. He had neither the time nor the men to spare for that⁵; his military position in Gaul, his political prospects in Italy were too precarious, for the rulers of the Republic loved him as little as the Senators of Carthage had loved Hannibal. But as leader of the opposition party, playing to the gallery in Rome, he had need of⁶ showy exploits; and he had need of tribute and slaves to enrich his partisans, pay his soldiers and fill his

war-chest. An invasion of Britain might answer all these requirements⁷. Besides, the tribes of North Gaul and South Britain were so closely allied that Gaul would be more submissive if its neighbour were constrained to pay tribute and to fear the mighty name of Rome. At least some first-hand knowledge⁸ of the politics and geography of the island was necessary for the would-be governors⁹ of Gaul.

As a military undertaking his first expedition was a failure. He took too small a force¹⁰, and scarcely moved ten miles inland from the Dover Straits. In the next year's invasion on a larger scale¹¹, he won several battles, forded the Thames in the face of the enemy, and penetrated into the Herfordshire territories of Cassivelaunus, King of the Catuvellauni. That tribe was dominant in southern Britain, and the jealousies caused by its hegemony turned some of its rivals and subjects into allies of the Roman invader, both in the time of Julius and a hundred years later during the Claudian conquest. But many of the Britons, including the men of Kent, put up a stout fight against¹² Caesar, and though their undisciplined infantry were useless against the 'legion's ordered line', the yellow-haired, athletic aristocracy of the Celt in their scythed chariots¹³ clattered down the warways of the battle like heroes of Homer, in a manner disconcerting even to the veterans of the Tenth¹⁴. The chariot, however, had seen its day¹⁵ as a method of warfare¹⁶; it had already been abandoned in Celtic Gaul as well as in the Hellenized East, and the British chiefs would have been more truly formidable if they have taught themselves¹⁷ to fight as cavalry. But the island never had the luck to be defended by an aristocracy trained to fight from the saddle, until the Norman conquest acclimatized the mediaeval knight.

The expedition of 54 B.C., though not a failure like that of the year before, was no great success. As Cicero complained to his cronies, the famous British gold was secured¹⁸ in very inadequate quantities; the slaves were too ignorant to fetch fancy prices¹⁹ in the market, and there had been neither the time nor the means to carry off rebellious clans wholesale to the auctioneer, as was Caesar's practice in Gaul. The expedition had no permanent results, except as a memory on both sides of the Channel. The tribute soon ceased to be paid. The rising of Vercingetorix, which proved the real crisis of the war in Gaul, put an end to Caesar's further plans for Britain, if he had any²⁰. Then the long civil wars, followed by the reorganization of the Empire under Augustus and Tiberius, gave the distant island a hundred years of respite.

The conquest of Gaul by Julius Caesar, more decidedly than his invasions of Britain, had brought the South British tribes into the orbit of Latin Civilization. They were of the same race and political group as the northern Gauls, and the Gauls were now Roman subjects, many of them Roman citizens.

A peaceful penetration of the island resulted from the work of Caesar, and prepared the way for the conquest under Claudius. The hundred most important years in the history of the world were not wholly a blank even in Britain. While Julius was being murdered and avenged, while the loves of Anthony and Cleopatra were raising the question of the relations of East and West inside the Roman world, while Augustus was cannily constructing the Empire, far in the north Roman traders and colonists, working from the base of the Latinized province of Gaul, were establishing

settlements in the interior of Britain and gaining influence at the courts of its tribal Kings.

Shakespeare's Cymbeline, unlike his Lear, was no myth. From 5 to 40 A.D.²¹ he reigned over the Catuvellauni, and so far increased their hegemony in the south of the island as to style himself²² on his silver coinage 'Rex Brittonum'. The use of the Roman language in his title is all of a piece with²³ the good relations he cultivated with the Emperors Augustus and Tiberius. Just as Edward the Confessor prepared the way for the Norman Conquest by introducing Norman knights and clergy into England and making French fashionable at Court, so Cymbeline encouraged Roman traders and craftsmen to colonize the towns of Britain, and familiarized the leading tribesmen²⁴ with the Latin language and civilization. Cymbeline moved his capital from Verulanium near St. Albans to Camulodunum (Colchester) in the territory of the subjugated Trinovantes, whence his mint poured out gold coinage of the Roman type in great profusion.

To his reign, perhaps, belongs the origin of London as a city. Finds have been made in the river bed which suggest that the first edition of London Bridge may have been erected in timber before the Roman Conquest but during the age of Roman influence. It was perhaps during this traditional period that London began to exist at the bridge-head on the northern shore. There was certainly a place of some kind known as London at the time of the invasion under Claudius.

In any case the city which was to play so great a part²⁵ first in English and then in world history²⁶, attained its original importance under the Roman rule. The name of London is Celtic, but it was not a great centre of Iberian or of Celtic civilization: in Caesar's time and long afterwards, Middlesex was a forest, and much of future London a marsh.

But a bluff of hard ground afforded a good bridge-head where roads from the Kentish ports could cross the river and spread out again thence on their journeys northward and westward over the island. It was also the best landing-place for continental commerce coming up the estuary of the Thames. The bridge and port coincided in situation and their geographic coincidence made the greatness of London.

