**LABEL:** Summary

**DATE:** 11/15/20

**TITLE:** The fall of the Western Roman Empire summary

**CONTENT:**

The fall of the Western Roman Empire (also called the fall of the Roman Empire or the fall of Rome) was the process of decline in the Western Roman Empire in which the Empire failed to enforce its rule, and its vast territory was divided into several successor polities. The Roman Empire lost the strengths that had allowed it to exercise effective control over its Western provinces; modern historians posit factors including the effectiveness and numbers of the army, the health and numbers of the Roman population, the strength of the economy, the competence of the Emperors, the internal struggles for power, the religious changes of the period, and the efficiency of the civil administration. Increasing pressure from invading barbarians outside Roman culture also contributed greatly to the collapse. Climate change has been suggested as a driver of the changes in some of these factors.[1] The reasons for the collapse are major subjects of the historiography of the ancient world and they inform much modern discourse on state failure.[2][3][4]

**LABEL:** Summary

**DATE:** 11/15/20

**TITLE:** The fall of the Western Roman Empire summary II

**CONTENT:**

In 376, unmanageable numbers of Goths and other non-Roman people, fleeing from the Huns, entered the Empire. In 395, after winning two destructive civil wars, Theodosius I died, leaving a collapsing field army and the Empire, still plagued by Goths, divided between the warring ministers of his two incapable sons. Further barbarian groups crossed the Rhine and other frontiers and, like the Goths, were not exterminated, expelled or subjugated. The armed forces of the Western Empire became few and ineffective, and despite brief recoveries under able leaders, central rule was never effectively consolidated.

**LABEL:** Summary

**DATE:** 11/15/20

**TITLE:** The fall of the Western Roman Empire summary III

**CONTENT:**

By 476, the position of Western Roman Emperor wielded negligible military, political, or financial power, and had no effective control over the scattered Western domains that could still be described as Roman. [Barbarian kingdoms](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barbarian_kingdoms) had established their own power in much of the area of the Western Empire. In 476, [Odoacer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Odoacer) deposed [the last emperor in Italy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romulus_Augustulus), and the Western [Senate](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Senate) sent the imperial insignia to the [Eastern Emperor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_emperor#Survival_of_the_Roman_Empire_in_the_East).

**LABEL:** Summary

**DATE:** 11/15/20

**TITLE:** The fall of the Western Roman Empire summary IV

**CONTENT:**

While its legitimacy lasted for centuries longer and its cultural influence remains today, the Western Empire never had the strength to rise again. It never again controlled any portion of Western Europe to the North of the [Alps](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alps). The Eastern Roman, or [Byzantine Empire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Byzantine_Empire) survived, and though lessened in strength remained for centuries an effective power of the Eastern Mediterranean.

**LABEL:** Summary

**DATE:** 11/15/20

**TITLE:** The fall of the Western Roman Empire summary V

**CONTENT:**

While the loss of political unity and military control is universally acknowledged, the Fall is not the only unifying concept for these events; the period described as [Late Antiquity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Late_Antiquity) emphasizes the cultural continuities throughout and beyond the political collapse.

**LABEL:** Historical Approaches

**DATE:** 11/15/20

**TITLE:** Historical Approaches Intro

**CONTENT:**

Since 1776, when [Edward Gibbon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Gibbon) published the first volume of his [*The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_History_of_the_Decline_and_Fall_of_the_Roman_Empire), Decline and Fall has been the theme around which much of the history of the Roman Empire has been structured. "From the eighteenth century onward," historian [Glen Bowersock](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glen_Bowersock) wrote, "we have been obsessed with the fall: it has been valued as an archetype for every perceived decline, and, hence, as a symbol for our own fears."[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-5) The Fall is not the only unifying concept for these events; the period described as [Late Antiquity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Late_Antiquity) emphasizes the cultural continuities throughout and beyond the political collapse.

**LABEL:** Historical Approaches

**DATE:** 11/15/20

**TITLE:** Timespan

**CONTENT:**

The Fall of the Western Roman Empire was the process in which it failed to enforce its rule. The loss of centralized political control over the West, and the lessened power of the East, are universally agreed, but the theme of decline has been taken to cover a much wider time span than the hundred years from 376. For [Cassius Dio](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cassius_Dio), the accession of the emperor [Commodus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commodus) in 180 CE marked the descent "from a kingdom of gold to one of rust and iron",[[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-6) while Gibbon also began his narrative of decline from the reign of Commodus, after a number of introductory chapters. [Arnold J. Toynbee](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arnold_J._Toynbee) and [James Burke](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Burke_(science_historian)) argue that the entire Imperial era was one of steady decay of institutions founded in [republican](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Republic) times, while [Theodor Mommsen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theodor_Mommsen) excluded the imperial period from his Nobel Prize-winning [*History of Rome*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Rome_(Mommsen)) (1854–56). As one convenient marker for the end, 476 has been used since Gibbon, but other key dates for the fall of the Roman Empire in the West include the [Crisis of the Third Century](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crisis_of_the_Third_Century), the [Crossing of the Rhine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crossing_of_the_Rhine) in 406 (or 405), the [sack of Rome in 410](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sack_of_Rome_(410)), and the death of [Julius Nepos](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julius_Nepos) in 480.[[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEMomigliano1973-7)[[*page needed*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Citing_sources)]

**LABEL:** Historical Approaches

**DATE:** 11/15/20

**TITLE:** Reasons

**CONTENT:** Gibbon gave a classic formulation of reasons why the Fall happened. He gave great weight to internal decline as well as to attacks from outside the Empire.

