

Research paper on the fall of the roman empire

[History](#), [Empires](#)



Examine the fall of the Roman Empire in detail, focusing on why and how such a powerful and strong empire collapsed and ultimately what were the main reasons and factors that led to its decline.

More than just a powerful empire, Rome was a uniting force bonding under the famous pax romana almost all of the then known world. In its long history the Roman Empire created an intricate web of organization and administration throughout the territories it occupied. Its culture, art and literature are still part of our civilization today, while many European languages derive from Latin, the language used by the ancient Romans (Le Glay, Voisin, Le Bohec, 484). At the same time, the fall of the Roman Empire changed Europe radically, signaling the end of antiquity. How and why Rome fell, the processes and factors that contributed to it have been debated ever since and will be examined in this essay.

In recent years, one more debate has been opened among historians. Was the fall of Rome really a collapse or was it simply a transformation? Noble et al argue that “no catastrophic time, place or event marked the fall of Rome” (204). Still, this is not universally accepted and Heather insists that “the end of empire was a major event in human history” that changed the world in more than one way. Even if the notion that the roman world never ceased to exist but simply transformed is interesting and tempting, Heather seems to be correct as the changes were so big and profound that it is probably best to consider the fall of Rome a real collapse. From the fourth century C. E. the roman state gradually stopped working, public administration collapsed, illiteracy became the norm, trade reached a low point and gradually new states were formed (Damen, Heather). Rome fell twice: first in 410 when the

Visigoths under Alaric attacked and sacked the city (Le Glay, Voisin, Le Bohec, 484) and then again in 476 when a German general named Odovacar deposed the last western Roman emperor (Damen).

Many reasons have been put forward to explain the end of the Roman Empire. The most prominent of them are: barbaric invasions, political instability, economic problems and the creation of two empires one in the East which continued until 1453 and a second in the West (Damen).

Barbarians and barbaric invasions have been considered the main cause for the fall of Rome for decades (Le Glay Voisin, Le Bohec, 483). Rome had issues with the Germanic tribes in the past and even allowed great numbers among them to migrate in the territories of the empire being employed either in farming or more often in the army (Damen). The numbers of immigrants rose dramatically as time passed by. As the empire offered unrivalled stability, in times of invasions or other crises, barbarians tried to enter the empire often fighting their way through (Southern). Raids on the Northern borders became more and more common from the first part of the 3rd century onwards (Southern). When the Huns invaded Europe in the 370's, Germanic tribes tried to force their way in Roman territories and in 378, Visigoths killed the emperor Valens. Their presence continued to provoke chaos until the final sacking of Rome by another German in 476 (Lightfoot). Whether peaceful or violent, the migrations of Germanic tribes into Roman soil proved a destabilizing factor for the empire. According Heather, the state gradually lost control of its provinces and this resulted in the loss of a vital base for tax collection. As Rome desperately needed taxes for its survival, the results were catastrophic.

Political instability was not something new for the Romans either. It was from civil war and instability that the empire sprang at the times of Augustus in the late first century B. C. E. (Noble et al, 174). From the 3rd century however this became widespread with assassinations and clashes becoming more and more common (Noble et al, 188). More than twenty men held the office of the emperor in the years between 235 and 284 and this is indicative of the chaos in which the empire was sinking (Noble et al, 189). These men completely based their rule on the support of the army, their ascent usually followed the assassination of the previous emperor and they too would eventually have the same fate (Lightfoot). The reforms of Diocletian and Constantine briefly saved Rome in the 4th century; however, by 364 a new political crisis was threatening the empire (Le Glay Voisin, Le Bohec, 478). Rome never really recovered and the 5th century is traditionally considered the century of its final demise. Damen suggests that a series of bad emperors led to a corrupt administration that was ultimately based on heavy taxation in order to support its heavy militarism.

At the same time, and perhaps because of political instability, Rome faced serious economic problems. Like the political crisis, the economic one began in the 3rd century (Damen). Devaluations of the Roman currency in order to sustain the large army of barbarians led to inflation and very high taxes (Damen). Taxation was especially catastrophic for the rural areas and the gap between rich and poor widened (Le Glay, Voisin, Le Bohec, 484). At the same time, the absence of new cheap slaves that began in the 3rd century led to the abandonment of agriculture and its industry giving more fuel to the already big economic problems of the empire. In such an environment

loyalty to the Roman state declined steadily (Noble et al, 211). So did its population. Population declined for centuries all over the empire probably as a result of never-ending war in both the Northern and Eastern frontiers, plagues inside its borders and perhaps even the unwillingness of Romans to change their luxurious lifestyles in order to produce children (Damen).

The foundation of a new capital on the Bosphorus in 330 by the emperor Constantine consolidated the split of the empire into two parts: the Western with Rome as its capital and the Eastern with the new city of Constantinople as the capital (Lightfoot). The eventual placement of two emperors one for each part of the empire after the death of Constantine further strengthened the division and by the end of the 4th century East and West were following their separate routes (Le Glay, Voisin, Le Bohec, 484).

Rome had faced major crises from the beginning of its history. How could this one lead a powerful empire to its demise? Historians had long suggested a natural decline that led to the end of the Roman Empire (Le Glay, Voisin, Le Bohec, 484). More recently, scholars tend to believe that a combination of the problems discussed in the previous pages which appeared

simultaneously and some on a far greater scale than ever before (Southern). The end of Rome was therefore not the result of one simple event or one simple factor. Various things contributed to the demise of the empire that had ruled most of Europe and the Near East for more than two centuries. The end did not occur in a year or even in several years. It took centuries for the process to be completed and eventually this process left another Roman Empire in the East and a legacy in the West that continued for the centuries to come and is still very much present today.

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