

## **DBQ 3: FALL OF THE WESTERN ROMAN EMPIRE**

### Historical Context

In the third century C.E., Rome faced many problems. In addition to internal decay, the invasion by Germanic tribes seemed to sound the death knell for the Western Roman Empire. Historians have examined both the internal conditions that weakened the expansive empire and the external force of the barbarian invasions. From this, historians have developed a variety of explanations for the fall of the Western Roman Empire.

■ **Directions:** The following question is based on the accompanying documents in Part A. As you analyze the documents, take into account both the source of each document and the author's point of view. Be sure to do each of the following steps:

1. Carefully read the document-based question. Consider what you already know about this topic. How would you answer the question if you had no documents to examine?
2. Read each document carefully, underlining key phrases and words that address the document-based question. You may also wish to use the margin to make brief notes. Answer the questions that follow each document before moving on to the next document.
3. Based on your own knowledge and on the information in the documents, formulate a thesis that directly answers the document-based question.
4. Organize supportive and relevant information into a brief outline.
5. Write a well-organized essay proving your thesis. You should present your essay logically. Include information both from the documents and from your own knowledge beyond the documents.

Question: Using the documents, analyze the social/cultural, political and economic causes of the fall of the Roman Empire

### **PART A**

The following documents address the causes for the fall of Rome. Examine each document carefully. In the space provided, answer the question or questions that follow each document.

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### **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?

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### **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.

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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.

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

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**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?

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What was the effect of high taxation on the people?

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

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**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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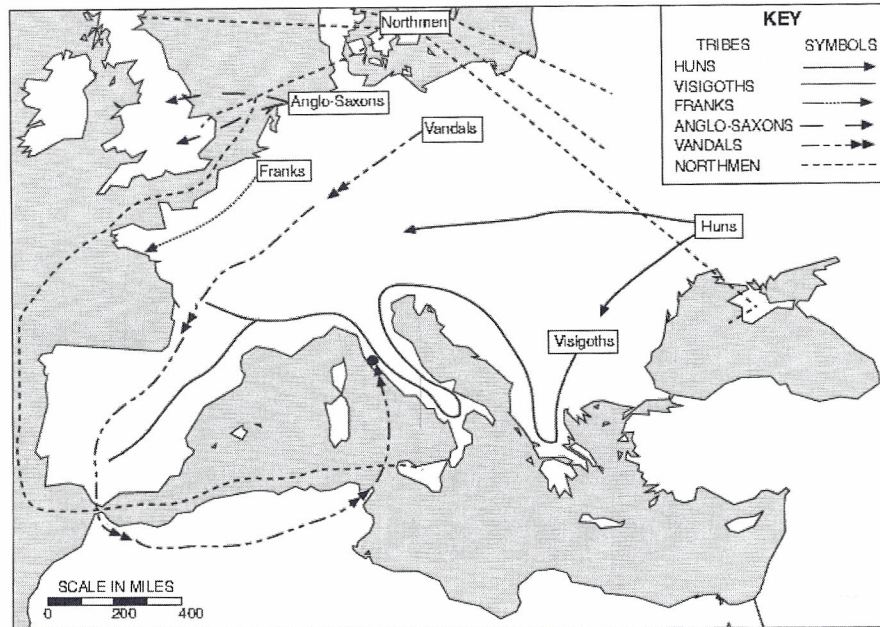
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### Document 6

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?

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Was this a unified attack? Explain.

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### PART B

Question: Using the documents, analyze the social/cultural, political and economic causes of the fall of the Roman Empire.