

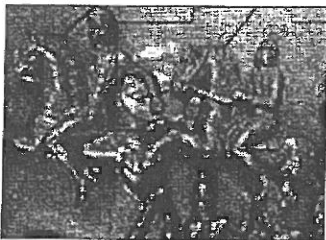
Why Did Rome Fall? (Overview)

Few topics in Roman history stir the imagination as much as the question of the "fall" of Rome. From its sixth-century-BC origins to the second century AD when the empire reached its greatest size, Rome seemed destined to last. Over the next few centuries, however, Rome experienced a slow but steady decline. Just as the Roman Empire did not fall in one calamitous event, but slowly transformed into new societies over the course of centuries, no single theory explains why Rome collapsed. A number of factors contributed to its demise.

There have been hundreds of theories for the fall of Rome. Some have become popular, but are without foundation, like lead pipes poisoning the empire. Each generation finds a new approach to the problem and develops its own theories. One of the most famous theories is that of the 18th-century English historian Edward Gibbon. He viewed the fall of Rome as an event, a moment in time in which Rome ceased to be Rome and became something else. Since Gibbon, many new theories have emerged, some of which have merit, each of which has its flaws. More importantly, each of those theories demonstrates the importance of defining Rome—one cannot talk about the end of Rome without defining what it was that ended.

Transformation vs. Fall

The prevailing theory today does not view the end of the Roman Empire as a fall, but as a transformation. Unlike earlier theorists, most modern historians do not view the Roman Empire or its people as static and unchanging. They define Rome as dynamic, a constantly evolving state, but one that continued to celebrate its past and that despite changes had cultural continuity with that past. Over several centuries, cultural, economic, political, and religious changes all worked together to transform Rome and its people. New peoples, such as the Germanic tribes, altered the cultural make-up of the empire. New religions, like Christianity, at first challenged and then changed the spiritual outlook of Rome. By the early fifth century AD, there were Romans like Flavius Stilicho who were ethnically German, culturally Roman, and confessed Christianity as their faith.



The Roman Empire was perhaps too large to govern effectively. The cost of defense, coupled with economic inflation, political corruption, the influx of Germanic tribes, and periodic imperial instability often led to trouble. Maintaining an army that had to defend existing borders and fight wars of expansion put an enormous strain upon the empire. Taxation attempted to solve the problem, but those most able to help, the wealthy, put the burden of taxation on the poor. As a result, not only did the Roman government lack the financial help it needed, but there was also tension between rich and poor, which sometimes led to violence. Added to this was the burden of dealing with the influx of Germanic peoples. In the face of such problems, any government would struggle, but periodic trouble with dynastic succession made the problem worse. As the empire tried various strategies to deal with those problems, it gradually fragmented into new societies. Examining several of the factors in Rome's transformation helps illuminate this fragmentation.

Religious Theories and the Year AD 476

Religion has sometimes been blamed for the fall of Rome. The Emperor Constantine I's adoption of Christianity in 312 has been viewed by some as the beginning of the end of old Roman values, many of which centered upon military glory. Others cite the official adoption of Christianity as the state religion by the Emperor Theodosius I in

380 as the date that traditional Roman values died. Each of those assumptions, however, fails to take into account not only that both emperors initiated several military campaigns, but also that life in the Roman Empire continued much as it had before either emperors became Christian. Far from spelling the doom of the empire, being Christian came to be part of what it meant to be Roman.



The most popular date for the fall of Rome is 476, when Romulus Augustulus, the last Western Roman emperor, was overthrown by the Germanic warrior Odoacer. That date suggests that the Roman Empire equals the Western Roman Empire. However, that theory ignores Romulus' tenuous claim to the throne, Odoacer's motivations, and the fact that the eastern half of the empire, centered in Constantinople, still had an emperor and continued to thrive for several centuries as the Byzantine Empire. Romulus' father had usurped the western throne, which hardly lent the young man much legitimacy. Moreover, Odoacer did not try to become emperor, but actually sent the imperial regalia back to Constantinople. Apart from the deposition of one usurper, something that had happened often enough before 476, little changed with the removal of Romulus. The citizens of Italy even enjoyed some measure of peace under Odoacer until his fall in 493.

