

DBQ 3: FALL OF THE WESTERN ROMAN EMPIRE

Document 1

This adapted excerpt describes the Western Roman Empire.

The basic trouble was that very few inhabitants of the empire believed that the old civilization was worth saving [T]he overwhelming majority of the population had been systematically excluded from political responsibilities. They could not organize to protect themselves; they could not serve in the army. . . . Their economic plight was hopeless. Most of them were serfs bound to the soil, and the small urban groups saw their cities slipping into uninterrupted decline

Source: Strayer, Gatzke, and Harbison, *The Course of Civilization*, Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1961 (adapted)

What were the basic problems facing the Western Roman Empire, according to these authors?

Document 2

This adapted excerpt describes the fall of the Roman Empire.

The decline of Rome was the natural and inevitable effect of immoderate greatness [large size]. . . . The introduction . . . of Christianity had some influence on the decline and fall of the Roman empire. The clergy successfully preached the doctrine of patience; the active virtues of society were discouraged; and the last remains of military spirit were buried in the cloister; a large portion of public and private wealth was consecrated to the . . . demands of charity and devotion. . . .

Source: Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 1776–88 (adapted)

According to this excerpt from Gibbon, what were two causes for the fall of Rome? Explain both.

(continued)

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Document 3

This excerpt described economic factors in the Roman Empire.

First the economic factor . . . While the empire was expanding, its prosperity was fed by plundered wealth and by new markets in the semi-barbaric provinces. When the empire ceased to expand, however, economic progress soon ceased. . . .

The abundance of slaves led to the growth of the latifundia, the great estates that . . . came to dominate agriculture and ruin the free coloni [farmers], who drifted to the cities, to add to the unemployment there. The abundance of slaves likewise kept wages low.

Source: Herbert J. Muller, *Uses of the Past*, Signet, 1967 (adapted)

What economic issues did Muller identify as causes for decline? Explain.

In what ways was slavery a cause for the decline of the Roman Empire?

Document 4

This excerpt blames the decline of the Roman Empire on the heavy taxation required to support the government's expenses.

Part of the money went into . . . the maintenance of the army and of the vast bureaucracy required by a centralized government. . . . [T]he expense led to strangling taxation. . . . The heart was taken out of enterprising men . . . tenants fled from their farms and businessmen and workmen from their occupations. Private enterprise was crushed and the state was forced to take over many kinds of business to keep the machine running. People learned to expect something for nothing. The old Roman virtues of self-reliance and initiative were lost in that part of the population on relief [welfare]. . . . The central government undertook such far-reaching responsibility in affairs that the fiber of the citizens weakened.

Source: Henry Haskell, *The New Deal in Old Rome*, A.A. Knopf, 1947 (adapted)

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Why did the Roman government have large expenses?

What was the effect of high taxation on the people?

What effect did the establishment of a governmental welfare system have on the people?

Document 5

This excerpt blames the fall on "internal decay," specifically that of the military.

Rome, like all great empires, was not overthrown by external enemies but undermined by internal decay. . . . The military crisis was the result of . . . proud old aristocracy's . . . shortage of children. [Consequently,] foreigners poured into this . . . void [lack of soldiers]. The Roman army [was] composed entirely of Germans.

Source: Indro Montanelli, *Romans Without Laurels*, Pantheon Books, 1962 (adapted)

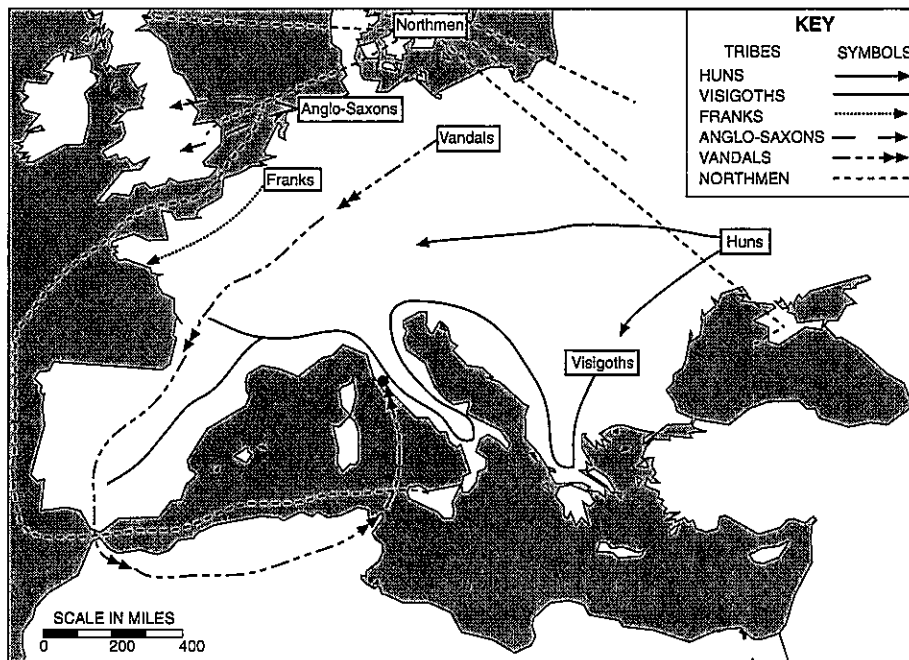
What did this author identify as the cause of problems in the military?

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Document 6

This map shows the barbarian invasions of the Roman Empire prior to 476.



According to the map above, what was the cause of the fall of the Roman Empire?

Was this a unified attack? Explain.

PART B

What caused the fall of the Western Roman Empire?