

Main Idea

Scale document up side also weakened the empire.

Threats From Outside the Empire

Rome might have overcome these weaknesses if it had not faced attacks on its borders. The most serious of these attacks were on the eastern border of the Western Empire.

Barbarian Invasions In Europe, the Rhine and Danube rivers marked the border of the empire. Across those rivers lived a number of Germanic tribes. The Romans viewed them as barbarian, or uncivilized. Still, for years, Roman officials had let peaceful tribes settle and trade along the border.

About A.D. 370, a terrifying new group of barbarians, the Huns, came storming out of Central Asia. The Huns were fierce horsemen. At first, they attacked peaceful Germanic tribes. As the Huns advanced, Visigoths, Ostrogoths, and other Germanic peoples fled into the empire, looking for safe homes. The Visigoths crossed the Danube and moved into northern Greece. In August 378, a Roman army tried but failed to stop the Visigoths at the Greek town of Adrianople. It was Rome's worst defeat in nearly 600 years. Some 40,000 Romans were killed.

Invasions of the Roman Empire

MAP MASTER Skills Activity

Beginning in the A.D. 300s, various groups of invaders attacked the Roman Empire.

- (a) **Read a Map** Which groups of invaders are shown on the map?
- (b) **Draw Conclusions** What impact do you think the invasions had on the Romans? Why?

MapMaster Online

For: Interactive map
Visit: PHSchool.com
Web Code: mxp-1013



Then, in about A.D. 430, a leader named **Attila** became the Huns' chief. This cruel warrior was known as "the Scourge [Punishment] of God." After terrorizing Rome's borders, he led the Huns deep into Gaul and Italy. Roman troops were called back from the borders to defend Italy. But once border posts were abandoned, more invaders poured in. The map on page 18 shows the many routes that invaders took to push into the empire.

New Germanic Kingdoms Attila died in 453, but he left behind a long trail of death and destruction. In many places, Roman authority had collapsed in the face of barbarian attacks. Once busy cities now stood deserted.

In time, the Germanic tribes settled down. The Franks and Burgundians carved out territory in Gaul. The Visigoths settled in Spain. The Ostrogoths took over Italy. Wherever the tribes settled, they set up their own **autonomous, or self-governing**, kingdoms.

In 476, the Visigoths forced the last emperor of the Western Empire to leave office. Ten years later, **Clovis**, king of the Franks, defeated the last Roman army in Gaul. Eventually, the Franks ruled most of what are now France and Belgium. By 500, the Western Empire was no more than a memory.

Why Did Rome Fall? For a long time, historians blamed the collapse of the Western Empire on Rome's many internal weaknesses. Some **emphasized** the empire's economic and social problems. The rich contributed little to the economy, these historians note, while the poor grew poorer. The poor became more resentful, and social conflict increased. This made it more difficult for Rome to defend itself from attack.

Other historians place much of the blame for Rome's decline on slavery. Slaves did much of the work of the empire. Not only did slave labor take jobs from Roman workers, it may also have made Romans too lazy to fight for the empire.

BIOGRAPHY QUEST

How did Clovis's symbol become France's national flower?



Clovis

Fast Facts

Who: Clovis

What: Founder of the Frankish kingdom

When: A.D. 466–511

Where: France and Belgium

Why important: Clovis and the Franks defeated the Romans and the Visigoths to rule much of France. The Frankish kingdom became the major European empire of the early Middle Ages.

Fast Find

How: Go online to find out how the toads on the Clovis family coat of arms turned into the national flower of France.

Biography
Online

For: More about Clovis

Visit: PHSchool.com

Web Code: mx-1013

Vocabulary Builder

emphasize (EHM fuh sīz) v. to show that something is important



Attila the Hun

Like other Huns, Attila was a great horseman and a fierce warrior. **Critical Thinking:**

Apply Information How does this picture support the idea that Attila was a great warrior?

Still other historians point to the growth of Christianity as a key factor in Rome's collapse. Acceptance of Christian beliefs as a higher authority may have weakened many Romans' loyalty to the empire.

Each of these factors probably played some part in the Western Empire's collapse. But as you have read earlier, interpretations of historical events can change over time. Many modern historians now think that the empire could have survived despite these problems. They believe that the cause of Rome's collapse was the barbarian invasions. Without the invasions, Rome might have solved its problems and moved into a new stage of development. But it did not get that chance. A French historian summed up this view when he wrote: "Roman civilization did not die a natural death. It was murdered."



Checkpoint

How did the Huns weaken the power of the Roman Empire?

Looking Back and Ahead In this section, you have learned how internal weaknesses and outside attacks led to the collapse of the Western Empire. In the next section, you will read how, in spite of its collapse, Rome made lasting contributions to the modern world.