

189 A.D.

Rome's addiction to the games is reaching new and absurd heights under Emperor Commodus. He believes that he is the god Hercules. He prefers killing captive men and animals in his favorite role as gladiator, to running the empire.

Instead of politics, there are deadly chariot races led by the drunken ruler. Senators and nobles must attend, for no-one is safe.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to find good people to serve in the government.

Division of empire brings huge increase in burden of taxation

Rome, 293

Diocletian's decision to divide the empire into East and West may make sense as far as governing distant territories is concerned but it has given rise to a massive increase in bureaucracy.

Both sections need a large number of officers - keepers of their palaces, personnel officers, record keepers, etc. This doubling of the normal number of state servants has created a huge increase in taxation.

Rather than face the burden of high taxes, many craftsmen have fled the country. Some farmers have abandoned their land and others are working for large landowners, in order to escape the taxes.

Roaring inflation hits small traders

Rome, 260

With wars raging throughout the empire and inflation rampant at home. Rome is facing a major economic crisis which is made worse by the political and military problems now confronting the empire.

The cost of maintaining fighting armies on so many fronts is crippling the Roman treasury and making it difficult to achieve agreement on measures to combat inflation.

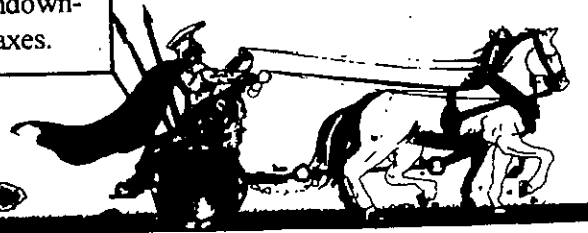
New coins are being produced in record numbers, but their silver content has been reduced. The depreciation of the denarius-combined with the dangers on road and sea- have paralyzed trade.

Plague has broken out and again food production has been reduced by overworked soil. Famines have become commonplace. Tradesmen, craftsmen, and small farmers are all hard hit.

With money becoming valueless, barter is commonplace throughout Rome.

The bigger landlords are thriving and becoming richer however, and buying up cheap land to increase the size of their estates.

excerpts from Chronicle of the World



New Roman capital to be at Byzantium

Byzantium. 324

Emperor Constantine has officially moved the capital from Rome to the Greek city of Byzantium. The city, called Constantinople, is located on the Bosphorus Strait.

The Huns invade Europe

Upper Danube Basin, 375

From the desolate Siberian deserts, the Huns have driven westwards. They are unsurpassed marksman with bow or lasso while on horseback. They have swept aside peoples who had warlike reputations themselves. They are not yet at the gates of Rome, but they are just across the river and threaten to intensify pressures on the empire.

Rome is sacked for the second time in less than 50 years

Rome, 16 June 455

The Vandal army laden with booty is leaving Rome. For two weeks its troops have plundered the great city, although they agreed not to burn it after a plea by Pope Leo.

The inability of the empire to defend the most prestigious city in the world against such an attack is proof of its decayed state.

Spain has fallen and North Africa is in the hands of the Vandals.

Barbarians sack Rome

Rome, 24 August 410

For three days German hordes have roamed the streets of Rome, burning and pillaging the greatest city in the known world.

Under their leader, King Alaric, the Visigoths have been a threat to the empire since 375. Rome has had to hire barbarian mercenaries to meet the Visigoth threat. The empire has been unable recruit enough Romans to fight in the military.

Realists know that the Romans are to blame for the weakness of the empire because they have given up their responsibility for defending themselves.

Western Emperor deposed by barbarian

September 476

The Western empire has seen ten emperors come and go in the past 21 years; now it has as ruler a man who refuses to call himself emperor.

Odoacer denies the need for separate Eastern and Western Emperors and will rule as the lieutenant of the Emperor Zeno in Constantinople. He only asks that he be recognized as a Roman citizen, though born a barbarian. Many believe that this signals the end of the empire in the West.

