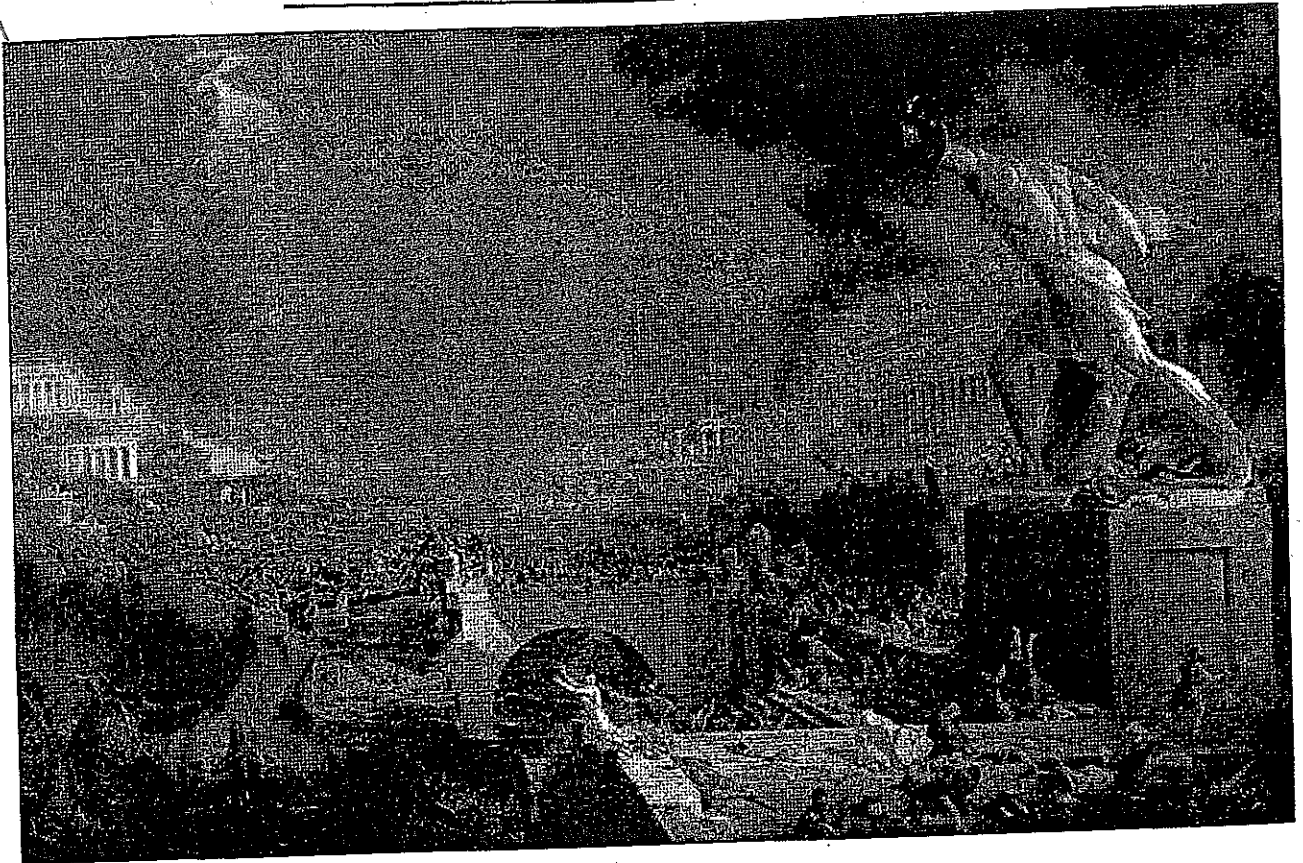


# \*Key\*

## What Were the Primary Reasons for the "Fall" of Rome?



*The Destruction of Empire*, painted by the American artist Thomas Cole in 1836.

**Overview:** From about 50 BCE until the year 200 CE, the Roman Empire was the superpower of the Mediterranean world. During that time, the empire's wealth, territory and international status grew and grew. But even as the empire prospered, it was slowly starting to fall apart. Some of its problems were internal – coming from within Rome itself – and others were external. This Mini-Q explores the factors that led to the eventual fall of one of history's most powerful and influential empires.

