

War and Conquest in the East and West:

The fall of the Roman Empire and its aftermath...

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Process of regression in the West*

The Roman Empire began to be destabilized for the following main reasons:

- The end of the Roman Army's conquests
- Internal disturbances namely the discontent of the poorer strata of the population resulting in the loss of the bonds of citizenship unity
- The invasions of the Germanic **(1)** and other tribes from the north and east.

In earlier periods, the Romans had managed to disarm the aggressiveness of Franks **(2)**, Germans and other groups and turned them into soldiers and peasants for their own profit to ease the manpower crisis in the army and the countryside.

On the other hand the conquered or neighbouring tribal chiefs often tried to imitate Roman customs and to decorate themselves with Roman titles. They appeared not as enemies but as admirers of Roman institutions. But when the Empire began to weaken and face a serious crisis, the populations of the formerly subdued provinces tended to return to their own traditions and resorted to tighter communal bonds and hierarchies.

As has already been pointed out, internal disturbances also contributed to the weakening of the Empire. Sometimes, in order to survive, the small farmers began to surrender their lands to great landowners in return for protection. In other cases, the dominant landowners took possession of the land of the powerless peasants. The formation of new power centres and estates further decentralized central government and economic authority.

These developments obliged the later emperors like Diocletian to change the administrative system radically in order to revitalize the Empire, but with modest results.

Later, Constantine (312-337 A.C.) publicly accepted Christianity. He established a second capital on the site of today's Istanbul, Constantinople, which was named after him. Constantine's efforts allowed the eastern half of the Roman Empire to recover. However, the division of the empire fatally weakened its western half.

When the Germanic migrations and southward attacks began in the fifth century A.C., the western half was not able to offer any resistance.

***Note:** At the end of the text there is a rough timeline to give a brief idea about the world during this period and a brief terminology page

Diocletian's reforms



Gaius Aurelius Valerius Diocletianus was emperor from 284 to 305. Diocletian brought to an end the period known as the "Crisis of the Third Century" caused by the three simultaneous crises of external invasion, internal civil war and economic

collapse. The changes in the institutions, society, economic life and eventually religion were so profound and fundamental that it is seen as a turning point between the classical world and the early medieval world, or world of late antiquity*. During this period of roughly half a century, three crises, any one of which alone would have been a threat to the Empire, came together in a perfect storm: external invasions, internal civil wars and a hyperinflation economy.

Diocletian established an autocratic government and was responsible for laying the groundwork and taking measures like splitting the Empire in two in order to make it more manageable. This process concludes with the second phase of the Roman Empire, which is known as the "Byzantine Empire". In addition, Diocletian created a new system of autocracy, breaking down republicanism, and introduced various economic reforms aimed at solving the problem of hyperinflation.

Diocletian chose a new title for himself, calling himself *Dominus et deus*, or "Lord and God". This was in contrast to previous Emperors, who were known as *Princeps* or "First Citizens", a name which implied some level of equality and democracy. He was not to be seen in public, and if an audience was required, he had elaborate ceremonies in which the visitor would be required to lie prostrate on the ground and never to look at the Emperor.

* **antiquity** is a broad term for a long period of cultural history centered on the Mediterranean Sea, which begins roughly with the earliest recorded Greek poetry of Homer (7th century BC), and continues through the rise of Christianity and the fall of the Western Roman Empire (5th century AD).

Byzantium and “Orthodoxy” *

The Byzantine Empire's origins lay in the eastern half of the Roman Empire, and it was a political heir of Rome. However, it increasingly developed a separate identity, particularly after the fall of the western half of the ancient Empire.

The strong “central” rule of Byzantium (3) resembled the political structure of other early centralized empires of the east. The emperor was head of both state and religion.

The word **orthodox**, from the Greek *ortho* ('right', 'correct') and *doxa* ('thought', 'teaching'), is typically used to refer to the correct theological or doctrinal observance of religion, as determined by an authority. This term has a usage also in the political science terminology to define a strict adherence to a doctrine.

On the other hand, after the recognition of Christianity, in the western part of the Empire the Papacy obtained ascendancy as the head of the Church as distinct from the king, who held temporal (earthly) power. This was the origin of the division between spiritual and temporal power in the West. However, in order to assert their authority the Popes had to work in league with the secular rulers. Expansion and conversion frequently took place at the same time.

In Eastern Rome (read as The Byzantine Empire) Justinian, who ruled from 527 to 565, attempted to restore the unity and grandeur of the Roman Empire and to secure the domination of the whole of the Mediterranean region and, in the East, fought against the Persians. He engaged in a large-scale construction and public works programme, such as providing systems of water supply and the rebuilding of Constantinople.