The story of its ruin is simple and obvious; and, instead of inquiring why the Roman empire was destroyed, we should rather be surprised that it had subsisted so long. The victorious legions, who, in distant wars, acquired the vices of strangers and mercenaries, first oppressed the freedom of the republic, and afterwards violated the majesty of the purple. The emperors, anxious for their personal safety and the public peace, were reduced to the base expedient of corrupting the discipline which rendered them alike formidable to their sovereign and to the enemy; the vigour of the military government was relaxed, and finally dissolved, by the partial institutions of Constantine; and the Roman world was overwhelmed by a deluge of Barbarians.

— Edward Gibbon. The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, "General Observations on the Fall of the Roman Empire in the West", Chapter 38

Gibbon felt that Christianity had hastened the Fall, but also ameliorated the results:

As the happiness of a future life is the great object of religion, we may hear without surprise or scandal that the introduction, or at least the abuse of Christianity, had some influence on the decline and fall of the Roman empire... the soldiers' pay was lavished on the useless multitudes of both sexes who could only plead the merits of abstinence and chastity... If the decline of the Roman empire was hastened by the conversion of Constantine, his victorious religion broke the violence of the fall, and mollified the ferocious temper of the conquerors (chapter 38).[8]

Some modern Roman historians do not believe that Christianity per se had a significant role in the Empire's fall, in part because of the Eastern (and thoroughly Christian) empire’s continuation for almost a thousand years longer.[9]

Alexander Demandt enumerated 210 different theories on why Rome fell, and new ideas have emerged since.[10][11] Historians still try to analyze the reasons for loss of political control over a vast territory (and, as a subsidiary theme, the reasons for the survival of the Eastern Roman Empire). Comparison has also been made with China after the end of the Han dynasty, which re-established unity under the Sui dynasty while the Mediterranean world remained politically disunited.

Harper identifies a Roman climatic optimum from about 200 BCE to 150 CE, when lands around the Mediterranean were generally warm and well-watered. From 150 to 450, the climate entered a transitional period, in which taxes were less easy to collect and bore more heavily on the working population. After about 450, the climate worsened further in the Late Antique Little Ice Age.[12][page needed] Climate change has also been suggested as a driver of changes in populations outside the Empire, in particular on the Eurasian steppe.[13]

**LABEL:** Historical Approaches

**DATE:** 11/15/20

**TITLE:** Alternative descriptions and labels

**CONTENT:**

From at least the time of Henri Pirenne scholars have described a continuity of Roman culture and political legitimacy long after 476.[citation needed] Pirenne postponed the demise of classical civilization to the 8th century. He challenged the notion that Germanic barbarians had caused the Western Roman Empire to end, and he refused to equate the end of the Western Roman Empire with the end of the office of emperor in Italy. He pointed out the essential continuity of the economy of the Roman Mediterranean even after the barbarian invasions, and suggested that only the Muslim conquests represented a decisive break with antiquity. The more recent formulation of a historical period characterized as "Late Antiquity" emphasizes the transformations of ancient to medieval worlds within a cultural continuity.[14] In recent decades archaeologically-based argument even extends the continuity in material culture and in patterns of settlement as late as the eleventh century.[15][16][page needed][17][page needed] Observing the political reality of lost control (and the attendant fragmentation of commerce, culture, and language), but also the cultural and archaeological continuities, the process has been described as a complex cultural transformation, rather than a fall.[18][page needed]

**LABEL:** Height of power, crises, and recoveries

**DATE:** 11/15/20

**TITLE:** Height of power, systematic weaknesses

**CONTENT:**

The Roman Empire reached its greatest geographical extent under Trajan (r. 98–117), who ruled a prosperous state that stretched from Armenia to the Atlantic. The Empire had large numbers of trained, supplied, and disciplined soldiers, drawn from a growing population. It had a comprehensive civil administration based in thriving cities with effective control over public finances. Among its literate elite it had ideological legitimacy as the only worthwhile form of civilization and a cultural unity based on comprehensive familiarity with Greek and Roman literature and rhetoric. The Empire's power allowed it to maintain extreme differences of wealth and status (including slavery on a large scale),[19][page needed] and its wide-ranging trade networks permitted even modest households to use goods made by professionals far away.[20]

The empire had both strength and resilience. Its financial system allowed it to raise significant taxes which, despite endemic corruption, supported a large regular army with logistics and training. The cursus honorum, a standardized series of military and civil posts organised for ambitious aristocratic men, ensured that powerful noblemen became familiar with military and civil command and administration. At a lower level within the army, connecting the aristocrats at the top with the private soldiers, a large number of centurions were well-rewarded, literate, and responsible for training, discipline, administration, and leadership in battle.[21] City governments with their own properties and revenues functioned effectively at a local level; membership of city councils involved lucrative opportunities for independent decision-making, and, despite its obligations, became seen as a privilege. Under a series of emperors who each adopted a mature and capable successor, the Empire did not require civil wars to regulate the imperial succession. Requests could be submitted directly to the better emperors, and the answers had the force of law, putting the imperial power directly in touch with even humble subjects.[22] The cults of polytheist religion were hugely varied, but none claimed that theirs was the only truth, and their followers displayed mutual tolerance, producing a polyphonous religious harmony.[23] Religious strife was rare after the suppression of the Bar Kokhba revolt in 136 (after which the devastated Judaea ceased to be a major centre for Jewish unrest).