Cultural Unity

One of the more modern theories was that of Henri Pirenne, a Belgian scholar who presented his theory in his book *Mahomet et Charlemagne (Mohammed and Charlemagne)*, which was first published in Europe in 1937. For Pirenne, Rome meant the cultural unity of the Mediterranean, a unity that was broken in the seventh century when the spread of Islam disrupted trade routes and toppled Roman cities. Archaeological evidence has since disproved the idea that trade suffered so badly, but more than that, Pirenne's view of Islam was flawed. His perspective looked at Islam through the lens of the medieval Crusades, which vilified Muslims and established a lasting bias against them. In reality, the historical record shows that Islam was actually one of the main heirs of Rome.

Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages

Most present-day Roman historians look at the end of Rome as a process rather than an event, one in which the Roman Empire gradually transformed into new societies. These historians of late antiquity take a more fluid view of history: they do not see late Roman society as a debased form of the classical past; they attempt to understand the period on its own terms, how it related to Rome's past, and what Roman culture meant at the time. No one cause explains how Rome fell, but the various factors that contributed to its decline are important pointers to changes that chart the transformation of Rome into the cultures of the early Middle Ages. Those changes also help demonstrate how the three key heirs to Rome—the Germanic kingdoms of the west, the Byzantine Empire in the east, and Islam—each in their own way, looked to Rome for inspiration.

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Why Did Rome Fall?: Discussion

1. Why do you think the question "Why did Rome fall?" is such a difficult one to answer?
2. What, if any, theory do you think best describes what happened to the Roman Empire and why?
3. Edward Gibbon's theory for the "fall of Rome" rests upon certain Enlightenment assumptions. How would you describe those assumptions and how he applied them to the question of the Roman Empire's fall?

INTERACTIVE

The Fall of the Roman Empire

Doc. H

Since the fifth century, historians and others have argued over the empire's fall. They have attributed it to a variety of causes, coming both from within and outside the empire. The following excerpts are examples of the differing opinions.

A SECONDARY SOURCE

Edward Gibbon

In the 1780s Gibbon published *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. In this passage, Gibbon explains that a major cause of the collapse was that the empire was simply just too large.

The decline of Rome was the natural and inevitable effect of immoderate greatness. Prosperity ripened the principle of decay; the causes of destruction multiplied with the extent of conquest; and, as soon as time or accident had removed the artificial supports, the stupendous fabric yielded to the pressure of its own weight. The story of its ruin is simple and obvious; and instead of inquiring why the Roman Empire was destroyed, we should rather be surprised that it had subsisted so long.

B SECONDARY SOURCE

Arther Ferrill

In his book *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (1986), Arther Ferrill argues that the fall of Rome was a military collapse.

In fact the Roman Empire of the West did fall. Not every aspect of the life of Roman subjects was changed by that, but the fall of Rome as a political entity was one of the major events of the history of Western man. It will simply not do to call that fall a myth or to ignore its historical significance merely by focusing on those aspects of Roman life that survived the fall in one form or another. At the opening of the fifth century a massive army, perhaps more than 200,000 strong, stood at the service of the Western emperor and his generals. The destruction of Roman military power in the fifth century was the obvious cause of the collapse of Roman government in the West.

C SECONDARY SOURCE

Finley Hooper

In this passage from his *Roman Realities* (1967), Hooper argues against the idea of a "fall."

The year was 476. For those who demand to know the date Rome fell, that is it. Others will realize that the fall of Rome was not an event but a process. Or, to put it another way, there was no fall at all—ancient Roman civilization simply became something else, which is called medieval. [It evolved into another civilization, the civilization of the Middle Ages.]

D PRIMARY SOURCE

St. Jerome

This early Church leader did not live to see the empire's end, but he vividly describes his feelings after a major event in Rome's decline—the attack and plunder of the city by Visigoths in 410.

