

barbarian

nomad

plunder

The Fall of the Roman Empire

Build on What You Know You have learned how the Roman Empire was permanently split in A.D. 395. Now read about the fall of the Western Roman Empire.

The Two Roman Empires

- 1 ESSENTIAL QUESTION** Why did the Western Roman Empire weaken?

When people talk about the fall of the Roman Empire, they mean the Western Roman Empire. You will learn about the growth of the Eastern Roman Empire in Lesson 3.

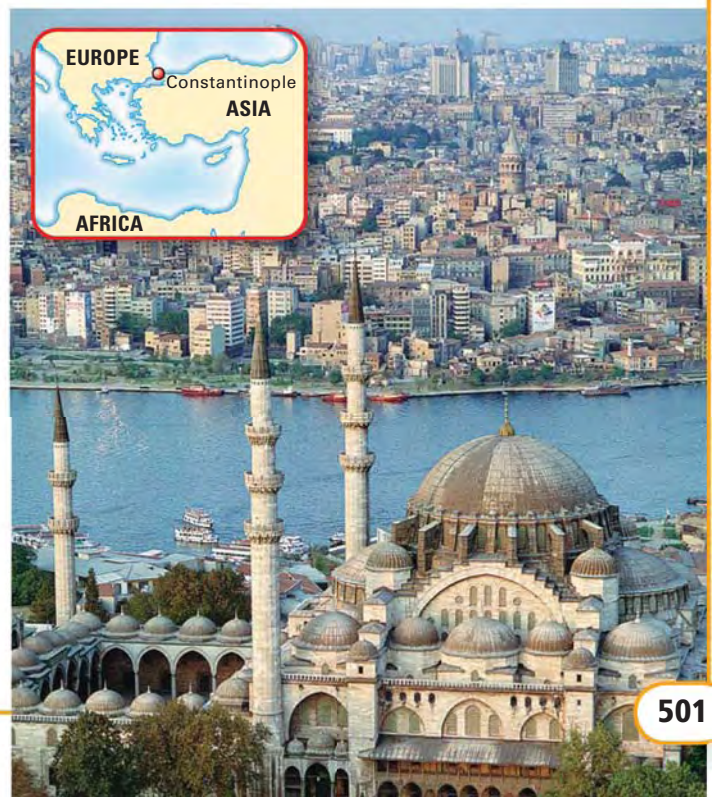
Wealthy East The Eastern Roman Empire was much stronger than the Western Roman Empire. The Eastern Empire's capital, Constantinople, bustled with traders from Asia, Africa, and Europe. As a result, the Eastern Empire had more wealth. Also, the eastern cities were larger and better fortified. And the Black Sea was a natural barrier that discouraged invasions. (See the map on page 503.)

Weaker West In contrast, cities in the Western Empire were smaller and less prosperous. They were located farther away from the trade routes that provided both goods and wealth.

The cities of the west were more exposed to attack from groups of invaders along the northern border of the Roman Empire. Defense forces were widely scattered. They were often poorly paid, so they had little reason to risk their lives.

Connect to Today

▼ **Istanbul Today**
Constantinople is called Istanbul. The Blue Mosque is visible in the foreground of this aerial view of the city.



Invaders Raid Cities The invaders were often looking for goods to take or people to kidnap and sell as slaves. As attacks on cities increased, the inhabitants chose to leave. They were looking for safer surroundings. The less populated the cities became, the more vulnerable they were to attack.

REVIEW In what ways was the Western Empire weaker than the Eastern Empire?

Invading Peoples

2 ESSENTIAL QUESTION What groups moved into the Roman Empire?

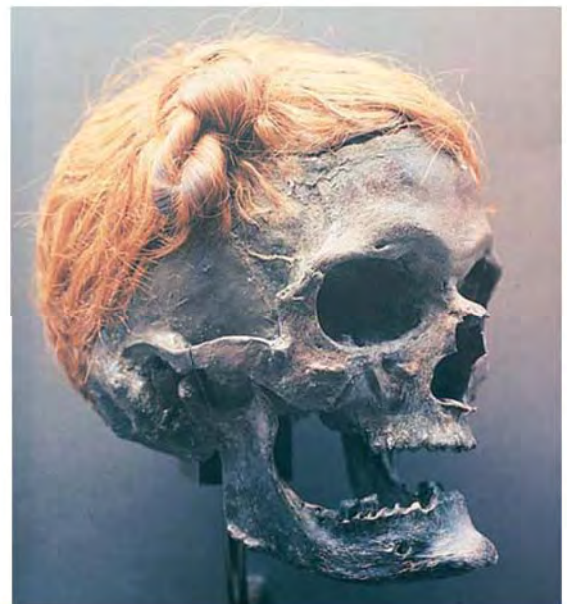
Defense forces on the north and northeast borders of the Roman Empire grew weaker. **Nomads**—people who move from place to place—took advantage of this weakness and frequently attacked Roman towns and cities. These groups were known as Germanic peoples. The Romans had clashes with Germanic peoples along their northern borders for hundreds of years.

The Germanic Peoples A variety of groups made up the Germanic peoples. They all spoke languages that were part of a language family also called Germanic. The Goths mentioned in the opening story were a Germanic people.

Romans looked down on these groups but also feared them. To the Romans, the Germanic peoples were barbarians. The term **barbarian** originally meant someone who spoke a language the Greeks could not understand. Barbarian came to mean someone who was primitive and uncivilized. The Romans referred to the people who lived along the borders of the empire as barbarians. Later, the Romans applied the term to anyone living outside the empire.