Nevertheless, it remained a culture based on an early subsistence economy, with no germ theory of disease. Despite its aqueducts, the water supply did not allow good hygiene, and sewage was disposed of on the streets, in open drains, or by scavenging animals. Even in the Roman Climatic Optimum, local harvest failures causing famines were always a possibility.[24][page needed] And even in good times, Roman women needed to have, on average, six children each in order to maintain the population.[24][page needed] Good nourishment and bodily cleanliness were privileges of the rich, advertised by their firm tread, healthy skin color, and lack of the "dull smell of the underbathed".[25] Infant mortality was very high, diarrhoeal diseases were a major cause of death, and malaria was endemic in many areas, notably in the city of Rome itself, possibly encouraged by the enthusiasm of rich Romans for water features in their gardens.[24][page needed]

**LABEL:** Height of power, crises, and recoveries

**DATE:** 11/15/20

**TITLE:** Climatic worsening and plague

**CONTENT:**

From about 150, the climate became on average somewhat worse for most of the inhabited lands around the Mediterranean.[26][27] Heavy mortality in 165–180 from the Antonine Plague seriously impaired attempts to repel Germanic invaders, but the legions generally held or at least speedily re-instated the borders of the Empire.[28]

**LABEL:** Height of power, crises, and recoveries

**DATE:** 11/15/20

**TITLE:** Crisis of the Third Century

**CONTENT:**

The Empire suffered multiple serious crises during the third century. The rising Sassanid Empire inflicted three crushing defeats on Roman field armies and remained a potent threat for centuries.[29] Other disasters included repeated civil wars, barbarian invasions, and more mass-mortality in the Plague of Cyprian (from 250 onwards). Rome abandoned the province of Dacia on the north of the Danube (271), and for a short period the Empire split into a Gallic Empire in the West (260–274), a Palmyrene Empire in the East (260–273), and a central Roman rump state. The Rhine/Danube frontier also came under more effective threats from larger barbarian groupings, which had developed improved agriculture and increased their populations.[30][31] The average nutritional state of the population in the West suffered a serious decline in the late second century; the population of North-Western Europe did not recover, though the Mediterranean regions did.[32]

The Empire survived the "Crisis of the Third Century", directing its economy successfully towards defense, but survival came at the price of a more centralized and bureaucratic state. Under Gallienus (Emperor from 253 to 268) the senatorial aristocracy ceased joining the ranks of the senior military commanders, its typical members lacking interest in military service and showing incompetence at command.[33][34]

**LABEL:** Height of power, crises, and recoveries

**DATE:** 11/15/20

**TITLE:** Reunification and political division

**CONTENT:**

Aurelian reunited the empire in 274, and from 284 Diocletian and his successors reorganized it with more emphasis on the military. John the Lydian, writing over two centuries later, reported that Diocletian's army at one point totaled 389,704 men, plus 45,562 in the fleets, and numbers may have increased later.[35] With the limited communications of the time, both the European and the Eastern frontiers needed the attention of their own supreme commanders. Diocletian tried to solve this problem by re-establishing an adoptive succession with a senior (Augustus) and junior (Caesar) emperor in each half of the Empire, but this system of tetrarchy broke down within one generation; the hereditary principle re-established itself with generally unfortunate results, and thereafter civil war became again the main method of establishing new imperial regimes. Although Constantine the Great (in office 306 to 337) again re-united the Empire, towards the end of the fourth century the need for division was generally accepted. From then on, the Empire existed in constant tension between the need for two emperors and their mutual mistrust.[29]

Until late in the fourth century the united Empire retained sufficient power to launch attacks against its enemies in Germania and in the Sassanid Empire. Receptio of barbarians became widely practised: imperial authorities admitted potentially hostile groups into the Empire, split them up, and allotted to them lands, status, and duties within the imperial system.[36] In this way many groups provided unfree workers (coloni) for Roman landowners, and recruits (laeti) for the Roman army. Sometimes their leaders became officers. Normally the Romans managed the process carefully, with sufficient military force on hand to ensure compliance, and cultural assimilation followed over the next generation or two.

**LABEL:** Height of power, crises, and recoveries

**DATE:** 11/15/20

**TITLE:** Growing social divisions

**CONTENT:**

The new supreme rulers disposed of the legal fiction of the early Empire (seeing the emperor as but the first among equals); emperors from Aurelian (reigned 270–275) onwards openly styled themselves as dominus et deus, "lord and god", titles appropriate for a master-slave relationship.[37] An elaborate court ceremonial developed, and obsequious flattery became the order of the day. Under Diocletian, the flow of direct requests to the emperor rapidly reduced and soon ceased altogether. No other form of direct access replaced them, and the emperor received only information filtered through his courtiers.[38]

Official cruelty, supporting extortion and corruption, may also have become more commonplace.[39] While the scale, complexity, and violence of government were unmatched,[40] the emperors lost control over their whole realm insofar as that control came increasingly to be wielded by anyone who paid for it.[41] Meanwhile, the richest senatorial families, immune from most taxation, engrossed more and more of the available wealth and income,[42][43] while also becoming divorced from any tradition of military excellence. One scholar identifies a great increase in the purchasing power of gold, two and a half fold from 274 to the later fourth century, which may be an index of growing economic inequality between a gold-rich elite and a cash-poor peasantry.[44]

Within the late Roman military, many recruits and even officers had barbarian origins, and soldiers are recorded as using possibly-barbarian rituals such as elevating a claimant on shields.[45] Some scholars have seen this as an indication of weakness; others disagree, seeing neither barbarian recruits nor new rituals as causing any problem with the effectiveness or loyalty of the army.[46]

**LABEL:** 313–376

**DATE:** 11/16/20

**TITLE:** Abuse of power, frontier warfare, and rise of Christianity

**CONTENT:**

In 313 Constantine I declared official toleration of Christianity, followed over the ensuing decades by establishment of Christian orthodoxy and by official and private action against pagans and non-orthodox Christians. His successors generally continued this process, and Christianity became the religion of any ambitious civil official. Under Constantine the cities lost their revenue from local taxes, and under Constantius II (r. 337–361) their endowments of property.[47] This worsened the existing difficulty in keeping the city councils up to strength, and the services provided by the cities were scamped or abandoned.[47] Public building projects became fewer, more often repairs than new construction, and now provided at state expense rather than by local grandees wishing to consolidate long-term local influence.[48] A further financial abuse was Constantius's increased habit of granting to his immediate entourage the estates of persons condemned of treason and other capital charges; this reduced future though not immediate income, and those close to the emperor gained a strong incentive to stimulate his suspicion of plots.[47]