It is the end of the world . . . Words fail me. My sobs break in . . . The city which took captive the whole world has itself been captured.



Document-Based QUESTIONS

1. Compare the reasons for the fall of Rome given in Sources A and B. How might they be considered similar?
2. What became of Rome according to Source C? Do you agree or disagree with that conclusion?
3. Source D is different from the other sources. How?

DOC. I

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The Fall of Rome

At its height, the boundaries of the Roman Empire stretched from the north of England across the North Sea, along the Rhine and Danube Rivers to the Caspian Sea, south to Egypt, along the coast of Africa to Spain. The decline and eventual collapse of this vast empire took place over a period of years before reaching its bitter end in the middle of the 5th century. Its demise followed a pattern in which extended periods of weakness were followed by unsustainable bursts of strength that inevitably led to further decline. The forces that motivated its destruction came from the internal decay of its economic, political and social structure combined with relentless barbarian attacks from without.

The Huns made their first appearance in what is now Eastern Europe around the year 370. Thundering out of Asia's Central Steppes, their arrival pushed the resident tribes such as the Vandals and Visigoths westward into a collision with the Roman Empire (see Dining with Attila the Hun). In 376, the Visigoths crossed the Danube River - a traditional boundary of the Roman Empire - and swarmed southward. Two years later, the Visigoths defeated the Romans at the battle of Adrianople, further weakening the Empire.

Further west, the Vandals crossed the Rhine River - another traditional boundary of the Empire - in 406. They continued their assault southward to Spain, crossing the Pyrenees Mountains in 409. A year later, the Visigoths sacked Rome and continued on to Spain.

In 429, the Vandals crossed the Strait of Gibraltar and reached the shores of Africa. They continued their assault eastward along the coast and re-crossed the Mediterranean to make a landing in Italy. In 455 they followed in the footsteps of the Visigoths and sacked Rome. The Western Roman Empire was dead. However, a vestige of Rome lived on. Its Eastern portion, with its capital at Constantinople, lasted for another 1000 years until the city was sacked by the Muslims in 1453.

"Who could believe this?"

St. Jerome was born around the year 340. He came to Rome and was baptized there around 360. He devoted the rest of his life to scholarly pursuits and the translation of the Bible into Latin. He died in 420. He wrote the following observations describing the

devastation of the Empire around 406:

"Nations innumerable and most savage have invaded all Gaul. The whole region between the Alps and the Pyrenees, the ocean and the Rhine, has been devastated by the Quadi, the Vandals, the Sarmati, the Alani, the Gepidae, the hostile Heruli, the Saxons, the Burgundians, the Alemanni, and the Pannonians.

Oh wretched Empire! Mayence [Mainz, Germany], formerly so noble a city, has been taken and ruined, and in the church many thousands of men have been massacred. Worms [Germany] has been destroyed after a long siege. Rheims, that powerful city, Amiens, Arras, Speyer [Germany], Strasburg, - all have seen their citizens led away captive into Germany. Aquitaine and the provinces of Lyons and Narbonne, all save a few towns, have been depopulated; and these the sword threatens without, while hunger ravages within.

I cannot speak without tears of Toulouse, which the merits of the holy Bishop Exuperius have prevailed so far to save from destruction. Spain, even, is in daily terror lest it perish, remembering the invasion of the Cimbric; and whatsoever the other provinces have suffered once, they continue to suffer in their fear.

I will keep silence concerning the rest, lest I seem to despair of the mercy of God. For a long time, from the Black Sea to the Julian Alps, those things which are ours have not been ours; and for thirty years, since the Danube boundary was broken, war has been waged in the very midst of the Roman Empire. Our tears are dried by old age. Except a few old men, all were born in captivity and siege, and do not desire the liberty they never knew.

Who could believe this? How could the whole tale be worthily told? How Rome has fought within her own bosom not for glory, but for preservation - nay, how she has not even fought, but with gold and all her precious things has ransomed her life...

