

FALL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Quaestio: _____

INTERNAL FACTORS

Nunc Agenda: Collapse of Commerce

... By the middle of the second century Italy [within the Roman Empire] was in a state of decline. By the time of Diocletian, at the opening of the fourth century, decay was apparent throughout the empire. Commerce had largely disappeared owing to (because of) the lack of customers, to piracy on the seas, and to insecurity of the roads on land. Generally speaking, purchasing power at that time was confined to the public officials, to the army officers, and to the great landowners. Trade in the everyday objects of daily use had all but disappeared, but trade in luxuries prospered. The cities in the west, omitting (except for) the places where government centered, were usually in decline; their commercial and industrial classes had disappeared, the old traders having been replaced by the traveling eastern merchant, of whom the Syrian was the most notorious. Foreign trade was sharply curtailed (cut short). At various times the government attempted to prohibit the export of various commodities (trade goods), among them wine, oil, grain, salt, arms, iron, and gold. With this curbing (reducing) of exports there was also an effort made to control certain imports such as is evidenced by the state monopoly in silk. These two movements hampered (reduced, weakened) commercial contracts outside the empire and all but killed what was left of foreign trade....

Source: Louis C. West, "The Economic Collapse of the Roman Empire," The Classical Journal, November 1932

1. *According to Louis C. West, what were two economic problems the Roman Empire faced during its period of decline?*

2. *Think about the factors that had allowed for peace and stability in Rome during the earlier days of the Empire. In what ways did the conditions in this later period represent an almost opposite version of the Pax Romana?*



Antonine Plague

- Last Emperor of Pax Romana = Marcus Aurelius
 - _____ Philosopher, remembered as one of the best
 - During war with Parthia, soldiers brought back a _____ (either smallpox or measles) killing 25% of the Roman population, even more among the military
 - Death toll means a weaker _____ (fewer buyers and sellers) and military

Crisis of the Third Century (235-284 CE)

- Major external threat = Germanic tribes like _____ and _____

- Rome hired Germanic soldiers as _____ (soldiers for hire)
 - Reasons: increase size of military, turn enemies into allies
 - Problems: mercenaries are loyal to _____ and their generals, not Rome itself
 - Result: General after general taking over as emperor by violent force
 - During the Crisis, 41 people claimed the title of Emperor
- Violence and instability further weakens trade
 - Emperors raised _____ to pay for military
 - People felt less _____ to trade / invest / spend their savings
 - Less conquering → less wealth coming in
 - Poor urban people began to move to rural areas to work as peasant farmers (coloni) for rich _____ who protected them (reverse urbanization)
 - Attempted Solution: Emperors mix lead into the silver coins, devaluing currency, to create more coins
 - Result: _____ (dramatic rise of prices), more being charged for same products
- Two parts of the Empire broke away from Rome, forming the Gallic Empire in Gaul and Britannia and the Palmyrene Empire in Syria and Egypt

Diocletian & Constantine

- Emperor Diocletian (284-305) tried to stabilize the Empire by dividing rule between four emperors (2 East 2 West), called the _____, a system that soon collapsed
- Began most severe persecution of Christians by the Roman Empire
- Abandoned the title Princeps (low key) for the title Domine (high key), meaning _____
- Emperor Constantine (309-324) reunited the Empire, and moved the capital to Byzantium, renamed _____, in the more prosperous East
- Empire soon split again between East and West.
- Legalized Christianity (Edict of Milan), ending persecutions and beginning a series of Christian Emperors until Emperor Theodosius (379-395) made Christianity the official religion of the Empire.

