



The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire

CIVIL WAR, POLITICAL UPHEAVAL, THE PLAGUE AND A DIVIDED
EMPIRE

The Decline

- Following a series of **civil infighting**, mostly over who was to be the new Emperor. Rome found itself under **military rule** where it seemed that whoever could muster a powerful force could seize the Roman throne.
- In fact, in a period of 50 years, between 235 and 284 CE, Rome had 22 (19 others claimed to be) emperors, most of whom died violently. Many of these emperors weren't even Roman!
- During this time the empire was faced with a series of **invasions**. The **Persians** from the East have reemerged as a threat and the **Germanic** tribes have pushed their way into West and Northern parts of the very expansive Roman empire.



Along with the invading hordes at its borders, the empire was on the verge of an **economic collapse**.

The Roman Empire was partially based on **constant expansion** which brought new land, new money, new treasures, new slaves, and new taxes.

During the 3rd century a **plague** swept across the empire wiping out hundreds of thousands of people which caused a **shortage of military and workers** to support the demands of the empire. This decline in trade and the hardships faced by farmers forced Rome to look outside its borders for new workers and soldiers.

ROMAN EMPIRE: TRADE AND EXPANSION

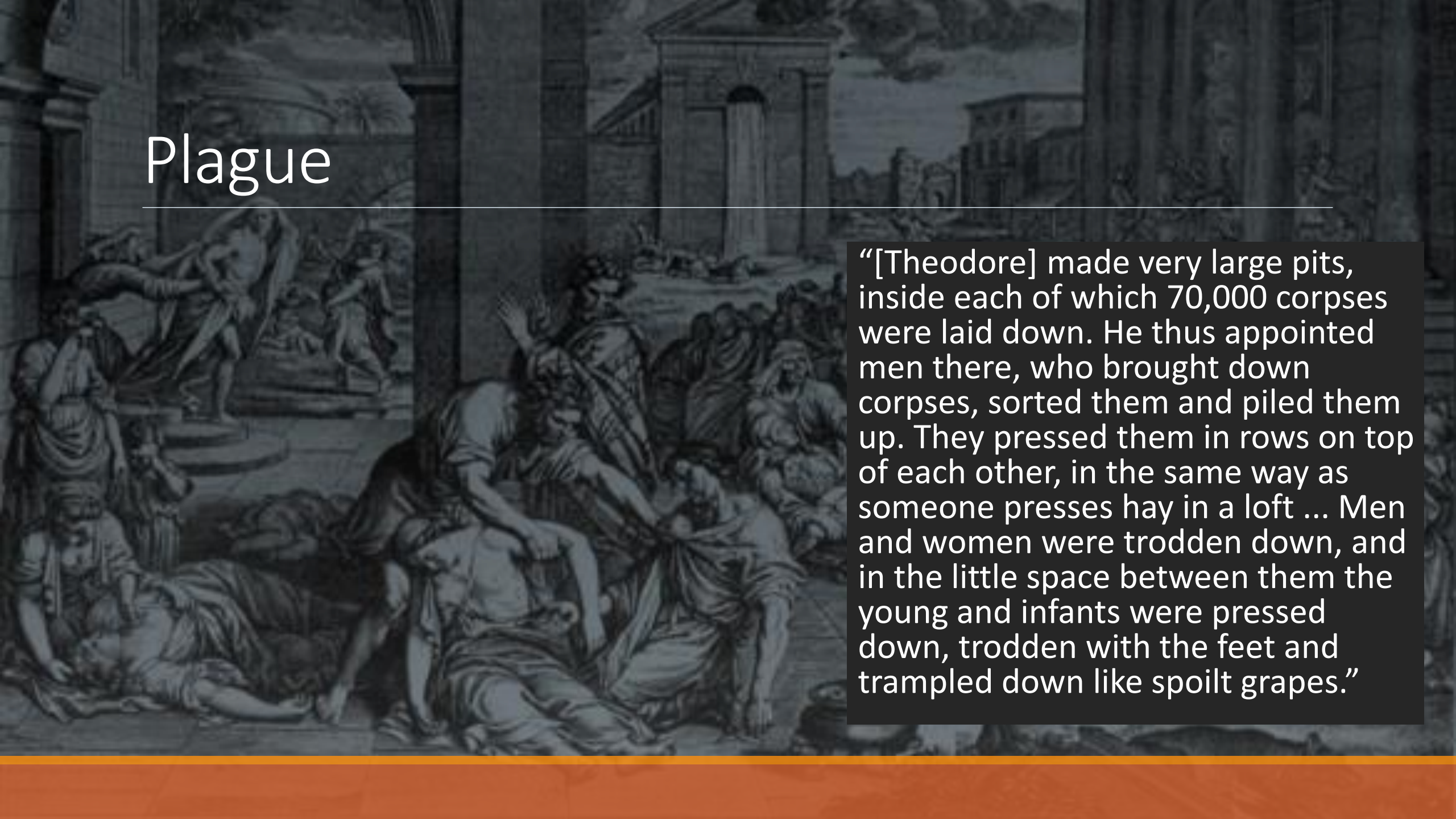


Roman Empire, A.D. 200
Trade route

People and Goods Traded:

Glassware	Silk
Grain	Slaves
Horses	Spices
Marble	Timber
Metals	Wine
Olive oil	Wool
Perfume	

Plague



“[Theodore] made very large pits, inside each of which 70,000 corpses were laid down. He thus appointed men there, who brought down corpses, sorted them and piled them up. They pressed them in rows on top of each other, in the same way as someone presses hay in a loft ... Men and women were trodden down, and in the little space between them the young and infants were pressed down, trodden with the feet and trampled down like spoilt grapes.”



- Remember that Rome has a long history of absorbing conquered people into the empire. Eventually this became a major problem as the number true Romans in the Roman Army shrunk and nearly became outnumbered to the non-Roman military personal.
- The openings in the military were filled by a variety of mercenaries and barbarians from the Germanic regions of modern-day Europe.
- These **Germans** could fight but they did not care for Rome and only were loyal to their commanders...and money. It was just years before that these Germanic barbarians were fighting against Rome, now they were fighting “with” them.



Not Keeping up with the Times

- The Romans were marvelous engineers, but they soon relied too much on human and animal labor instead of building machines.
- Since they weren't conquering new people, they also weren't adapting as much new and different technology.
- They especially **relied too much on slave labor** which meant a lot of unemployed folks that strained the economy.