Who could believe that Rome, built upon the conquest of the whole world, would fall to the ground? That the mother herself would become the tomb of her peoples? That all the regions of the East, of Africa and Egypt, once ruled by the queenly city, would be filled with troops of slaves and handmaidens? That to-day holy Bethlehem should shelter men and women of noble birth, who once abounded in wealth and are now beggars?"

References:

This eyewitness account appears in Robinson, James Harvey, Readings in European History (1906); Duruy, Victor, History of Rome and of the Roman People, vol VIII (1883).

Doc. J

Christianity / Decline in morals / Public health issues / Political Corruption / Unemployment / Inflation / Urban Decay / Inferior Technology / Increased Military spending

Reasons for the fall of the Roman Empire

All left Rome open to outside invaders

adapted from History Alive material

There were many reasons for the fall of the Roman Empire. Each one intertwined with the next. Many even blame the introduction of Christianity for the decline. Christianity made many Roman citizens into pacifists, making it more difficult to defend against the barbarian attackers. Also money used to build churches could have been used to maintain the empire. Although some argue that Christianity may have provided some morals and values for a declining civilization and therefore may have actually prolonged the imperial era.

Decline in Morals and Values

Those morals and values that kept together the Roman legions and thus the empire could not be maintained towards the end of the empire. Crimes of violence made the streets of the larger cities unsafe. Even during Pax Romana there were 32,000 prostitutes in Rome. Emperors like Nero and Caligula became infamous for wasting money on lavish parties where guests ate and drank until they became ill. The most popular amusement was watching the gladiatorial combats in the Colosseum. These were attended by the poor, the rich, and frequently the emperor himself. As gladiators fought, vicious cries and curses were heard from the audience. One contest after another was staged in the course of a single day. Should the ground become too soaked with blood, it was covered over with a fresh layer of sand and the performance went on.

Public Health

There were many public health and environmental problems: Many of the wealthy had water brought to their homes through lead pipes. Previously the aqueducts had even purified the water but at the end lead pipes were thought to be preferable. The wealthy death rate was very high. The continuous interaction of people at the Colosseum, the blood and death probable spread disease. Those who lived on the streets in continuous contact allowed for an uninterrupted strain of disease much like the homeless in the poorer run shelters of today. Alcohol use increased as well adding to the incompetency of the general public.

Political Corruption

One of the most difficult problems was choosing a new emperor. Unlike Greece where transition may not have been smooth but was at least consistent, the Romans never created an effective system to determine how new emperors would be selected. The choice was always open to debate between the old emperor, the Senate, the Praetorian Guard (the emperor's private army), and the army. Gradually, the Praetorian Guard gained complete authority to choose the new emperor, who rewarded the guard who then became more influential, perpetuating the cycle. Then in 186 A. D. the army strangled the new emperor, the practice began of selling the throne to the highest bidder. During the next 100 years, Rome had 37 different emperors - 25 of whom were removed from office by assassination. This contributed to the overall weaknesses of the empire.

Unemployment

During the latter years of the empire farming was done on large estates called latifundia that were owned

by wealthy men who used slave labor. A farmer who had to pay workmen could not produce goods as cheaply. Many farmers could not compete with these low prices and lost or sold their farms. This not only undermined the citizen farmer who passed his values to his family, but also filled the cities with unemployed people. At one time, the emperor was importing grain to feed more than 100,000 people in Rome alone. These people were not only a burden but also had little to do but cause trouble and contribute to an ever increasing crime rate.

Inflation

The roman economy suffered from inflation (an increase in prices) beginning after the reign of Marcus Aurelius. Once the Romans stopped conquering new lands, the flow of gold into the Roman economy decreased. Yet much gold was being spent by the romans to pay for luxury items. This meant that there was less gold to use in coins. As the amount of gold used in coins decreased, the coins became less valuable. To make up for this loss in value, merchants raised the prices on the goods they sold. Many people stopped using coins and began to barter to get what they needed. Eventually, salaries had to be paid in food and clothing, and taxes were collected in fruits and vegetables.