Constantine settled Franks on the lower left bank of the Rhine; their settlements required a line of fortifications to keep them in check, indicating that Rome had lost almost all local control.[39] Under Constantius, bandits came to dominate areas such as Isauria well within the empire.[49] The tribes of Germany also became more populous and more threatening.[30] In Gaul, which did not really recover from the invasions of the third century, there was widespread insecurity and economic decline in the 300s,[30] perhaps worst in Armorica. By 350, after decades of pirate attacks, virtually all villas in Armorica were deserted, and local use of money ceased about 360.[50] Repeated attempts to economize on military expenditure included billeting troops in cities, where they could less easily be kept under military discipline and could more easily extort from civilians.[51] Except in the rare case of a determined and incorruptible general, these troops proved ineffective in action and dangerous to civilians.[52] Frontier troops were often given land rather than pay; as they farmed for themselves, their direct costs diminished, but so did their effectiveness, and there was much less economic stimulus to the frontier economy.[53] However, except for the provinces along the lower Rhine, the agricultural economy was generally doing well.[54]

The numbers and effectiveness of the regular soldiers may have declined during the fourth century: payrolls were inflated so that pay could be diverted and exemptions from duty sold, their opportunities for personal extortion were multiplied by residence in cities, and their effectiveness was reduced by concentration on extortion instead of drill.[55] However, extortion, gross corruption, and occasional ineffectiveness[56] were not new to the Roman army; there is no consensus whether its effectiveness significantly declined before 376.[57] Ammianus Marcellinus, himself a professional soldier, repeats longstanding observations about the superiority of contemporary Roman armies being due to training and discipline, not to physical size or strength.[58] Despite a possible decrease in its ability to assemble and supply large armies,[59] Rome maintained an aggressive and potent stance against perceived threats almost to the end of the fourth century.[60]

Solidus, obverse showing Julian as philosopher, reverse symbolizing the strength of the Roman army

Solidus of Julian, c. 361. Obverse: Julian with the beard appropriate to a Neoplatonic philosopher. Inscription: FL(AVIVS) CL(AVDIVS) IVLIANVS PP(=Pater Patriae, "father of the nation") AVG(=Augustus). Reverse: an armed Roman, military standard in one hand, a captive in the other. Inscription: VIRTVS EXERCITVS ROMANORVM, "the bravery/virtue of the Roman army"; the mint mark is SIRM, Sirmium

Julian (r. 360–363) launched a drive against official corruption which allowed the tax demands in Gaul to be reduced to one-third of their previous amount, while all government requirements were still met.[61] In civil legislation Julian was notable for his pro-pagan policies. All Christian sects were officially tolerated by Julian, persecution of heretics was forbidden, and non-Christian religions were encouraged. Some Christians continued to destroy temples, disrupt rituals, and break sacred images, seeking martyrdom and at times achieving it at the hands of non-Christian mobs or secular authorities; some pagans attacked the Christians who had previously been involved with the destruction of temples.[62]

Julian won victories against Germans who had invaded Gaul. He launched an expensive campaign against the Persians,[47] which ended in defeat and his own death. He succeeded in marching to the Sassanid capital of Ctesiphon, but lacked adequate supplies for an assault. He burned his boats and supplies to show resolve in continuing operations, but the Sassanids began a war of attrition by burning crops. Finding himself cut off in enemy territory, he began a land retreat during which he was mortally wounded. His successor Jovian, acclaimed by a demoralized army, began his brief reign (363–364) trapped in Mesopotamia without supplies. To purchase safe passage home, he had to concede areas of northern Mesopotamia and Kurdistan, including the strategically important fortress of Nisibis, which had been Roman since before the Peace of Nisibis in 299.

The brothers Valens (r. 364–378) and Valentinian I (r. 364–375) energetically tackled the threats of barbarian attacks on all the Western frontiers[63] and tried to alleviate the burdens of taxation, which had risen continuously over the previous forty years; Valens in the East reduced the tax demand by half in his fourth year.[64]

Both were Christians and confiscated the temple lands that Julian had restored, but were generally tolerant of other beliefs. Valentinian in the West refused to intervene in religious controversy; in the East, Valens had to deal with Christians who did not conform to his ideas of orthodoxy, and persecution formed part of his response.[65] The wealth of the church increased dramatically, immense resources both public and private being used for ecclesiastical construction and support of the religious life.[66] Bishops in wealthy cities were thus able to offer vast patronage; Ammianus described some as "enriched from the offerings of matrons, ride seated in carriages, wearing clothing chosen with care, and serve banquets so lavish that their entertainments outdo the tables of kings". Edward Gibbon remarked that "the soldiers' pay was lavished on the useless multitudes of both sexes who could only plead the merits of abstinence and chastity", though there are no figures for the monks and nuns nor for their maintenance costs. Pagan rituals and buildings had not been cheap either; the move to Christianity may not have had significant effects on the public finances.[30] Some public disorder also followed competition for prestigious posts; Pope Damasus I was installed in 366 after an election whose casualties included a hundred and thirty-seven corpses in the basilica of Sicininus.[67]

Valentinian died of an apoplexy while shouting at envoys of Germanic leaders. His successors in the West were children, his sons Gratian (r. 375–383) and Valentinian II (r. 375–392). Gratian, "alien from the art of government both by temperament and by training" removed the Altar of Victory from the Senate House, and he rejected the pagan title of Pontifex Maximus.[68]

