

Fall of Rome Documents

Document 1

Source: Anonymous, *On Military Matters* 368 A.D. In *A Roman Reformer and Inventor*, translated by E.A. Thompson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), pp. 106-14, 122-23.

The Corruption of the Provincial Governors

Now in addition to these injuries, wherewith the arts of [greediness] afflict the provinces, comes the appalling greed of the provincial Governors, which is ruinous to the taxpayers' interests. For these men, despising the respectable character of their office, think that they have been sent into the provinces as merchants...As for the Governors, the buying of recruits, the purchase of horses and grain, the monies intended for city walls – all these are regular sources of profit for them and are the pillage for which they long.

Methods of Economy in Military Expenditure

I have now described, as I intended, the distresses of the State, which should rightly be removed by Imperial measures. Let us turn now to the vast expenditure on the army which must be checked similarly, for this is what has thrown the entire system of tax payment into difficulties...

Military Machines

Above all it must be recognized that wild nations are pressing upon the Roman Empire and howling round about it everywhere, and treacherous barbarians, covered by natural positions, are assailing every frontier.

Document 2

Roman Emperors, 235-285 CE

Emperor	Reign	Cause of Death
Maximus	235-238	Assassination
Gordian I & II (co-rulers)	238	Suicide, Killed in Battle
Balbinus & Pupineus	238	Assassination
Gordian III	238-244	Possible Assassination
Philip the Arab	244-249	Killed in Battle
Decius	249-251	Killed in Battle
Hostilian	251	Possible Plague
Gallus	251-253	Assassination
Aemilianus	253	Assassination
Valerian & Gallienus	253-260	Died as Slave of Persians, Assassination
Quintillus	268-270	Assassination or Suicide
Aurelian	270-275	Assassination
Tacitus	275-276	Possible Assassination
Florianus	276	Assassination
Probus	276-282	Assassination
Carus	282-283	Assassination
Numerian	283-284	Possible Assassination
Carinus	283-285	Killed in Battle

Document 3

“There can be little doubt that the weaknesses of the late Roman Army were largely due to the eventual failure . . . to enforce regular conscription [draft of soldiers] . . . The exempted categories were . . . numerous. Hosts of senators, bureaucrats, and clergymen were entitled to avoid the draft; and among other grouped who escaped were cooks, bakers, and slaves.”

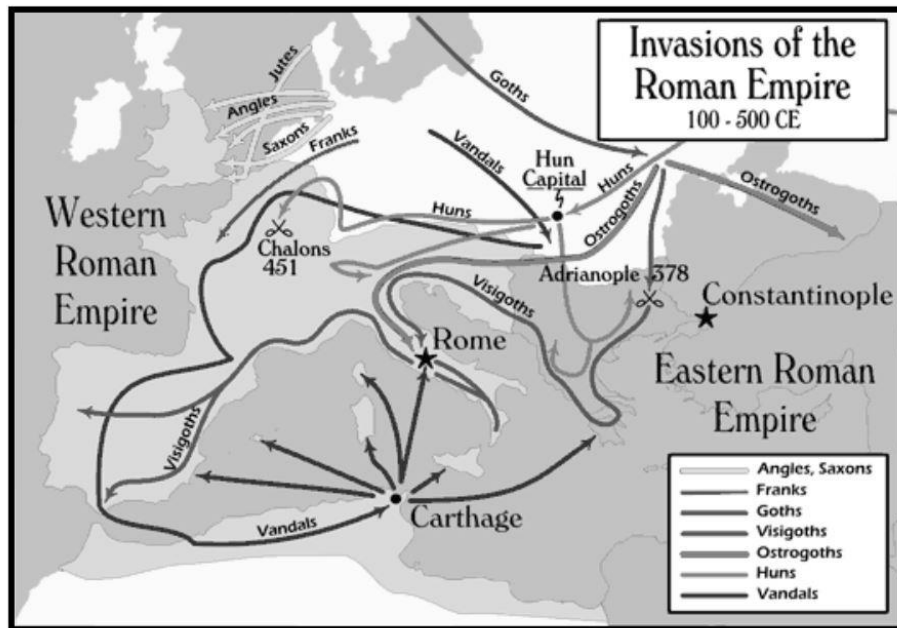
Source: *The Fall of the Roman Empire: A Reappraisal* by Michael Grant (1982)

Document 4

“[Before the year 400 CE] footsoldiers wore breastplates and helmets. But when, because of negligence and laziness, parade ground drills were abandoned, the customary armor began to seem heavy since the soldiers rarely ever wore it. Therefore, they first asked the emperor to set aside the breastplates . . . and then the helmets. So our soldiers fought the Goths without any protection for chest and head and were often beaten by archers. Although there were many disasters, which led to the loss of great cities, no one tried to restore breastplates and helmets to the infantry. Thus it happens that troops in battle, exposed to wounds because they have no armor, think about running and not fighting.”

Source: *Concerning Military Matters* by Vegetius (c. 450 CE)

Document 5



Fall of Han China Documents

Document 6

... The near constant need to mount an effective military defense against nomadic raids demanded manpower, food, horses, and weapons. To maintain itself, the central government imposed increasingly heavy taxes on the peasants in the north. The growing power of China's private land owners however, brought a dramatic drop in the number of tax-paying peasants, particularly in North China and the northern frontier regions. Eventually, the tax burden became unbearable. Many peasants fled south where taxes were lower, or moved onto the estates of the great land owners, where rent was a far less crushing burden than the taxes paid by free peasants. The inevitable result of this population shift was a dwindling number of tax-paying peasants in the north. The government persisted in its demands for money, imposing an ever-increasing tax burden on a diminishing tax base. Hard-pressed peasants faced the choice of turning to banditry or open revolt, either of which further weakened the dynasty's finances. Once this downward spiral began, nothing would stop it.

Document 7

The decline of the Later Han Dynasty accelerated toward the end of 2nd century, yet the Chinese government took no effective measures to control the disintegration of its empire. While Chinese bureaucrats spent much of their time redistributing the empire's wealth among themselves, the collapse of the tax-paying peasantry ruined both the forced manual labor system and the peasant draft army. China's professional armies generally became the private forces of the rich land-owning generals who commanded them. These private armies grew in both size and power until the generals became virtually independent warlords, men too powerful to be curbed by the central government. Soon, these warlords completely overshadowed the central Chinese government; in fact, they controlled it.

Document 8

Because of the weakened Han military, the Yellow Turban Rebellion also caused the Han government to desperately recruit men to fight for their cause. However, charismatic leaders managed to form their own paramilitary groups and join the Han army to deal with the uprising. An example of this can be seen in the first chapter of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* where the emperor issues a call for volunteer fighters against the rebels. The protagonist, Liu Bei, decides to recruit his own army instead of joining up with the government forces. Another example deals with a volunteer army recruited from Southern China to deal with the rebels. According to Sun Jian's biography in the *Chronicles of the Three Kingdoms*, the young military officer, Sun Jian, gathered recruits from his home district and joined up with the Han army to fight against the Yellow Turban rebels. While the central government decayed, these paramilitary groups grew in strength.

Source: Chris Butler, *The Flow of History – The Qin and Han Dynasties (221 BCE – 220 CE)*, published 2007. *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* written by Luo Guanzhong in the 14th century is a historical novel set in the Han dynasty.