Urban decay

Wealthy Romans lived in a domus, or house, with marble walls, floors with intricate colored tiles, and windows made of small panes of glass. Most Romans, however, were not rich, They lived in small smelly rooms in apartment houses with six or more stories called islands. Each island covered an entire block. At one time there were 44,000 apartment houses within the city walls of Rome. First-floor apartments were not occupied by the poor since these living quarters rented for about \$00 a year. The more shaky wooden stairs a family had to climb, the cheaper the rent became. The upper apartments that the poor rented for \$40 a year were hot, dirty, crowded, and dangerous. Anyone who could not pay the rent was forced to move out and live on the crime-infested streets. Because of this cities began to decay.

Inferior Technology

During the last 400 years of the empire, the scientific achievements of the Romans were limited almost entirely to engineering and the organization of public services. They built marvelous roads, bridges, and aqueducts. They established the first system of medicine for the benefit of the poor. But since the Romans relied so much on human and animal labor, they failed to invent many new machines or find new technology to produce goods more efficiently. They could not provide enough goods for their growing population. They were no longer conquering other civilizations and adapting their technology, they were actually losing territory they could not longer maintain with their legions.

Military Spending

Maintaining an army to defend the border of the Empire from barbarian attacks was a constant drain on the government. Military spending left few resources for other vital activities, such as providing public housing and maintaining quality roads and aqueducts. Frustrated Romans lost their desire to defend the Empire. The empire had to begin hiring soldiers recruited from the unemployed city mobs or worse from foreign counties. Such an army was not only unreliable, but very expensive. The emperors were forced to raise taxes frequently which in turn led again to increased inflation.

THE FINAL BLOWS

For years, the well-disciplined Roman army held the barbarians of Germany back. Then in the third

century A. D. the Roman soldiers were pulled back from the Rhine-Danube frontier to fight civil war in Italy. This left the Roman border open to attack. Gradually Germanic hunters and herders from the north began to overtake Roman lands in Greece and Gaul (later France). Then in 476 A. D. the Germanic general Odacer or Odovacar overthrew the last of the Roman Emperors, Augustulus Romulus. From then on the western part of the Empire was ruled by Germanic chieftain. Roads and bridges were left in disrepair and fields left untilled. Pirates and bandits made travel unsafe. Cities could not be maintained without goods from the farms, trade and business began to disappear. And Rome was no more in the West.

???? Fall of the United States ????

Give a present day example:

Decline in Morals and Values

Public Health

Political Corruption

Unemployment

Urban decay

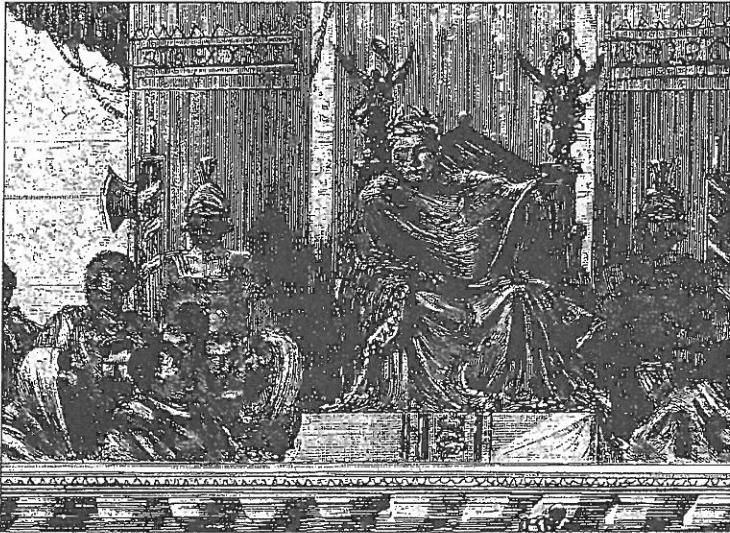
Inferior Technology

Military Spending

Make a prediction about the future of the United States.