**LABEL:** 313–376: invasions, civil wars, and religious discord

**DATE:** 11/16/20

**TITLE:** Battle of Andrianople

**CONTENT:**

In 376 the East faced an enormous barbarian influx across the Danube, mostly [Goths](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goths) who were refugees from the [Huns](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Huns). They were exploited by corrupt officials rather than effectively resettled, and they took up arms, joined by more Goths and by some [Alans](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alans) and Huns. Valens was in Asia with his main field army, preparing for an assault on the Persians, and redirecting the army and its logistic support would have required time. Gratian's armies were distracted by Germanic invasions across the Rhine. In 378 Valens attacked the invaders with the Eastern field army, perhaps some 20,000 men – possibly only 10% of the soldiers nominally available in the Danube provinces[[69]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEMacMullen1988185-69) – and in the [Battle of Adrianople](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Adrianople), 9 August 378, he lost much of that army and his own life. All of the Balkan provinces were thus exposed to raiding, without effective response from the remaining garrisons who were "more easily slaughtered than sheep".[[69]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEMacMullen1988185-69) Cities were able to hold their own walls against barbarians who had no siege equipment, and they generally remained intact although the countryside suffered.[[70]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTENicasie1998263ff-70)

**LABEL:** 313–376: invasions, civil wars, and religious discord

**DATE:** 11/16/20

**TITLE:** Partial recovery in the Balkans, internal corruption and financial desperation

**CONTENT:**

Gratian appointed a new *Augustus*, a proven general from [Hispania](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hispania) called [Theodosius](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theodosius_I). During the next four years, he partially re-established the Roman position in the East.[[71]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTENicasie1998256-71)[[72]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEHalsall2007183-72) These campaigns depended on effective imperial coordination and mutual trust – between 379 and 380 Theodosius controlled not only the Eastern empire, but also, by agreement, the [diocese of Illyricum](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diocese_of_Illyricum).[[73]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns199448-73) Theodosius was unable to recruit enough Roman troops, relying on [barbarian warbands](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foederati) without Roman military discipline or loyalty. In contrast, during the [Cimbrian War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cimbrian_War), the [Roman Republic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Republic), controlling a smaller area than the western Empire, had been able to reconstitute large regular armies of citizens after greater defeats than Adrianople, and it ended that war with the near-extermination of the invading barbarian supergroups, each recorded as having more than 100,000 warriors (with allowances for the usual exaggeration of numbers by ancient authors).[[74]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-74)

The final Gothic settlement was acclaimed with relief,[[72]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEHalsall2007183-72) even the official [panegyrist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panegyrist) admitting that these Goths could not be expelled or exterminated, nor reduced to unfree status.[[75]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEHeather2005188-75) Instead they were either recruited into the imperial forces, or settled in the devastated provinces along the south bank of the Danube, where the regular garrisons were never fully re-established.[[76]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns199454-76) In some later accounts, and widely in recent work, this is regarded as a treaty settlement, the first time that barbarians were given a home within the Empire in which they retained their political and military cohesion.[[77]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEJones1964157-77) No formal treaty is recorded, nor details of whatever agreement was actually made; when the Goths are next mentioned in Roman records, they have different leaders and are soldiers of a sort.[[78]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEHalsall2007185-78) In 391 [Alaric](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alaric_I), a Gothic leader, rebelled against Roman control. Goths attacked the emperor himself, but within a year Alaric was accepted as a leader of Theodosius's Gothic troops and this rebellion was over.[[79]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994102,_152-79)

Theodosius's financial position must have been difficult, since he had to pay for expensive campaigning from a reduced tax base. The business of subduing barbarian warbands also demanded substantial gifts of precious metal.[[80]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns199465-80) Nevertheless, he is represented as financially lavish, though personally frugal when on campaign.[[81]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEJones1964162,_169-81) At least one extra levy provoked desperation and rioting in which the emperor's statues were destroyed.[[82]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEJones1964162-82) A contemporary reports that at his court "everything was for sale", with corruption rampant.[[83]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-83) He was pious, a [Nicene Christian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicene_Christian) heavily influenced by [Ambrose](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ambrose), and implacable against heretics. In 392 he forbade even private honor to [the gods](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polytheism), and pagan rituals such as the [Olympic Games](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Olympic_Games). He either ordered or connived at the widespread destruction of sacred buildings.[[84]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEJones1964166%E2%80%93167-84)

**LABEL:** 313–376: invasions, civil wars, and religious discord

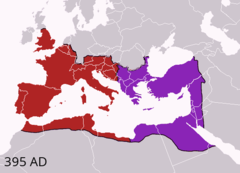
**DATE:** 11/16/20

**TITLE:** Civil wars

**CONTENT:**

Theodosius had to face a powerful usurper in the West; [Magnus Maximus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magnus_Maximus) declared himself Emperor in 383, stripped troops from the outlying regions of [Britannia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Britannia) (probably replacing some with [federate chieftains](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cunedda) and their war-bands) and invaded Gaul. His troops killed Gratian and he was accepted as Augustus in the Gallic provinces, where he was responsible for the first official executions of [Christian heretics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Priscillian).[[85]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEJones1964164-85) To compensate the Western court for the loss of Gaul, Hispania, and Britannia, Theodosius ceded the [diocese of Dacia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diocese_of_Dacia) and the [diocese of Macedonia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diocese_of_Macedonia) to their control. In 387 Maximus invaded Italy, forcing [Valentinian II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Valentinian_II) to flee to the East, where he accepted Nicene Christianity. Maximus boasted to [Ambrose](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ambrose) of the numbers of barbarians in his forces, and hordes of Goths, Huns, and Alans followed Theodosius.[[86]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEJones1964159-86) Maximus negotiated with Theodosius for acceptance as *Augustus* of the West, but Theodosius refused, gathered his armies, and counterattacked, [winning the civil war](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_the_Save) in 388. There were heavy troop losses on both sides of the conflict. Later Welsh legend has Maximus's defeated troops resettled in [Armorica](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armorica), instead of returning to Britannia, and by 400, Armorica was controlled by [Bagaudae](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bagaudae) rather than by imperial authority.[[87]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEMacMullen1988178-87)