Although the Romans thought the Germanic peoples were barbaric, they had a very complex culture. They were skilled metalworkers and fond of jewelry. Some groups had elected assemblies. War chiefs headed their military organizations. The Germanic peoples were loyal, especially to their chieftains.

Germanic Skull This skull still has its hair. The knot in the hair is a characteristic style of Germanic people. ▼



Invasions into the Roman Empire, A.D. 350–500

INTERACTIVE



GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER INTERPRETING MAPS

Movement Which group of invaders entered Italy from the south?

The German Migrations In Chapters 2 and 6, you read about nomads. Nomads moved to a new location as their food ran out, or when they were driven out of an area by a stronger force. Nomads often fought for the right to remain in a new place. As Rome began to decline, groups of well-armed nomads posed a huge threat to other nomadic people living along the borders of the empire. The people on those borders would be driven into the Roman Empire by a stronger group of nomads.

Between 370 and 500 A.D., Central Asian nomads were pushing people out of their lands into both the Roman and the Chinese empires. The most important of these nomadic groups was the Huns.

The Huns moved across the grasslands of Asia into Germanic lands. They drove the Germanic peoples west and south into Roman territory. The Germanic peoples were looking for new places to settle and for the protection of the Roman armies. As you learned in the opening story, many Romans did not like the Germanic peoples and took advantage of them.

REVIEW Why did the Germanic peoples move into Roman territory?

The Fall of Rome

3 ESSENTIAL QUESTION How did the Western Roman Empire end?

Some people believe the barbarian invasions were the cause of Rome's fall. In reality, Rome gradually declined for many reasons. Corruption of government officials, indifferent citizens, and a breakdown of society contributed to the fall. Historians say a barbarian invasion of the city of Rome marked the beginning of the end for the Western Roman Empire.

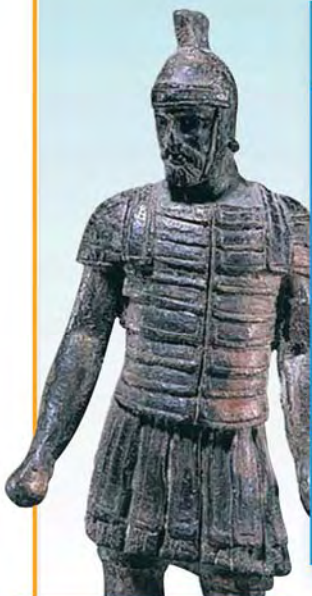
Invaders Gain Ground In 410, the Goths attacked and plundered the city of Rome. **Plunder** means to loot, or to take things by force. It was the first time in centuries that nomadic invaders had entered Rome. After looting the city for three days, the Goths left. The city of Rome tried to recover and go on, but it was seriously weakened.

Germanic peoples also invaded what is now France, Spain, and northern Africa. The empire's army was no longer strong enough to drive them out. Italy was raided almost constantly.

In 445, the Huns united under the leadership of Attila. First his armies swept into the Eastern Empire. They attacked 70 cities and then moved into the Western Empire. These attacks placed great pressure on the Roman military.

Comparisons Across Cultures

The Decline of Empires: Roman and Han



Causes for Failure	Roman Empire 27 B.C.—A.D. 476	Han Empire 202 B.C.—A.D. 220
Political	A series of inexperienced and often corrupt emperors	A series of inexperienced emperors
	Division of the empire	No division of the empire
	Ongoing conflict with Germanic tribes	Ongoing conflict with nomads
Economic	Crushing tax burden	Crushing tax burden
	Gap between the rich and the poor	Gap between the rich and the poor
Social	Decline of patriotism and loyalty	Peasant revolts
	Food shortages	Floods that caused starvation and displacement of people



The Aftermath of Rome's Fall In A.D. 476, the last Roman emperor was removed from power. This date marks the fall of the Western Roman Empire. After Rome's fall, life changed in Western Europe in a number of ways.

- Roads and other public structures fell into disrepair.
- Trade and commerce declined.
- Germanic kingdoms claimed former Roman lands.
- The Roman Catholic Church became a unifying and powerful force.

The Eastern Empire continued for almost another thousand years. You will read about the Eastern Empire in Lesson 3.

REVIEW What caused the continued weakening of the Western Empire?

Lesson Summary

- The Western Roman Empire was less wealthy and harder to protect from invaders than the East.
- Germanic invaders further weakened the empire.
- In A.D. 476, the Western Roman Empire ceased to exist.

Why It Matters Now . . .

The decline and fall of empires is a repeating pattern of world history. Even large empires eventually break into smaller pieces.

2 Lesson Review

Terms & Names

1. Explain the importance of
barbarian nomad plunder

Using Your Notes

Explaining Sequence Use your completed time line to answer the following question:

2. What was the most significant event of the empire's downfall?



Main Ideas

3. Why was the Western Empire more likely to be invaded than the Eastern Empire?
4. What pushed the Germanic peoples south and west into Roman territory?
5. Why is A.D. 476 considered an important date in Roman history?

Critical Thinking

6. **Recognizing Changing Interpretations of History** How was the movement of the Huns into Europe related to the fall of Rome? Give reasons for your answer.
7. **Making Inferences** Why didn't the Romans make the Germanic peoples their allies?

Activity

Writing Newspaper Headlines Write a series of headlines that describe the fall of Rome. Base each headline on a major event or news story. Arrange the headlines in chronological order on a poster. When possible, provide a date for each.