He also had Haghia Sophia reconstructed in 537 by the architects Isidorus of Miletus (Milet) and Anthemius of Tralleis (Ayдын). There was formerly a church on the site which had been destroyed by fire and riots. The present building is a triumph of Byzantine architecture which has exerted a powerful influence through the centuries.

Under his direction, bureaucrats recodified the Roman Civil Law known as the *Codex Justinianus*, formally named the *Corpus Juris Civilis* ('Body of Civil Law'). This was constituted by the accumulation of former Roman collections of laws and legal interpretations.

The work did not, therefore, constitute a new legal code but was a basic reference work containing collections of past laws which, in later times, were used by European lawyers. In this respect it resembles the late Ottoman codification of law known as the

Mecelle, which was prepared in the mid 19th century by Ahmet Cevdet Paşa.

Justinian's armies conducted campaigns on both the western and eastern borders of the empire but victories in these regions proved to be short-lived. Meanwhile, the attempts to defend the eastern borders against the Persian attacks exhausted the treasury.

After the Justinian period, the attacks of the Persians and the Islamic expansion of the seventh century resulted in the loss of the Empire's provinces along the eastern seaboard of the Mediterranean and gradually caused the Empire to lose direct control over the territories outside the capital.

New forces on the scene

Between 500 – 700 A.C. the world was shaped both by the decline of classical civilizations and the spread of world religions: Christianity and Islam. Islam in particular became the primary “Global Civilization” in the sense that it spread from its point of origin to Europe, Asia, and Africa within a relatively short period of time.

While cultivating and spreading cultural and commercial links with many parts of the world, Islam also served as the developer and transmitter of the science and learning of *classical antiquity*.

Islam was able to spread among both Christian and Judaic peoples as well as pagans*. This was aided by the fact that Islam is universal, in the sense that it accepts other religious revelations and does not discriminate between people according to their ethnic origins or status.

*The belief of a “*pagan*”, called *paganism*, in the broader sense includes all religions and belief systems other than the one revealed by God, and, in a narrower sense, all except Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. The term is also used as the equivalent of Polytheism. It is derived from the Latin *pagus*, whence *pagani* (i. e. those who live in the country), a name given to the country folk who remained unbelievers after the cities had become Christian.

It has to be noted that early Islamic invaders manifested more tolerance than the Byzantines towards other religions and, since they did not observe class differences, were more lenient towards the oppressed lower classes. This led the Christian populations of Egypt, Palestine, and Syria to welcome the Muslims.

The Islamic achievements of naval supremacy in the Eastern Mediterranean reinforced their victories in the former Byzantine provinces and northern Africa.

The Byzantine emperors were only just able to prevent the final collapse of their Empire and the Byzantine Empire survived only in Asia Minor and the Balkans.

In the box read an observation of a previous period on “corruption”



Ammianus Marcellinus (c.330-395 CE): Born probably at Antioch (Antakya) Ammianus Marcellinus is a Roman historian who wrote during Late Antiquity. The surviving books of his valuable history cover the years from 353 to 378; the work is

sometimes referred to by a Latin title as *Res Gestae*. Marcellinus, who observed Rome on a visit, saw the city as full of emptiness, shallowness, and as lacking of all real culture. From *History, XIV.16: The Luxury of the Rich in Rome, c. 400 CE*.

Rome is still looked upon as the queen of the earth, and the name of the Roman people is respected and venerated. But the magnificence of Rome is defaced by the inconsiderate lightness of a few, who never recollect where they are born, but fall away into error and shamelessness as if a perfect immunity were granted to vice. Of these men, some, thinking that they can be handed down to immortality by means of statues... and they are even anxious to have them plated over with gold!

Others place the summit of glory in having a seat higher than usual, or splendid clothing; and so work and sweat under a vast weight of cloaks which are fastened to their necks by many clasps, and blow about by the excessive fineness of the material, showing a desire by the continual wriggling of their bodies, and especially by the waving of the left hand, to make more conspicuous their long fringes and tunics, which are embroidered in multiform figures of animals with threads of divers colours.

Others again, put on a feigned severity of countenance, and extol their patrimonial estates in a boundless degree, exaggerating the yearly produce of their fruitful fields, which they boast of possessing in numbers, from east and west, being ignorant that their ancestors, who won greatness for Rome, were not eminent in riches....

Those few mansions which were once celebrated for the serious cultivation of liberal studies now are filled with ridiculous amusements of idleness, re-echoing with the sound of singing, and the tinkle of flutes and lyres. You find a singer instead of a philosopher; a teacher of silly arts is summoned in place of an orator, the libraries are shut up like tombs, organs played by waterpower are built, and lyres so big that they look like wagons!