Theodosius restored Valentinian II, still a very young man, as *Augustus* in the West. He also appointed [Arbogast](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arbogast_(magister_militum)), a pagan general of [Frankish](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franks) origin, as Valentinian's commander-in-chief and guardian. Valentinian quarreled in public with Arbogast, failed to assert any authority, and died, either by suicide or by murder, at the age of 21. Arbogast and Theodosius failed to come to terms and Arbogast nominated an imperial official, [Eugenius](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eugenius) (r. 392–394), as emperor in the West. Eugenius made some modest attempts to win pagan support,[[82]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEJones1964162-82) and with Arbogast led a large army to fight another destructive civil war. They were defeated and killed at the [Battle of the Frigidus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_the_Frigidus), which was attended by further heavy losses especially among the Gothic federates of Theodosius. The north-eastern approaches to Italy were never effectively garrisoned again.[[88]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994159-88)



The [Eastern](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern_Roman_Empire) and [Western](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Roman_Empire) Roman Empire at the death of Theodosius I in 395

Theodosius died a few months later in early 395, leaving his young sons [Honorius](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Honorius_(emperor)) (r. 395–423) and [Arcadius](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arcadius) (r. 395–408) as emperors. In the immediate aftermath of Theodosius's death, the [*magister militum*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magister_militum) [Stilicho](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stilicho), married to Theodosius's niece, asserted himself in the West as the guardian of Honorius and commander of the remains of the defeated Western army. He also claimed control over Arcadius in Constantinople, but [Rufinus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rufinus_(consul)), [*magister officiorum*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magister_officiorum) on the spot, had already established his own power there. Henceforward the Empire was not under the control of one man, until much of the West had been permanently lost.[[89]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEJones1964157%E2%80%93158,_169-89) Neither Honorius nor Arcadius ever displayed any ability either as rulers or as generals, and both lived as the puppets of their courts.[[90]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEJones1964173-90) [Stilicho](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stilicho) tried to reunite the Eastern and Western courts under his personal control, but in doing so achieved only the continued hostility of all of Arcadius's successive supreme ministers.

**LABEL:** Military, financial, and political ineffectiveness: the process of failure

**DATE:** 2/15/21

**TITLE:** Military, financial, and political ineffectiveness: the process of failure

**CONTENT:**

The ineffectiveness of Roman military responses from Stilicho onwards has been described as "shocking",[[91]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEMacgeorge2002171-91) with little evidence of indigenous [field forces](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Field_Force) or of adequate training, discipline, pay, or supply for the barbarians who formed most of the available troops. Local defence was occasionally effective, but was often associated with withdrawal from central control and taxes; in many areas, barbarians under Roman authority attacked culturally-Roman "[Bagaudae](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bagaudae)".[[92]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEHeather2005213%E2%80%93214,_217%E2%80%93218,_242,_255-92)[[93]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEJones1964187-93)[[94]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEMacMullen1988chapter_2:_Power_Effective_pp=58%E2%80%93121-94)

Corruption, in this context the diversion of public finance from the needs of the army, may have contributed greatly to the Fall. The rich senatorial aristocrats in Rome itself became increasingly influential during the fifth century; they supported armed strength in theory, but did not wish to pay for it or to offer their own workers as army recruits.[[95]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEAlf%C3%B6ldy200117-95)[[96]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEMacgeorge2002171-172-96) They did, however, pass large amounts of money to the Christian Church.[[97]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEMacgeorge2002172-97) At a local level, from the early fourth century, the town councils lost their property and their power, which often became concentrated in the hands of a few local despots beyond the reach of the law.[[98]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEMacMullen1988-98)

The fifth-century Western emperors, with brief exceptions, were individuals incapable of ruling effectively or even of controlling their own courts.[[90]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEJones1964173-90) Those exceptions were responsible for brief, but remarkable resurgences of Roman power.

**LABEL:** 395–406; Stilicho

**DATE:** 2/15/21

**TITLE:** Summary

**CONTENT:**

Without an authoritative ruler, the Balkan provinces fell rapidly into disorder. Alaric was disappointed in his hopes for promotion to magister militum after the battle of the Frigidus. He again led Gothic tribesmen in arms and established himself as an independent power, burning the countryside as far as the walls of Constantinople.[99] Alaric's ambitions for long-term Roman office were never quite acceptable to the Roman imperial courts, and his men could never settle long enough to farm in any one area. They showed no inclination to leave the Empire and face the Huns from whom they had fled in 376; indeed the Huns were still stirring up further migrations which often ended by attacking Rome in turn. Alaric's group was never destroyed nor expelled from the Empire, nor acculturated under effective Roman domination.[92][93][100]

**LABEL:** 395–406; Stilicho

**DATE:** 2/15/21

**TITLE:** Stilicho's attempts to unify the Empire, revolts, and invasions

**CONTENT:**

Alaric took his Gothic army on what Stilicho's propagandist [Claudian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Claudian) described as a "pillaging campaign" that began first in the East.[[101]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEJames201454-101) Alaric's forces made their way along the coast to Athens, where he sought to force a new peace upon the Romans.[[101]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEJames201454-101) His march in 396 passed through [Thermopylae](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thermopylae). [Stilicho](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stilicho) sailed from Italy to Greece with his remaining mobile forces, a clear threat to [Rufinus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rufinus_(consul))' control of the Eastern empire. The bulk of Rufinus' forces were occupied with [Hunnic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Huns) incursions in [Asia Minor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asia_Minor) and [Syria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Syria), leaving [Thrace](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thrace) undefended. Stilicho's propagandist Claudian reports that only Stilicho's attack stemmed the plundering as he pushed Alaric's forces north into Epirus.[[102]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEKulikowski2019126-102) Burns' interpretation is that Alaric and his men had been recruited by [Rufinus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rufinus_(consul))'s Eastern regime, and sent to [Thessaly](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thessaly) to stave off Stilicho's threat.[[88]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994159-88) No battle took place. Zosimus adds that Stilicho's troops destroyed and pillaged too, and let Alaric's men escape with their plunder.[[a]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-103)