External Problems

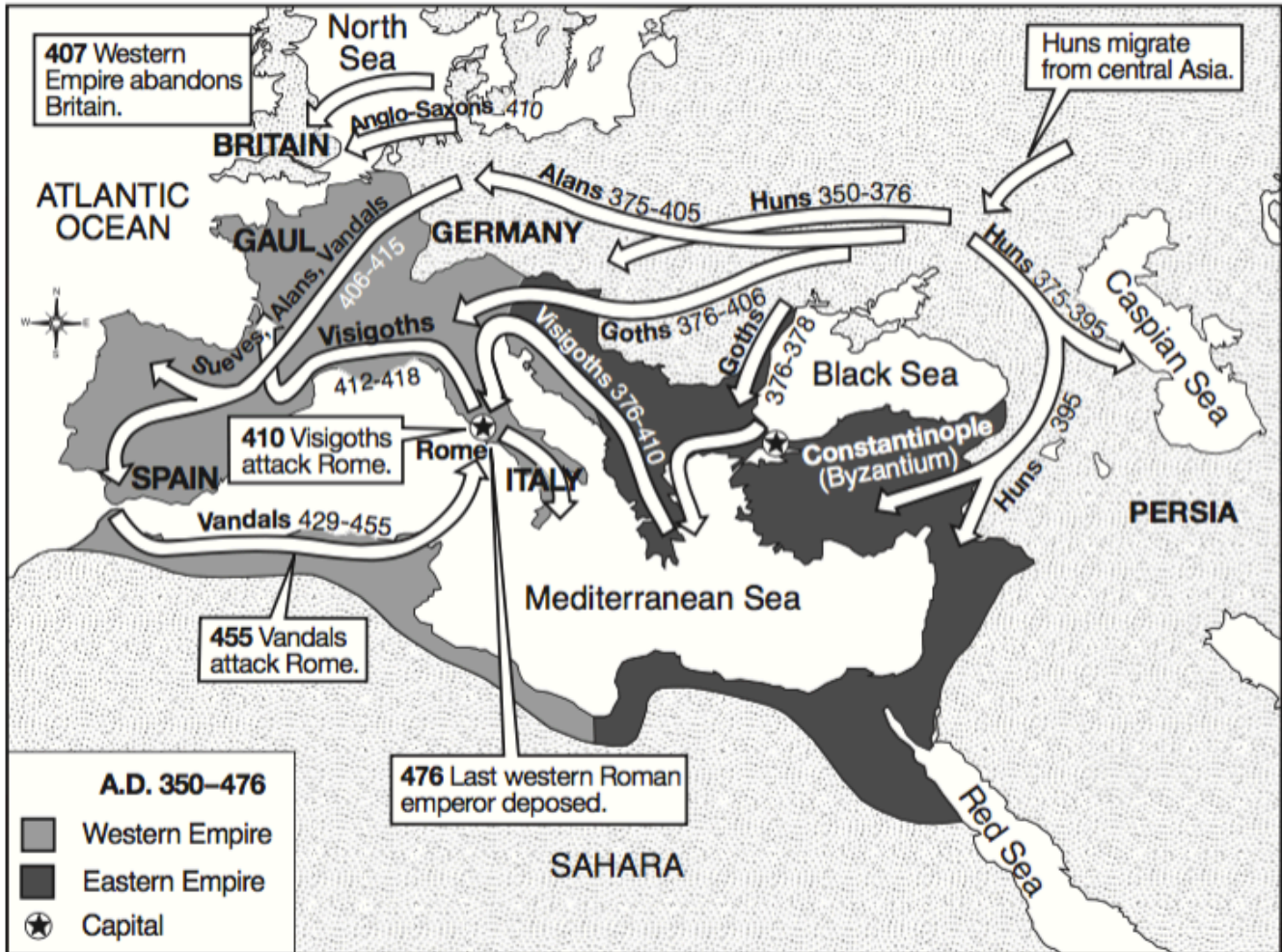
- No new conquests of land and no money means no paying mercenaries what they were promised, which means Germans with Roman training now want to fight Rome!
- PLUS a new and more powerful threat emerged from the East, the _____!

EXTERNAL FACTORS

Directions: There was no single cause for the fall of the Roman Empire. Many different internal and external factors came together to contribute to the decline of Rome. Now that you have examined some of the internal factors, **examine each of the documents provided below and answer the questions in order to identify the external factors.**

Waves of Invasions

Roman Empire A.D. 350–476



Source: *The Nystrom Atlas of World History*, Herff Jones Education Division (adapted)

1. Based on the information shown on this map, in what way did the invasion of the Huns create a “domino effect” of invasion into Rome?
2. The map shows the division of the Empire into two halves, first begun by Emperor Diocletian. How might this division have made the Romans more vulnerable to invaders?

Hunnic Invasions and Germanic Refugees

For centuries, Rome had faced attacks from the **Germanic** peoples who lived east of the Rhine and north of the Danube rivers. When Rome was powerful, the legions (Roman military) on the frontiers (border lands) were successful in holding back the invaders. In fact, some of the Germanic peoples who lived along the borders learned Roman ways and became allies of the Romans. However, as early as **200 CE**, wars in East Asia set off a chain of events that would eventually overwhelm Rome, thousands of miles to the west. Those wars sent a nomadic people, the **Huns**, migrating from central Asia toward eastern Europe, which they reached by **370 CE**. These skilled riders fought fierce battles to dislodge (remove) the Germanic peoples in their path. The Visigoths, Ostrogoths, and other Germanic peoples who were expelled from their lands crossed into Roman territory seeking safety. With the empire in decline, Roman legions were hard pressed to halt the invaders. Under pressure from attacks, the Roman empire surrendered first Britain, then France and Spain. It was only a matter of time before foreign invaders marched into Italy and took over Rome itself.