### The Documents:

- Document A: Roman Emperors, 235-285 CE (chart)
- Document B: The Roman Army
- Document C: Foreign Invasions (map)
- Document D: The Huns
- Document E: Economic Corruption
- Document F: Disasters and Disease

A Mini Document Based Question (Mini-Q)

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Document A

Source: Chart compiled from various sources.

Roman Emperors, 235-285 CE

Emperor	Reign	Cause of Death
Maximinus	235-38 CE	Assassination
Gordian I & II (co-rulers)	238	Suicide; killed in battle
Balbinus & Pupineus	238	Assassination
Gordian III	238-44	Possible assassination
Philip the Arab	244-49	Killed in battle
Decius	249-51	Killed in battle
Hostilian	251	Possible plague
Gallus	251-53	Assassination
Aemilianus	253	Assassination
Valerian & Gallienus	253-60	Died as slave of Persians; assassination
Claudius Gothicus	268-70	Plague
Quintillus	270	Assassination or suicide
Aurelian	270-75	Assassination
Tacitus	275-76	Possible assassination
Florianus	276	Assassination
Probus	276-82	Assassination
Carus	282-83	Assassination
Numerian	283-84	Possible assassination
Carinus	283-85	Killed in battle

Document Analysis

- How many Roman emperors ruled during the 50-year period covered by this chart? How many died a natural death? What was the most frequent cause of death of these men?  
*22 emperors ruled in a 50 year period. 2 died a natural death.*
- What message might these frequent and violent changes in leadership have sent to people of the Roman Empire?  
*instability and fear*
- What message might these frequent and violent changes in leadership have sent to people living outside the Roman Empire?  
*instability in the government which meant the empire was open to attack.*
- How does this document help explain the decline of the Roman Empire?  
*There was no stable leadership in Rome's government because of political violence.*

Document B

Pr. ver

Source: An excerpt from the ancient book *Concerning Military Matters* by the Roman historian Vegetius, c. 450 CE.

[Before the year 400 CE] footsoldiers wore breastplates and helmets. But when, because of negligence and laziness, parade ground drills were abandoned, the customary armor began to seem heavy since the soldiers rarely ever wore it. Therefore, they first asked the emperor to set aside the breastplates ... and then the helmets. So our soldiers fought the Goths without any protection for chest and head and were often beaten by archers. Although there were many disasters, which led to the loss of great cities, no one tried to restore breastplates and helmets to the infantry. Thus it happens that troops in battle, exposed to wounds because they have no armor, think about running and not about fighting.

EV

Source: Michael Grant, *The Fall of the Roman Empire: A Reappraisal*, Crown Publishing, 1982.

second

There can be little doubt that the weaknesses of the late Roman army were largely due to the eventual failure ... to enforce regular conscription [draft of soldiers] .... The exempted categories were ... numerous. Hosts of senators, bureaucrats, and clergymen were entitled to avoid the draft; and among other groups who escaped were cooks, bakers, and slaves.

weakened

Document Analysis

1st  
1. According to Vegetius, what led to the changes in Roman military armor and training techniques?  
negligence and laziness led to military changes.  
the army abandoned ground drills and armor

2. How did the change in breastplates and helmets contribute to the decline of Rome?  
soldiers fought without armor and thought about running instead of fighting.

2nd  
3. What is conscription?