Stilicho was forced to send some of his Eastern forces home.[[103]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994154-104) They went to Constantinople under the command of one [Gainas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gainas), a Goth with a large Gothic following. On arrival, Gainas murdered Rufinus, and was appointed *magister militum* for [Thrace](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thrace) by [Eutropius](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eutropius_(consul_399)), the new supreme minister and the only eunuch consul of Rome, who controlled Arcadius "as if he were a sheep".[[104]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-Zosimus,_book_5-105) Stilicho obtained a few more troops from the German frontier and continued to campaign ineffectively against the Eastern empire; again he was successfully opposed by Alaric and his men. During the next year, 397, Eutropius personally led his troops to victory over some [Huns](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Huns) who were marauding in Asia Minor. With his position thus strengthened he declared Stilicho a public enemy, and he established Alaric as *magister militum* per [Illyricum](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Illyricum_(Roman_province)). A poem by [Synesius](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Synesius) advises the emperor to display manliness and remove a "skin-clad savage" (probably Alaric) from the councils of power and his barbarians from the Roman army. We do not know if Arcadius ever became aware of the existence of this advice, but it had no recorded effect.[[105]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994162%E2%80%93163-106) [Synesius](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Synesius), from a province suffering the widespread ravages of a few poor but greedy barbarians, also complained of "the peacetime war, one almost worse than the barbarian war and arising from military indiscipline and the officer's greed."[[106]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEMacMullen1988189-107)

The *magister militum* in the [Diocese of Africa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diocese_of_Africa) [declared for the East](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gildonic_revolt) and stopped the supply of grain to Rome.[[88]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994159-88) Italy had not fed itself for centuries and could not do so now. In 398, Stilicho sent his last reserves, a few thousand men, to re-take the Diocese of Africa, and he strengthened his position further when he married [his daughter Maria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maria_(empress)) to Honorius. Throughout this period Stilicho, and all other generals, were desperately short of recruits and supplies for them.[[107]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994183-108) In 400, Stilicho was charged to press into service any "[laetus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laetus), Alamannus, Sarmatian, vagrant, son of a veteran" or any other person liable to serve.[[108]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994186-109) He had reached the bottom of his recruitment pool.[[109]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994187-110) Though personally not corrupt, he was very active in confiscating assets;[[104]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-Zosimus,_book_5-105) the financial and administrative machine was not producing enough support for the army.

In 399, [Tribigild](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tribigild)'s rebellion in Asia Minor allowed Gainas to accumulate a significant army (mostly Goths), become supreme in the Eastern court, and execute Eutropius.[[110]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994169-111) He now felt that he could dispense with Alaric's services and he nominally transferred Alaric's province to the West. This administrative change removed Alaric's Roman rank and his entitlement to legal provisioning for his men, leaving his army – the only significant force in the ravaged Balkans – as a problem for Stilicho.[[111]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994175-112) In 400, the citizens of Constantinople revolted against Gainas and massacred as many of his people, soldiers and their families, as they could catch. Some Goths at least built rafts and tried to cross the strip of sea that separates Asia from Europe; the Roman navy slaughtered them.[[112]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEWard-Perkins200560-113) By the beginning of 401, Gainas' head rode a pike through Constantinople while [another Gothic general](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fravitta) became consul.[[113]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994173-114) Meanwhile, groups of Huns started a series of attacks across the Danube, and the [Isaurians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isaurians) marauded far and wide in Anatolia.[[114]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEJones1964192-115)

In 401 Stilicho travelled over the [Alps](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alps) to [Raetia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raetia), to scrape up further troops.[[115]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994191-116) He left the Rhine defended only by the "dread" of Roman retaliation, rather than by adequate forces able to take the field.[[115]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994191-116) Early in spring, Alaric, probably desperate,[[116]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994190-117) invaded Italy, and he drove Honorius westward from [Mediolanum](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mediolanum), besieging him in [Hasta Pompeia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hasta_Pompeia) in Liguria. Stilicho returned as soon as the passes had cleared, meeting Alaric in two battles (near [Pollentia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Pollentia) and [Verona](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Verona_(402))) without decisive results. The Goths, weakened, were allowed to retreat back to Illyricum where the Western court again gave Alaric office, though only as [comes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comes) and only over [Dalmatia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dalmatia) and [Pannonia Secunda](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pannonia_Secunda) rather than the whole of Illyricum.[[117]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994193-118) Stilicho probably supposed that this pact would allow him to put Italian government into order and recruit fresh troops.[[107]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994183-108) He may also have planned with Alaric's help to relaunch his attempts to gain control over the Eastern court.[[118]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994195-119)