Source: Elizabeth Gaynor Ellis and Anthony Elser, "The Long Decline," World History (adapted)

3. *Do you think the Romans would have viewed the Germanic peoples crossing over their borders as **refugees** (people fleeing violence seeking safety) or as **invaders**? How do you think they should be viewed?*



Romans Face a Refugee Crisis

376 CE alarming reports reached the Roman emperor Valens that over **100,000 Goths** had massed on the far bank of the River Danube. It soon became clear, however, that this was no barbarian invasion. For this horde was made up of women and children as well as men; their leaders sought permission to settle in the Roman empire as allies. Their own kingdoms had been overrun by the fearsome Huns. For the Romans, this looked like a win-win situation: free manpower to address the chronic shortage in the imperial Roman army. What followed, however, was a total catastrophe. Nervous about the flood of people preparing to enter Roman land, officials tried to limit the numbers crossing the border. Soon, any remaining goodwill quickly evaporated as the Goths suffered for month after month in squalid refugee camps where hunger and disease were the norm.

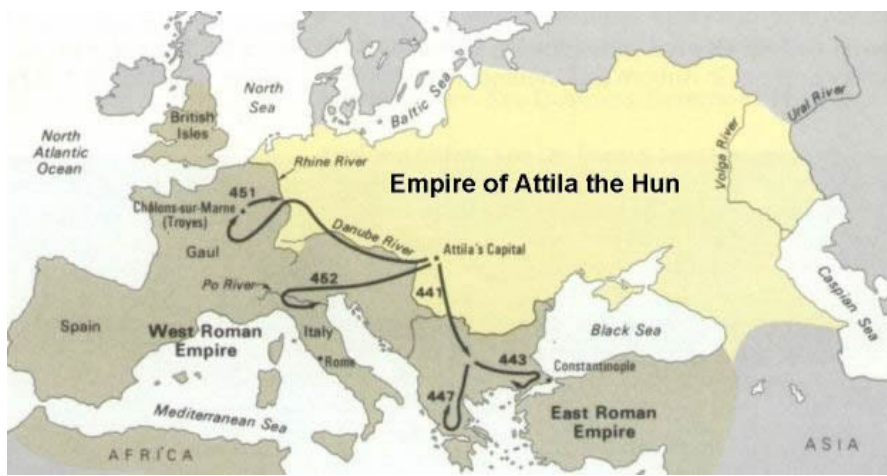
In such desperate circumstances, it was hardly surprising that refugees began raiding the surrounding countryside for food. Emperor Valens decided to march his imperial army against the Goths, and the result was one of the greatest military disasters that Rome would ever suffer. At the **Battle of Adrianople** in **378 CE**, Valens was killed and the vast majority of his army butchered. It is not difficult to see why many historians have judged Adrianople to have marked the beginning of the end for the Roman Empire in the west.

Source: Richard Miles, "What the Romans Can Teach Us About Refugees," *The Guardian* (adapted)

4. *What mistakes did the Romans make in handling the refugee crisis? What could they have done differently?*
5. *Do you think there are any lessons that can be learned today in dealing with crises like dealing with Syrian refugees coming to Europe and migrants coming to the United States from Latin America?*



The Power of Attila



Meanwhile, the Huns, who were indirectly responsible for the Germanic assault on the empire, became a direct threat. In 444 CE, they united for the first time under a powerful chieftain named Attila. With his 100,000 soldiers, Attila terrorized both halves of the empire. In the East, his armies attacked and plundered 70 cities. The Huns then swept into the West. In 452 CE, Attila's forces advanced against Rome, but bouts of famine and disease kept them from conquering the city. **Although the Huns were no longer a threat to the empire after Attila's death in 453 CE, the Germanic invasions continued.**

Source: Roger Beck, et al., "The Fall of the Roman Empire," World History: Patterns of Interaction (adapted)

"They filled the whole earth with slaughter and panic as they flitted here and there on their swift horses. . . . They were at hand everywhere before they were expected: by their speed they outstripped rumour, and they took pity on neither religion nor rank nor age nor wailing childhood."

Source: St Jerome, *Letters*, c. 400 CE

6. *Do you think the Huns should be viewed as a loose bunch of barbarian invaders or as an Empire like Rome?*



Barbarians at the Gates

Let me introduce you to the traditional view [of the Fall of Rome]: Barbarians at the Gates. If you want to be really technical about it, the city of Rome was conquered by bar-bar-bar-barbarians in 476 CE. There was a last Roman Emperor **Romulus Augustus**, who ruled the empire for less than a year before being deposed (removed from the throne) and sent into exile by **Odoacer**, who was some kind of barbarian- we don't know for sure. Ostrogoth, Hun, Visigoth, Vandals; they all looked the same to the Romans. Of course, Rome had been sacked by barbarians before, most notably by Alaric the Visigoth in 410. But after 476, there was never again a "Roman" emperor in Rome.

Source: John Green, "The Fall of Rome... in the 15th Century," Crash Course World History (adapted)

7. *What event marked the final defeat of the Roman Empire?*
8. *"Odoacer caused the fall of Rome." Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?*
9. *Considering EVERYTHING you have learned through this lesson, do you think INTERNAL or EXTERNAL factors played a more major role in the collapse of the Roman Empire.*