draft of soldiers

4. In what ways could the failure to enforce conscription weaken Rome?  
why were some exempt?

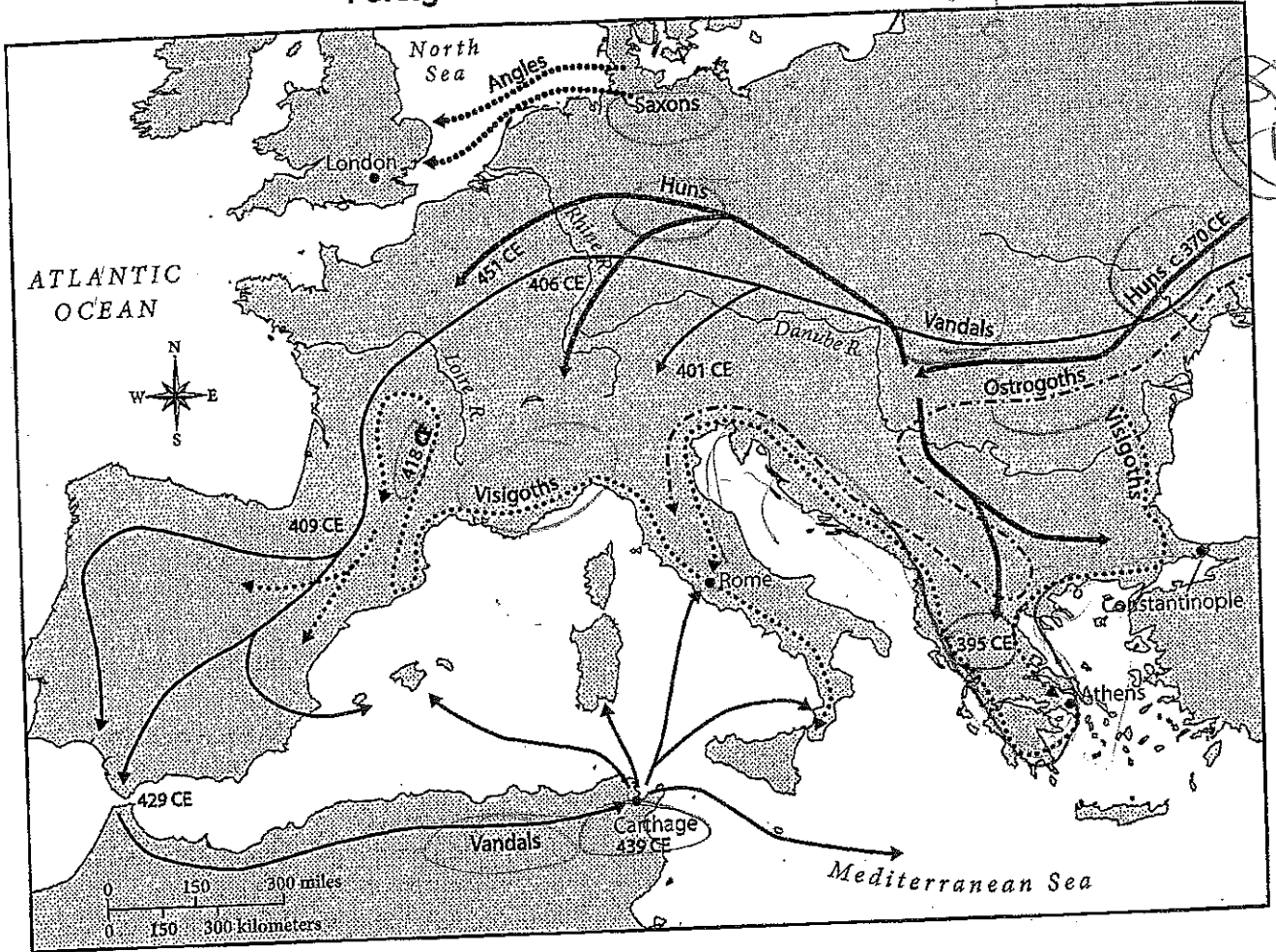
5. Is there any connection between Document A and Document B? Explain your thinking.  
The army was smaller and weaker.

no strong leader to be loyal to  
and no leader to consistently enforce ground

### Document C

Source: Map created from various sources.

### Foreign Invasions of the Roman Empire



### Document Analysis

1. Which invaders of the Roman Empire came from the farthest eastern point?

Huns

2. Which invaders of the Roman Empire were the first to reach the city of Rome?

Visigoths

3. Do the dates on this map suggest an invasion of people or a migration of people? Explain your thinking.

Invasion. Migration suggests people returning back home.

4. How does this document help explain the reasons for the decline of the Roman Empire?

Rome was being attacked/invaded many different people

5. Is there a possible connection between Document C and Document B?

Having the a weak army allowed the country to be vulnerable and open to invasions

Document D

Source: Excerpts about an Asian tribe called the Huns from *Roman History* by the Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus, c. 380 CE.

The Huns exceed any definition of savagery. They have compact, sturdy limbs and thick necks.... Although they have the shape ... of human beings, they are so wild in their way of life that they have no need of fire or pleasant tasting foods, but eat the roots of uncultivated plants and the half-raw flesh of all sorts of animals. This they place between their thighs and the backs of their horses and so warm it a little .... Huns are never sheltered by buildings, but ... roam freely in the mountains and woods, learning from their earliest childhood to endure freezing cold, hunger and thirst.... Huns are not well adapted to battle on foot, but are almost glued to their horses, which are certainly hardy, but also ugly.... Like refugees – all without permanent settlements, homes, law, or a fixed way of life – they are always on the move with their wagons, in which they leave.... Like unthinking animals, they are completely ignorant of the difference between right and wrong. Fired with an overwhelming desire for seizing the property of others, these swift-moving and ungovernable people make their destructive way amid the pillage and slaughter of those who live around them.