MARCUS
 Chef
 specializing in
 fancy fish dishes
 and use of Garum



NESTOR
 Building skills
 Master of
 Mosaics



GNAEUS
 Tutor of
 Military Tactics
 Physical Fitness
 Equine Mastery



PALLAS
 Astrologer
 fortune
 teller



COROLIUS
 Tutor of
 Philosophy
 History



ANNA
 Singer
 Seamstress
 Scribe



APULIUS
 Tutor of
 Languages

Just a Few of the Special Slaves We Offer

Diocletian and Constantine

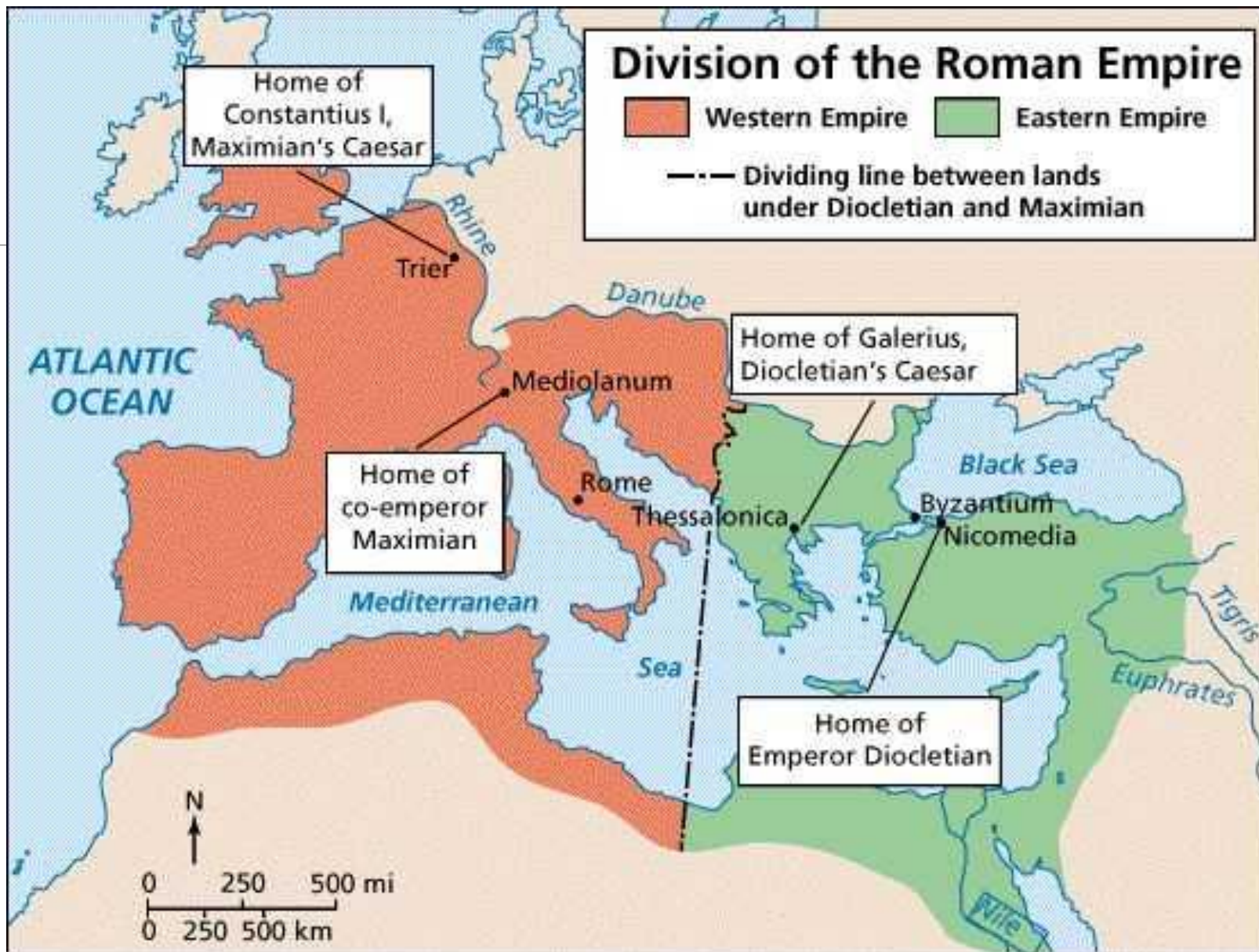


- At the end of the 3rd century two emperors revitalized the empire with sweeping economic and political reforms and ushered in Christianity as the official religion of the empire.
- **Diocletian**, believed that the empire was too vast to be able to properly control from Rome so he decided to divide the empire into four units, a **Tetrarchy**, each with its own ruler. This lasted 20 years until 313 CE when **Constantine** was able to divide the empire into two pieces; the east and the west.

From St. Mark's in
Venice, Italy

Why do you think the
statue of the Tetrarchs
shown have one hand
on their swords while
the second hand rests
on the other leaders
shoulder?





Constantine

- Constantine ruled from 306 to 337 CE and expanded on the ideas of Diocletian by having two Roman Empires and decided to build a city from which he could rule.
- The Greek city of **Byzantium**, on the coast of the Bosphorus, near the Black Sea was to become his capital. This city was later named **Constantinople**, which is modern day Istanbul, Turkey.
- This city was chosen as it was strategically located for its **defensive position** from the east, and along a major trade route between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea.
- Constantinople became the centre of the Eastern Roman Empire and one of the greatest cities in the world.