The Fall of Rome

Rome wasn't built in a day, nor did it crumble in a day. In a sense, the empire had begun to fall as soon as it began to rise.



ROME WAS AWARE OF THE ROLE OF POMP IN MAINTAINING CONTROL OF ITS FAR-FLUNG LANDS. A 19TH-CENTURY ENGRAVING SHOWS EMPEROR NERO, WHO RULED FROM 54-68 AD, AT A GLADIATOR CONTEST. BELOW, A ROMAN COIN BEARS THE FACE OF NERO.



HISTORY HAS ATTRIBUTED ROME'S DOWNFALL TO numerous causes, not the least of which was the relentless pressure exerted by barbarian tribes along its frontiers. From the time of its founding, Rome had successfully repelled myriad attackers and, by the 2nd century AD, the security of its European borders required little military effort. But this was not to last. When those many Vandals, Huns, and miscellaneous ruffians began arriving in ever greater numbers, Rome was growing smaller and weaker, making defense decidedly more difficult.

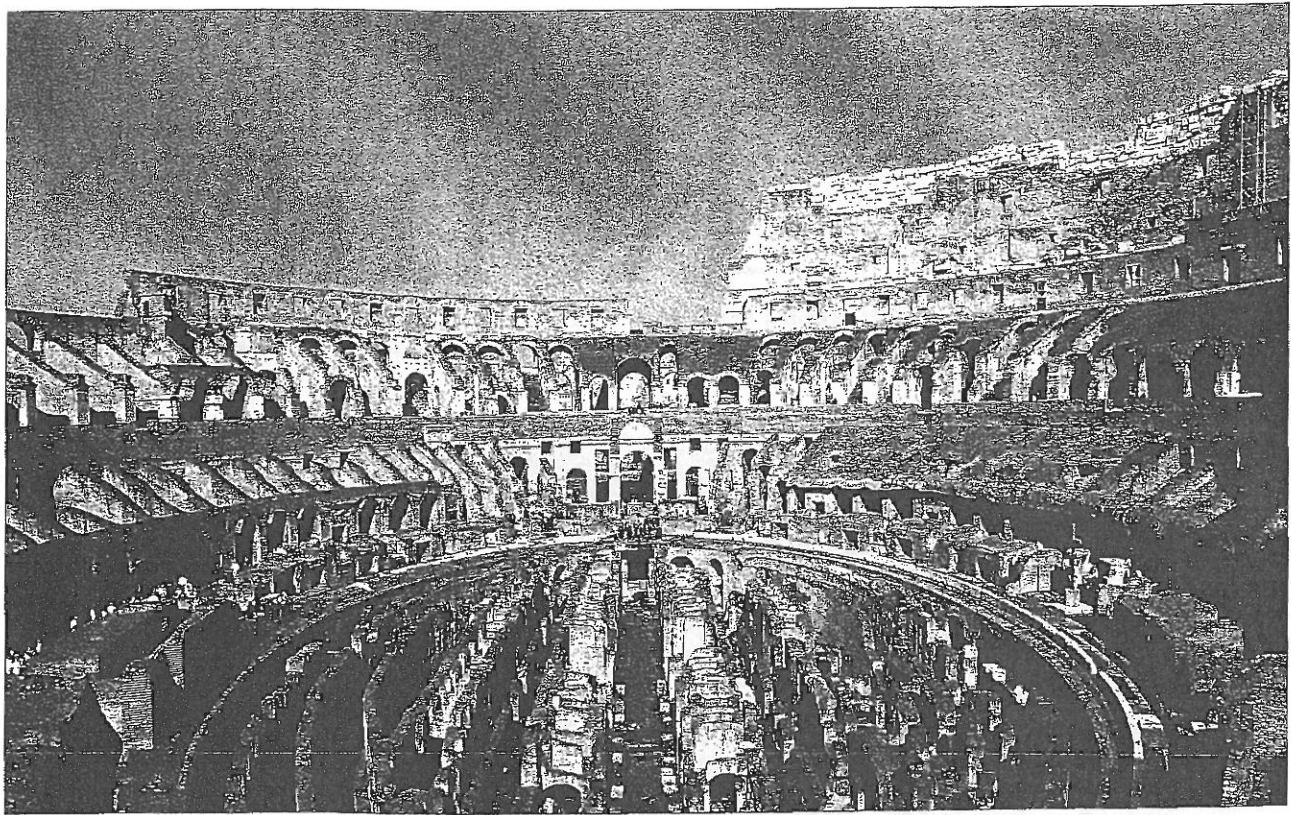
Stretching from northern England to the Middle East, the Roman Empire fluctuated in extent but it always encompassed the Mediterranean, which the Romans called *mare nostrum* ("our sea"). But Rome found that the gigantic and extraordinary empire it had so successfully created was too unwieldy to administer and protect. Its size awakened ambitious dreams of power in megalomaniacal generals and senators who waged wasteful internal wars to gain imperial control.