A mosaic of the Byzantine palace members

A long long decline!

The reign of Emperor Flavius Heraclius Augustus, from 610 to 641, was a dramatic period for the Byzantine Empire.

Heraclius offered peace terms to the Persians upon his accession, but Khosrau II (II. Hüsrev Perviz, 591-628) refused to negotiate with him and the Persian armies rapidly advanced westward.

They took Damascus in 613, Jerusalem in 614 (damaging the Church of the Holy Sepulchre) and Egypt in 616. They made raids deep into Anatolia as far as Chalcedon (Kadıköy) when it was said that at night the people of Constantinople would see Persian campfires and their reflections in the water.

The Persian-Byzantine war also found its place in *The Koran* in the sure named Rum (Roman):

“The Roman Empire has been defeated. In a land close by; but they, after this defeat of theirs, will soon be victorious. Within a few years, since with Allah is the decision, in the past and in the future. On that Day shall the believers rejoice with the help of Allah. He helps whom He will, and He is exalted in might, most merciful.”

Heraclius worked on reorganizing the Byzantine military. He established the system of granting land to individuals in return for military service. The land so granted was organized into *thema* or *theme*, a word to describe a division of troops, and each theme was placed under the command of a *strategos* or military governor (similar to the Ottoman system of *timar*). This arrangement ensured the survival of the Empire for hundreds of years.

Heraclius re-conquered the lands taken by the Persians with the assistance of the Khazar (Hazar) and other Turkic troops. After the battle of Nineveh in 627 where the Khazar-Byzantine alliance defeated the

Persian army, the Sassanid dynasty never recovered. In 630, Byzantine armies marched into Jerusalem and saved the sacred places. But later, at the battle of Yarmuk in 636, they could not resist the emerging Muslim armies and within three years, Syria and Palestine were lost.

In the early eighth century, after the Arab siege of Constantinople, the capital survived but all these wars created the need for greater taxation. This worsened the position of the small farmers, and led to greater aristocratic feudal control of the Byzantine countryside, which meant further weakening of the centralized state.

The long period of decline approached a final stage during the 11th century when Seljuk Turks dominated most of the Asiatic provinces of the empire.

Byzantine Society and Politics

The power of the Emperor was sustained by an elaborate bureaucratic organization. The position of administrator was in general open to citizens from all ranks of society.

Provincial governors were appointed from the center, and a system of agents sought to preserve loyalty to the central government. The military consisted of soldiers recruited locally and granted land in return for service.

Byzantine society and economy was controlled by the imperial bureaucracy, which regulated all trade and prices. Food prices in particular were kept low to feed the enormous population, but taxes on the peasantry were high. This dominance of the center gradually led to the decline of other cities and luxury flourished in the capital. Although merchants became wealthy, they could never exercise political control.

The growing separation between Byzantine Orthodox Christianity and Western Catholicism as well as political and cultural differences became more noticeable especially around the 10th century.

Byzantine Culture and Art

Although for several centuries Latin was the court language of the Eastern Empire, Greek was the common tongue and after the Emperor Justinian in the 6th century it became the official language as well.

Byzantine learning represented a close union between secular and theological elements or the reconciliation of the ancient pagan wisdom with the new ideas of Christianity. It aimed at providing universal and encyclopaedic knowledge.

The 10th century is the period of development of Byzantine epic and popular poetry. The most famous epic hero was Digenes Akritas. The name Digenes means born of two peoples because his father was an Arab and his mother a Christian Greek.

Akritas was a name that applied to the defenders of the borders of the Empire.

Interestingly, before this, during the 8th century the Islamic popular culture had created its epic hero with his courageous deeds against the Roman armies, the famous Battal Gazi. Digenes Akritas is its Byzantine version.



A Greek stamp for the memory of Digenes Akritas



And the revenge of Battal Gazi

The area where Byzantium excelled was architecture and art. The most impressive architectural monument is the world-famous cathedral Hagia Sophia (Aya Sofya). Its plan combines the features of a circular, domed structure with characteristics derived from the *basilica* (an oblong hall with a double row of columns and an apse at one end used in ancient Rome as law courts). The great dome is the most arresting element of the building.

After architecture, the art of the mosaic is perhaps of greatest interest for its imaginativeness and attention to detail, an example of which can be observed today at the Kariye (Khora) Museum of Istanbul.



