**UNIVERSITY OF 8 MAI 1945, GUELMA**

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

**Lecture in Culture and Civilization**

**First year, LMD**

 **Decline and Fall of the Empire**

**Weakness in the Empire**

Late in the A.D. 100s, the empire still seemed as strong as ever to most people. Yet a series of internal problems had begun that would threaten Rome’s existence.

**Economic Problems:** Some of Rome’s problems were brought about by a weakened economy. During the A.D. 100s, the empire stopped expanding. The end of new conquests meant an end to new sources of wealth. As a result, the government raised taxes, creating hardships for citizens. A decline in agriculture also weakened the empire. Constant warfare and overuse had destroyed farmland. In addition, technology had not improved because farmers had relied on slaves rather than new tools to do the work. The resulting food shortages caused unrest.

**Military Problems:** Meanwhile, Rome’s once powerful military began showing signs of trouble. The empire was constantly at war with **nomadic** peoples in the north and northeast Rome needed larger armies to respond to so many threats, so it hired foreign mercenaries. A **mercenary** is a soldier for hire. Mercenaries often had no loyalty to the empire. Over time, Roman soldiers in general became less disciplined and loyal. They pledged their allegiance not to Rome but to individual military leaders.

**Political and Social Problems:** The sheer size of the Roman Empire made it hard to govern. Government officials had trouble getting news about affairs in distant regions of the empire. This made it more difficult to know where problems were developing. Also, many government officials were corrupt, seeking only to enrich themselves. These political problems destroyed people’s sense of citizenship. Many Romans no longer felt a sense of duty to the empire. Other aspects of Roman society also suffered. The cost of education increased, so poor Romans found it harder to become educated. People grew less informed about civic matters.

**Rome Divides into East and West**

A rapidly changing series of emperors also weakened the government. During the 49 years from 235 to 284, Rome had 37 emperors. Of these, 34 died in civil wars or by assassination. With emperors changing so often, the Roman people had little sense of orderly rule.

**Splitting the Empire:** In 284, the emperor **Diocletian** took power. He restored order to the empire by ruling with an iron fist and tolerating little opposition. Diocletian changed the way the army operated by permanently placing troops at the empire’s borders. He also introduced economic reforms. For example, he kept prices low on bread to help feed the poor.

In addition, Diocletian realized that he could not effectively govern the huge empire. In 285, he divided the empire into east and west parts, taking the eastern portion for himself. He chose this area for its greater wealth and trade and its magnificent cities. Diocletian appointed Maximilian to rule the Western Empire. The two men ruled for 20 years.

**A New Capital:** In 306, a civil war broke out over control of the empire. Four military commanders fought for control of the two halves. One of these commanders was Constantine. He gained control during the civil war and became emperor. Constantine’s second significant action came in 330 when he moved the empire’s capital from Rome to the ancient Greek city of Byzantium. Constantine renamed the city Constantinople. At a crossroads between east and west, the city was well placed for defense and trade. The new capital signaled a shift in power from the western part of the empire to the east.

**The Western Empire Falls**

In addition to internal difficulties, the Romans faced another major problem. Foreign groups were swarming all around Rome’s borders.

**Invasion and Conquest:** A number of Germanic peoples and other groups lived beyond Rome’s borders. Romans looked down on these groups but also feared them. To the Romans, the Germanic peoples were barbarians. For the ancient Romans, the term **barbarian** meant someone who was primitive and uncivilized. The Romans applied the term to anyone living outside the empire.

During the late 300s, these Germanic groups began pushing into Roman lands. Their reasons for invading varied. Some came looking for better land or a way to join in Rome’s wealth. Many others were fleeing a fierce group of invaders from Asia known as the Huns.

**Rome’s Fall:** In 410, Germanic peoples attacked and plundered the city of Rome. **Plunder** means to loot, or to take things by force. The nomadic entered Rome. Eventually, the Huns would also invade the empire. In 476, the Germanic tribes conquered Rome. This date marks the fall of the Western Roman Empire.

**The Aftermath of Rome’s Fall:** In the years that followed, the final holdouts of Roman power in the west fell. In 486, **Clovis**, the leader of a Germanic group known as the Franks, conquered the remaining Roman land in the province of Gaul (present-day France and Switzerland)

After Rome’s fall, life in Western Europe changed in many ways. Roads and other public structures fell into disrepair, and trade and commerce declined. Germanic kingdoms claimed former Roman lands. Though the western part of the empire had crumbled, the eastern part survived. This civilization became known as the Byzantine Empire.

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