A GOLDEN AGE ENDS

Until the late 2nd century AD, the smooth succession of emperors had ensured the stability of the empire. But this golden age ended with the death of the emperor and Stoic philosopher Marcus Aurelius (161-180 AD), who bequeathed the throne to his foolish son Commodus, whose assassination provoked a civil war. The Roman legions proclaimed their candidates as successors, but Septimius Severus, the commander of the largest battalions, was the winner. During his reign (193-211 AD), he diminished Rome as the imperial center and initiated a military despotism. His campaigns secured the imperial borders, and his last years were spent fighting in Britain. After his death at Eborcum (present-day York), the empire passed to his relatives, notable for their cruel and dissolute behavior. The last of his successors was assassinated in 235 AD.

There followed three decades of anarchy as one emperor after another briefly came to power. The army chose an emperor for benefits he might bestow. His short reign was spent fighting his rivals, and his life ended in battle or at the hands of his erstwhile supporters. These struggles weakened imperial authority, bankrupted the empire, and left the frontiers poorly defended. In western Europe, barbarians crossed the Rhine, overran Gaul, and penetrated as far as Spain and Italy. In the East, they invaded the Balkans and Turkey, while the rival Persian Empire conquered Armenia.

After 270 AD, Rome crushed all rebels, rivals, and barbarians, restoring unity in the empire. But the military was not what it had been. The troops, firmly rooted in their provincial bases, were reluctant to serve elsewhere. The emperor's presence was required to maintain his authority with his troops and, at the same time,



THE COLOSSEUM, ORIGINALLY THE FOCUS OF A MILITANT SOCIETY, DEGENERATED INTO AN ARENA FOR DIVERTING ENTERTAINMENT. WHEN ROME WAS ATTACKED BY SUCH BARBARIANS AS THE HUNS OF CENTRAL ASIA, LED BY ATILLA (BELOW), THE ROMAN ARMY WAS INCAPABLE OF DEFENDING IT.



he was expected to fight barbarians all along the frontier from England to Egypt. To ease this burden, the Emperor Diocletian (284–305 AD) divided the empire into eastern and western sectors, each with its own emperor, and in 285 AD moved the western capital to Milan to be closer to the northern frontier.

So began the empire's internal breakup. In 330 AD, Constantine, a Christian convert, made a Turkish city founded by Greeks, Byzantium, the East's capital. Rebuilt by Constantine, the city was renamed Constantinople. Constantine's new faith quickly took root and, despite religious disputes, strengthened a state destined to survive a thousand years more.