A cross-section view of Aya Sophia



A view from Kariye museum

The Early Medieval Age :

Confrontation between the East and the West

The material and intellectual poverty of the West, as compared to the East, may perhaps – among other factors - help to explain the envy manifested in the attacks of the Crusaders against Islam as well as Western hostility against the Orthodox Church which has not yet been resolved completely. The Crusades, which lasted from the 11th to the 13th century, aimed to free the Holy Land from the Muslims. Similarly, although they were ostensibly conducted for the purpose of helping the Christians to overcome Islamic expansion, the Fourth Crusade turned out to be a plundering and destructive expedition on the part of the Catholic Latins against the Orthodox Byzantines.

The political structure of the West remained unstable and chaotic between the fifth and tenth centuries.

However, gradually the invading Germanic tribes started to consolidate themselves into monarchies governed by kings. The social and political system came to be organised around units where the loyalty of vassal to his lord governed the structure of social relationships. Though inspired by former Germanic tradition, feudalism was mainly a product of the Middle Ages. Of these peoples, the Visigoths in Spain and the Merovingians in France established short-lived dynasties which aimed to impose order on their territories.

In 732, the Arab conquest from Spain was halted in Poitiers by a Frankish leader, Charles Martel, uncle of Charlemagne (Charles the Great). His nephew Charles the Great was crowned Emperor by the Pope and his coronation as Roman Emperor in 800 was a turning point in the history of medieval Europe.

Charlemagne became the author of large-scale reform in Europe and initiated a revival of learning known as the Carolingian revival.

The crowning of Charles the Great by the Pope established once and for all the attempt of the Church to dominate the State. From that time on, the 'Emperor' of the West was known as the Holy Roman Emperor.

However, the conflict of Church and State was by no means resolved but continued to exert its influence throughout the "Middle Ages".



Coronation of Charlemagne by the Pope

One of the dominant cultural organisations of the early Middle Ages was monasticism (4). Originally an outgrowth of asceticism (5), it was first organized by Pope Benedict as a well-regulated institution.

The Feudal System:

Obligations and Allegiances (6)

Although kingdoms were established, the dominant political organization was local agricultural estates called “*manor*”. In the manorial system peasants called **serfs** (derived from the Latin word *servus*, for slave or servant) farmed land belonging to lords in return for which the militarized aristocracy provided protection. This status is called **serfdom**.

Serfdom refers to the legal and economic status of some peasants under feudalism, specifically in the manorial (also known as *seigneurialism*) economic system.

A serf is a laborer who is bound to the land. Serfs formed the lowest social class of feudal society.

Serfs differed from slaves in that serfs were not property themselves and could not be sold apart from the land which they worked.

In addition to their labor, serfs were required to pay a portion of their produce to their lords. Serfs retained ownership of their houses and could pass property on from one generation to another.

Serfdom evolved from the agricultural slavery of Roman Empire and spread through Europe around the 10th century.

It was dominant during Europe's Middle Ages. In England serfdom lasted up to the 17th century, and in France until 1789. In some other countries like Italy and Russia serfdom lasted until the early 19th century.

The most important political relationship of the period is called **feudalism (7)**, a system linking landlords in military alliances. Greater landlords provided protection and aid to lesser lords, called vassals, in return for loyalty and military service. Three elements existed which characterize the period: *lords*, *vassals* and *fiefs*. Feudalism is defined by how these three elements fit together.

A lord was a noble who owned land. A vassal was a person who was granted land on lease by the lord. The land was known as a fief. In exchange for the fief, the vassal would provide military service to the lord. The obligations and relations between lord, vassal and fief form the basis of feudalism.

With the notable exception of the case of Carolingian France, most parts of Europe, particularly Germany, and Italy, remained fragmented into regional states and city-states. The best-known French Carolingian ruler was as mentioned before was Charles

the Great, or Charlemagne, who reigned from 768 AD to 814 AD.

Charles was able to unify much of Western Europe under his control and to receive the title of Emperor in 800 AD. After his death, however, the Empire rapidly fractured into numerous successor kingdoms.