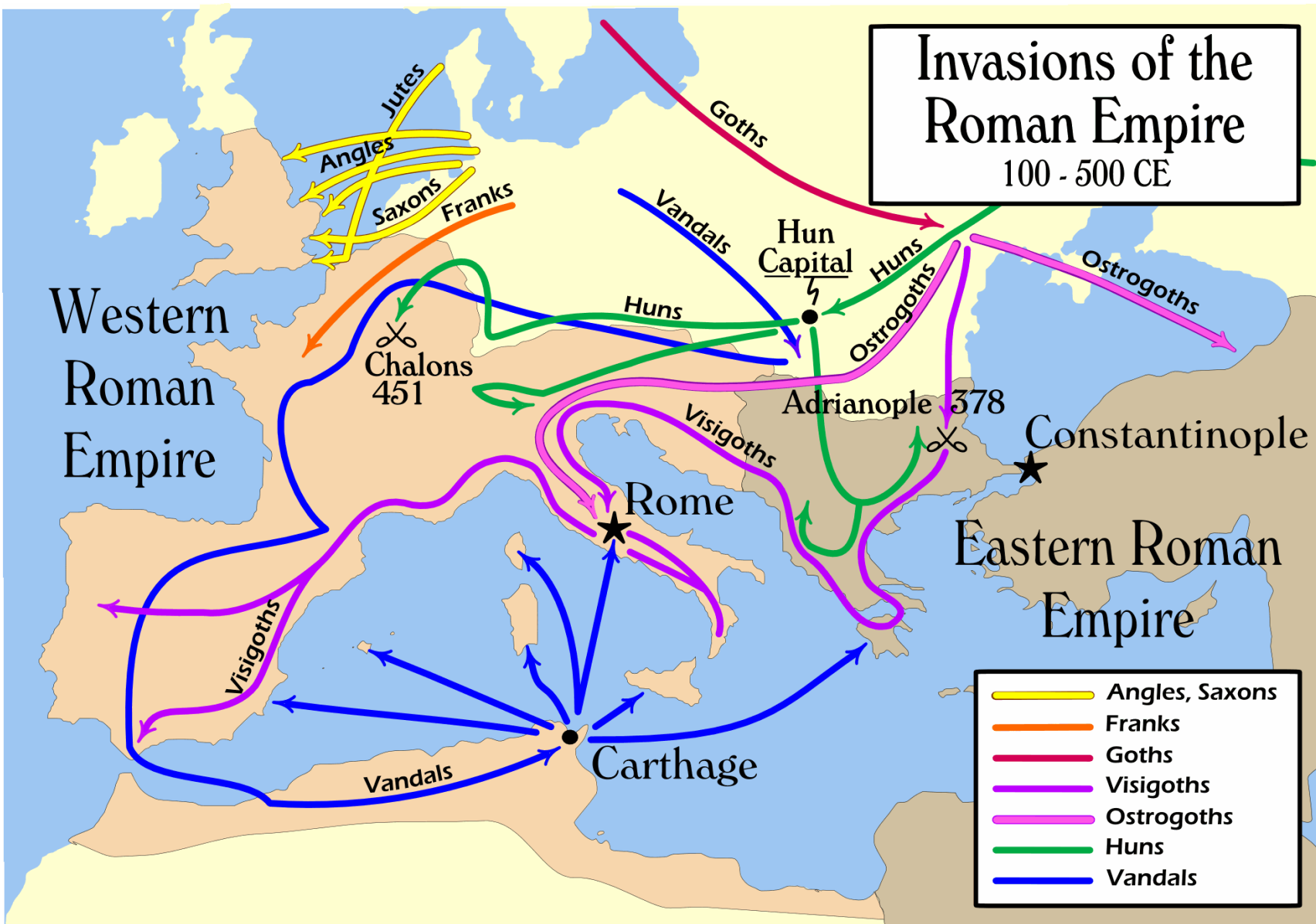
Constantinople



- While Diocletian and Constantine`s political and military reforms seemed to help the empire in the short run, the **drain on the empires wealth** was too much. With a **slowing birth rate** new tax money was available and the government couldn`t pay its bureaucrats or its army. The economic collapse was at hand.
- Despite economic and social policies, such as forcing workers to stay in their vocations, wealthy landowners managed to expand their estates while the poor became poorer. This new policy meant that **jobs became hereditary** and sons and daughters took on the jobs of their parents.



- Grain production also decreased due to over-farming. This meant feeding people became more difficult.
- The demands on the farms to supply the armies and the people of Rome while at the same time dealing with the constant invading barbarians who plundered and pillaged as they ran through the countryside was too much to handle. Food became scarce and the people suffered and starved.



The restored empire of Diocletian and Constantine limped along for another century. While the east prospered the west suffered from constant invasions from migrating Germanic tribes.

Wealthy East

- Eastern Roman Empire much stronger than Western Roman Empire as they were **constantly at war** with the Persians and other Islamic nations, this **meant wealth** from conquered cities.
- Constantinople **traded with Asia, Africa, Europe** therefore Eastern Empire had more wealth as a result of trade.
- Eastern cities were **larger, better fortified**, remember that the east include Greece who had independent city states that were already.
- The Black Sea was **natural barrier** against invasions.