The Romans, after they had conquered the island, made the fortune of²⁷ London Bridge by concentrating upon it one-half of their great roads, from both north and south. And they made the fortune of London port by creating an extensive commerce with the Continent, which found in the long-neglected Thames the best means of entry. London was the point at which goods from Europe could be unshipped well inside the land, and sent to its most distant parts by roads planned not for the local needs of tribes but

for the imperial needs of the province. The principal exports of Roman Britain, with which she purchased the luxuries of the world, were tin, skins, slaves, pearls and sometimes grain.

London became larger and richer under the Roman than she ever was again²⁸ after their departure, until near the Norman Conquest. The Roman walls enclosed an area corresponding very closely to the walls of the City in mediaeval times, which were in fact only the Roman walls restored. In both periods London was a commercial, not a governmental centre. Officially she ranked lower in the Roman hierarchy than much smaller and less important towns.

Until some effective system of military control had been established over the Welsh mountains and the northern moors, war-like tribes would be continually descending from

those reservoirs of savagery²⁹ to plunder the demilitarized inhabitants of city and villa in the plains below.

The Roman armies who for so many generations addressed themselves to this problem, were very different from the warrior swarms of Celt, Saxon and Dane, very different too from the feudal host of Norman times. A Roman army was a highly drilled, long-service force³⁰, held together under strict discipline all the year round and from year to year, accustomed, when not fighting, to fatigue duty in building roads, bridges and forts. Unlike the other invaders of Britain, the Romans did not achieve their conquest by indiscriminate slaughter and destruction, nor by ushering in a host of farmer immigrants, nor by the erection of private castles. Their method of conquest was to make military roads, planned on system for the whole island, and to plant along them forts garrisoned by the regular troops. It was thus that the legions were able, after a first check, to do what the Saxons failed to do, and the castle-building Norman Barons only did after long centuries, namely, to subjugate and hold down the Welsh mountaineers. They could not Romanize the mountains as they Romanized the eastern and southern plains, nor plant cities at the foot of Snowdon and Plynlymmon. But by means of roads and forts they had made an effective military occupation of Wales within five-and thirty years of their landing.

Devon and Cornwall they neglected, as an area too small and isolated to be dangerous. Roman remains are scarce beyond Exeter. But Somerset played an important part in the new Britain, Within six years of the Claudian invasion, the new Government was working the Mendip lead-mines. And the waters of *Aquae Solis* soon made Bath the centre of fashion, luxury and leisure for Romano-British society,

desperately resolved to reproduce under leaden skies the gay, lounging life of Imperial Rome.

But the real difficulty of the frontier problem, never wholly solved, lay in the North. Between Tyne and Humber lay the moorlands of heather and white grass that we know, varied in those days by vast forest of brushwood, birch and dwarf oak destined to disappear before the nibbling of sheep when the wool trade developed in a later England. In those desolate regions the savage Brigantes refused to listen to the voice of the Roman charmer, or to lay aside their native habits and warlike aspirations. Beyond them, in modern

Scotland, lay the Caledonians, of Pictish and other race, partly Celtic; they were no more submissive than the Brigantes, and were yet more formidable from the remoteness and the physical character of their territory.

It was not till a century and a half had passed after the Claudian conquest that the Emperor Severus marked the final limit of the northern frontier by renovating (210 A.D.) the wall that Hadrian had erected (123 A.D.) from Solway to the mouth of the Tyne. Several times the Romans had tried to conquer Scotland; once under Tacitus' father-in-law Agricola, the great Governor of Britain, with his victory at the 'Mons Graupius' somewhere on the edge of the Highlands (84 A.D.); one in the reign of Antoninus Pius (140 A.D.); and once again under Severus himself. But the Romans failed in Scotland as repeatedly and hopelessly as the English Plantagenet Kings. Their failure was due not only to the frontal resistance of the Picts in their water-logged straths and inaccessible mountains and forests, but to the frequent rebellions of the Brigantes in the rear. Until they abandoned Caledonia, the Romans' line of communication was too long,

being exposed to the likelihood of attack all the way from the Humber northwards.

Some well trenched camps and the ruins of Antoninus¹ turf wall from Forth to Clyde were all that the legions left behind them in Scotland – except indeed a greater sense of cohesion among the Pictish tribes, inspired by the common purpose of resisting and ruining the Roman Empire with all its walls and works. No attempt was made to add Ireland to the territory of the Caesars.

G. M. TREVELYAN
Illustrated History of England
London, 1964

Vocabulary Practice

1. had glutted their first rage of plunder = și-au satisfăcut prima lor sete de jaf
2. it was worth his while = merită osteneala
3. with more important work on hand = având mai multe probleme de rezolvat
4. on the spot = de îndată, imediat, pe loc
5. neither... nor = nici... nici
6. he had need of = avea nevoie de
7. might answer all the requirements = putea satisface toate cerințele
8. first-hand knowledge = informații directe
9. would-be governors = presupușii guvernatori
10. he took too small a force = a luat o forță (armată) prea mică (prea redusă)
11. on a larger scale = pe o scară mai largă
12. put up a stout fight against = au organizat o rezistență fermă împotriva