Document Analysis

1. Who was Ammianus Marcellinus?

A Roman historian

2. What words and phrases does Ammianus use to describe the Huns?

"Savage" "unthinking animals" "wild in their way of life"

3. What does Marcellinus mean when he describes the Huns as being "glued to their horses"?

always on the move to attack

4. Why might a Roman historian like Ammianus want to compare the Huns to "unthinking animals"?

They are ungovernable. Like unthinking animals they are ignorant of right and wrong.

5. How can you use this document to help explain the decline of the Roman Empire?

Invasions by the Huns contributed to Rome's decline. The Romans ideology was that they could not defeat the Huns

### Document E

Source: An excerpt of a historical text written by Priscus, Roman ambassador to the Huns, 449 CE.

Note: Priscus is reporting a conversation he had with a former Roman citizen whose land had been conquered by the Huns.

[He] ... considered his new life ... better than his old life among the Romans, and the reasons he gave were as follows: ... The condition of [Roman] subjects in time of peace [is worse than war] ... taxes are very severe, and unprincipled men inflict injuries on others ... A [wealthy lawbreaker] ... is not punished for his injustice, while a poor man ... undergoes the legal penalty .... The climax of misery is to have to pay in order to obtain justice.... [He said] that the laws and constitution of the Romans were fair, but deplored that the governors, not possessing the spirit of former generations, were ruining the state.

### Document Analysis

1. Who was Priscus? Do you think his description is reliable? Why?

a Roman ambassador

2. Why were some Romans happy about being conquered by the Huns?

Rome's government had become corrupt. Before being attacked by the Huns the Roman government was unfair treatment in Rome's government. taxes were high and

3. What does the person talking to Priscus mean when he says, "The climax of misery is to have to pay ... for justice"?

The worst part of misery is having to pay for fair treatment.

4. How can you use this document to help explain what caused the decline of the Roman Empire?

Rome's government was corrupt and as a result life in Rome was unpleasant. There were also high taxes leaving the Romans poor.

### Document F

Severus

Source: Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Strahan & Cadell, 1776-1788.

Note: It took the author 12 years to write this six-volume set of books.

In the second year of the reign of Valens (366 <sup>AD</sup> CE) ... the Roman world was shaken by a violent and destructive earthquake .... The shores of the Mediterranean were left dry by the sudden retreat of the sea ... but the tide soon returned with the weight of an immense [flood] which was severely felt on the coasts of Sicily, ... Greece, and of Egypt .... Fifty thousand persons had lost their lives in the flood [in the city of Alexandria alone] .... [T]his calamity ... astonished and terrified the subjects of Rome ... and their fearful vanity was disposed to [see a connection between] the symptoms of a declining empire and a sinking world....

Source: Peter Stearns, Michael Adas, Stuart Schwartz, Marc Jason Gilbert, *World Civilizations: The Global Experience*, Pearson Education, 2000.

increased taxes

More important in initiating the process of decline was a series of plagues that swept over the empire... which brought diseases [from] southern Asia to new areas like the Mediterranean, where no resistance had been established even to contagions such as the measles. The resulting diseases decimated the population. The population of Rome decreased from a million people to 250,000. Economic life worsened in consequence. Recruitment of troops became more difficult, so the empire was increasingly reduced to hiring Germanic soldiers to guard its frontiers. The need to pay troops added to the demands on the state's budget, just as declining production cut into tax revenues.

### Document Analysis

1. In the Gibbon passage, what natural disaster struck the Roman Empire in 366 CE?
2. In the Stearns passage, what deadly illness arrived from southern Asia?

earthquake → flood

plagues

3. Describe one specific way that the two disasters detailed above contributed to the decline of the Roman Empire.

① less people in population not enough people for military troops

population decreased

4. Consider the various causes of decline presented by the six documents in this Mini-Q: political assassinations, military problems like armor and conscription, legal injustice, foreign invasions, and natural disasters. Which of these do you regard as the most important three causes? Explain.

Students give opinion for this answers

\* answers vary