THE DECLINE OF THE WEST

In the Western Sector, the collapse of the military and financial systems was more damaging than the barbarian threat. Diocletian, seeking to reestablish the currency, ordered balanced budgets and higher taxes. When defense spending outran revenues, the government devalued the coinage to hide the deficit. The resulting inflation destroyed the government's credit and crippled its power. When Diocletian moved the capital to Milan, Rome became provincial backwater. With the division of the

empire, Rome lost the wealth of the East, which flowed instead to Constantinople. As trade and industry dwindled away, people reverted to subsistence living. Towns were abandoned. Wealthy townspeople, weary of taxes and martial law, retreated to country estates. Impoverished rural folk left their own small farms to find work on these estates or in the fortified, if increasingly empty, towns.

BARBARIANS AT THE GATES

By the late 4th century, many barbarians had converted to Christianity. At the same time, barbarian turmoil beyond Rome's frontiers





drove Visigoths, Vandals, and others to seek sanctuary within the empire, where they were permitted to settle. As a defensive measure, the Romans employed the new arrivals as mercenaries, and barbarian generals soon assumed military and political control.

In 402 AD, Rome's army led by Stilicho the Vandal beat back the Visigoths' invasion of Italy. But when Stilicho was murdered by the Emperor Honorius, the Visigoths poured in unopposed, demanding land and subsidies. Rome's refusal to negotiate signaled its ruin.

The Visigoths besieged the walled city, where plague and famine had already run rampant through the citizenry. Finally, in August 410 AD, the Visigoths, with help from slaves within the city, marched through its gates. Their sack of Rome was mild, almost respectful. But it dimmed Rome's prestige, and the city became prey for more ruthless barbarians.

The year 476 is usually given as the date for the fall of the Roman Empire. In that year, the barbarian general Odoacer deposed the last western emperor and, refusing to acknowledge the power of the emperor in the East, proclaimed himself King of Italy.

The event passed almost unnoticed. By this time, the regions in the West had been swallowed up by belligerent barbarians.

THE ETERNAL CITY TODAY

Rome—often called “the eternal city”—revived, of course, and survives in much of its glory. In the Dark Ages, the Papacy established its importance as a spiritual center, and Roman ruins and monuments that include the Pan-

OMEN IN THE SKY

Some scholars say the struggles between Rome's new Christianity and the old atheism contributed to the fall of the Roman Empire. If so, the seeds were sown when Constantine the Great's Edict of Milan officially approved Christianity. But how was Constantine supposed to have been converted?

Legend has it that on October 27, 312 AD, the night before a decisive battle with his rival, the soon-to-be Roman emperor saw a golden Chi-Rho cross, the sign of Christ, in the skies near the Milvian Bridge. On the cross were emblazoned the words, *In Hoc Signo Vinces*, or “With this sign, you will win.”

Constantine embraced the prophetic miracle, and the next day handily defeated his opponent, crediting his victory to Christ and urging Rome to embrace the Lord. Constantine became the first Christian emperor and, in 313, gave Christians full freedom to practice their religion.

How likely was that evening occurrence? Con-

stantine did not seem too affected by it overall—he himself converted to Christianity only on his deathbed, and even that is disputed. Christianity did not even become the official religion under Constantine's rule—that happened 60 years after his death, about six emperors later.

Modern scholars theorize that the “vision” he had in the sky was the rare conjunction of Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn, which occurred around the October 27 date. In an attempt to rally his troops, the quick-thinking Constantine may have turned a possible bad omen into a prophecy of victory.



CONSTANTINE THE GREAT REBUILT THE CITY OF BYZANTIUM AND NAMED IT CONSTANTINOPLE, WHICH WOULD BECOME ISTANBUL. MANY OF THE CITY'S TREASURES, LIKE THE HAGIA SOPHIA (“CHURCH OF HOLY WISDOM”), DATE FROM THE ERA OF CHRISTIANITY.

theon—a church for 1,000 years—now dominate the cityscape. In the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, Rome's citizens recycled stones and statues from ancient structures to build beautiful palaces and churches.

Whither Rome today? At the beginning of the 21st century, the city is engaged in a massive effort to renovate its ancient structures, piazzas, and multifaceted treasures. When the scaffolding is pulled down, Rome may be revealed as the true *caput mundi*—the head of the world—if not in power, then certainly in splendor.