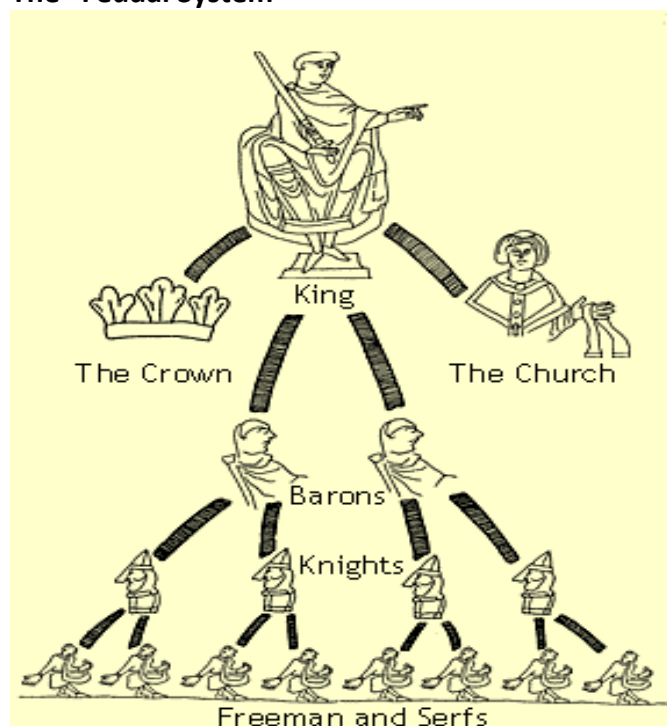
After the decline of the Carolingian empire, the political history of Western Europe consisted of the development of regional monarchies, although the title of Emperor was retained. In the period immediately after the collapse of the Carolingian Empire, rulers in Germany styled themselves as “Holy Roman Emperors.” In fact, the kingdom of the Germans was among the least centralized governments of the early Middle Ages.

In many ways, the West during this period remained sluggish in comparison to civilizations in Asia and the Middle East. It might be claimed that an element of ‘envy’ occasioned by this disparity might have prompted the Crusades coupled with a drive to reach Asia through a more direct route. This resulted in the discovery of China and South Asia and the accidental discovery of America.

However, it must be accepted that medieval thinkers did help to recapture and keep alive the intellectual heritage of the classical past.

Art and architecture showed some creativity in departing from classical norms. In politics, medieval rulers abandoned the imperial past to create more limited regional monarchies, which yielded participatory and civil administrative systems. Medieval economy ultimately paved the way for the development of western capitalism.

The “Feudal System”



WHAT ?WHEN ?WHERE? A ROUGH TIMELINE							
	500BC	200BC	100BC	200AC	500 AC	700AC	1000 AC
AMERICAS				MAYA			
				HUN			
			FRANK & GERMAN			CAROLINGIANS	
EUROPE	ROMAN EMPIRE						
	GREECE				BYZANTINE EMPIRE		
		HELLENIC STATES				ISLAM	
MID.EAST	PERSIA		PARTHIA	SASSANIDES			
		HUN					
					GÖKTÜRK		
EAST	CHOU	CHIN	HAN		TANG		SUNG

TERMINOLOGY

- 1. Germanic** applies to the ancient Germanic peoples sharing a common material culture living in northern Germany and southern Scandinavia during the late European Bronze Age (1000 BC-500 BC). This culture group is called the Nordic Bronze Age and spread from southern Scandinavia into northern Germany. Their cultural features consisted of small, independent settlements, and an economy strongly based on the keeping of livestock.
- 2. The Franks** or the Frankish people were one of several west Germanic tribes who entered the late Roman Empire from Frisia as foederati and established a lasting realm (sometimes referred to as Francia) in an area that covers most of modern-day France and the western regions of Germany (Franconia, Rhineland, Hesse). The Merovingian kings claimed descent of their dynasty from a Scythian or Cimmerian tribe, asserting that this tribe had changed their name to "Franks" in 11 BC. The meaning of "free" (English frank, frankly) arose because after the conquest of Gaul, only Franks had the status of freemen.
- 3. Byzantium** was an ancient Greek trade colony, founded around 650 BC and named after their king Byzas.
- 4. Monasticism** (from Greek: *monachos*—a solitary person) is the religious practice of renouncing all worldly pursuits in order to fully devote one's life to spiritual work
- 5. Asceticism** from the ancient Greek term askesis (practice, training or exercise) denotes a life which is characterized by refraining from worldly pleasures even some form of self-humiliation, ritual punishment of the body or harsh abandonment of pleasure. Originally associated with any form of disciplined practice, the term ascetic has come to mean anyone who practices a renunciation of worldly pursuits to achieve higher intellectual, emotional, or spiritual goals.
- 6. Allegiance** is the duty which a subject or a citizen owes to the state or to the sovereign of the state to which he belongs. Historically In that sense it represents the feudal *liege* (from Late Latin *laeticus*, from *laetus* serf) duties which is due to a lord.
- 7. Feudalism** is a term developed during the 17th century, based on the Late Latin feudum, commonly used in the Middle Ages meaning land held under certain obligations and set of reciprocal legal and military obligations among the warrior nobility of Europe during the Middle Ages, revolving around the three key concepts of lords, vassals, and fiefs .