Weaker West

- Western Empire cities, **far from trade routes**, were smaller, poorer.
- Cities exposed to **constant attack from invaders** along northern border.
- **less money meant defense forces were often poorly paid, so less willing to risk lives.**

Invaders Raid Cities

- Invaders attacked cities, kidnapped people to sell as slaves.
- As attacks increased, cities' inhabitants often left to seek safety.
- **Less populated cities** were even more vulnerable to attack.

The Western Empire really felt the pressure from the north during the 4th century as the **Huns** (Attila – leader) from Asia, moved into eastern Europe and forced the **Germanic Visigoths** south and west over the Danube River. They eventually defeated the Romans at Adrianople in 378 CE.



Western Woes

Danube River

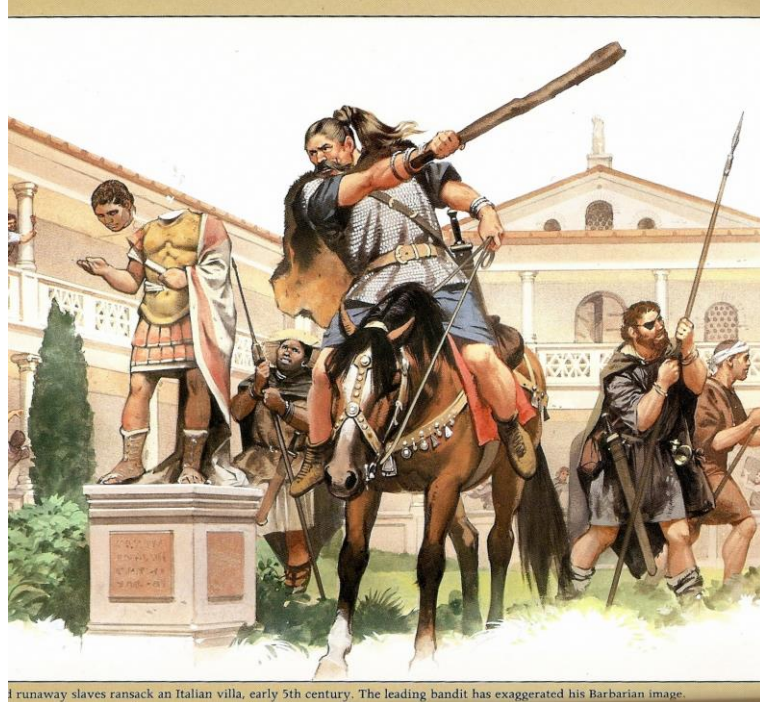


Enough with the German Goths already!

- The Germans continued to move into Roman territories during fifth century(401-500 CE). In 401 CE the **Visigoths** sacked Rome itself and the **Vandals** poured into Spain and Africa. These Vandals travelled east along the African coast and they too sacked Rome in 455 CE.
- In 476 CE, Emperor **Romulus Augustulus** was disposed by German **Ostragoth** war general **Flavius Odovacer** who became the first King of Italy. This date is often cited as the fall of the Roman Empire.

The Germanic Tribes and the Sack of Rome

The fall of the city of Rome and the Western Empire did not put an end to the entire Roman Empire. The Eastern Empire survived for another thousand years. The Eastern Empire is sometimes called the Byzantine Empire, after the capital city of Byzantium. Greek was the main language in the Byzantine Empire, not Latin.



runaway slaves ransack an Italian villa, early 5th century. The leading bandit has exaggerated his Barbarian image.



Theories About The Fall

Many historians argue about what was the leading reason for the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. Some of these reasons are:

- Christianity's emphasis on the spiritual kingdom weakened Roman Military virtues.
- Traditional Roman values declined as non-Italians gained power in the Empire.
- Lead poisoning through lead pipes and cups caused mental decline in the population.
- Plague wiped out a tenth of the population.
- Rome failed to advance technology due to reliance on slavery.
- Rome could not create a consistent working political system.

Video and Class Activity

Fall of Rome video – [Crash Course](#)

Activity – You are a newspaper reporter in ancient Rome and have been tasked to report on the decline of the Roman Empire. You should include a brief on-the-scene account of what's happening during the chaos. You should have a mock interview with a person in Rome, you can choose to interview an invading barbarian, member of the Roman military or the Emperor himself. Be sure to have at least 5 good questions and answers that provide information about what it would be like if you lived through the decline and fall of one of the greatest empires that ever existed. **(10 Marks)**