However, in 405, Stilicho was distracted by a fresh invasion of Northern Italy. Another group of Goths fleeing the Huns, led by one [Radagaisus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radagaisus), devastated the north of Italy for six months before Stilicho could muster enough forces to take the field against them. Stilicho recalled troops from [Britannia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Britannia) and the depth of the crisis was shown when he urged all Roman soldiers to allow their personal slaves to fight beside them.[[118]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994195-119) His forces, including Hun and Alan auxiliaries, may in the end have totalled rather less than 15,000 men.[[119]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994198-120) Radagaisus was defeated and executed. 12,000 prisoners from the defeated horde were drafted into Stilicho's service.[[119]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994198-120) Stilicho continued negotiations with Alaric; [Flavius Aetius](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flavius_Aetius), son of one of Stilicho's major supporters, was sent as a hostage to Alaric in 405. In 406 Stilicho, hearing of [new invaders](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crossing_of_the_Rhine) and [rebels](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constantine_III_(Western_Roman_Emperor)) who had appeared in the northern provinces, insisted on making peace with Alaric, probably on the basis that Alaric would prepare to move either against the Eastern court or against the rebels in Gaul. The Senate deeply resented peace with Alaric; in 407, when Alaric marched into [Noricum](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noricum) and demanded a large payment for his expensive efforts in Stilicho's interests, the senate, "inspired by the courage, rather than the wisdom, of their predecessors,"[[120]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-121) preferred war. One senator famously declaimed *Non est ista pax, sed pactio servitutis* ("This is not peace, but a pact of servitude").[[121]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-122) Stilicho paid Alaric four thousand pounds of gold nevertheless.[[122]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994215-123) Stilicho sent [Sarus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sarus_(Goth)), a Gothic general, over the Alps to face the usurper [Constantine III](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constantine_III_(Western_Roman_Emperor)), but he lost and barely escaped, having to leave his baggage to the bandits who now infested the Alpine passes.[[122]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994215-123)

The [empress Maria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maria_(empress)), daughter of Stilicho, died in 407 or early 408 and her sister [Aemilia Materna Thermantia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thermantia) married Honorius. In the East, Arcadius died on 1 May 408 and was replaced by his son [Theodosius II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theodosius_II); Stilicho seems to have planned to march to Constantinople, and to install there a regime loyal to himself.[[123]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994216-124) He may also have intended to give Alaric a senior official position and send him against the rebels in Gaul. Before he could do so, while he was away at [Ticinum](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ticinum) at the head of a small detachment, a bloody coup against his supporters took place at Honorius's court. It was led by Stilicho's own creature, one [Olympius](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympius).[[124]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994218-125)

**LABEL:** 408–410; the end of effective regular field armies (410-455), starvation in Italy, sack of Rome

**DATE:** 2/15/21

**TITLE:** Stilicho's fall and Alaric's reaction

**CONTENT:**

Stilicho had news of the coup at [Bononia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bologna) (where he was probably waiting for Alaric).[[125]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994227-126) His army of barbarian troops, including a guard of Huns and many Goths, discussed attacking the forces of the coup, but Stilicho prevented them when he heard that the Emperor had not been harmed. Sarus's Gothic troops then massacred the Hun contingent in their sleep, and Stilicho withdrew from the quarreling remains of his army to Ravenna. He ordered that his former soldiers should not be admitted into the cities in which their families were billeted. Stilicho was forced to flee to a church for sanctuary, promised his life, and killed.[[126]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994219-127)

Alaric was again declared an enemy of the Emperor. The conspiracy then massacred the families of the federate troops (as presumed supporters of Stilicho, although they had probably rebelled against him), and the troops defected *en masse* to Alaric.[[127]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994224%E2%80%93225-128) The conspirators seem to have let their main army disintegrate,[[128]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994228-129) and had no policy except hunting down supporters of Stilicho.[[129]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994236-130) Italy was left without effective indigenous defence forces thereafter.[[91]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEMacgeorge2002171-91) [Heraclianus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heraclianus), a co-conspirator of Olympius, became governor of the Diocese of Africa, where he controlled the source of most of Italy's grain, and he supplied food only in the interests of Honorius's regime.[[130]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEHalsall2007216-131)

As a declared 'enemy of the Emperor', Alaric was denied the legitimacy that he needed to collect taxes and hold cities without large garrisons, which he could not afford to detach. He again offered to move his men, this time to [Pannonia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pannonia), in exchange for a modest sum of money and the modest title of [Comes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comes), but he was refused as a supporter of Stilicho.[[131]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994226%E2%80%93227-132) He moved into Italy, probably using the route and supplies arranged for him by Stilicho,[[125]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994227-126) bypassing the imperial court in [Ravenna](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ravenna) which was protected by widespread marshland and had a port, and he menaced the city of Rome itself. In 407, there was no equivalent of the determined response to the catastrophic [Battle of Cannae](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Cannae#Aftermath) in 216 BCE, when the entire Roman population, even slaves, had been mobilized to resist the enemy.[[132]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEConnolly1998189-133)

Alaric's military operations centred on [the port of Rome](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portus), through which Rome's grain supply had to pass. Alaric's first [siege of Rome](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sack_of_Rome_(410)#First_siege) in 408 caused dreadful famine within the walls. It was ended by a payment that, though large, was less than one of the richest senators could have produced.[[133]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994233%E2%80%93234-134) The super-rich aristocrats made little contribution; pagan temples were stripped of ornaments to make up the total. With promises of freedom, Alaric also recruited many of the slaves in Rome.[[134]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994234-135)

Alaric withdrew to Tuscany and recruited more slaves.[[134]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994234-135) [Ataulf](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ataulf), a Goth nominally in Roman service and brother-in-law to Alaric, marched through Italy to join Alaric despite taking casualties from a small force of Hunnic mercenaries led by Olympius. Sarus was an enemy of Ataulf, and on Ataulf's arrival went back into imperial service.[[135]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEHeather2005227-136)

**LABEL:** 408–410; the end of effective regular field armies (410-455), starvation in Italy, sack of Rome

**DATE:** 2/15/21

**TITLE:** Alaric besieges Rome

**CONTENT:**

In 409 Olympius fell to further intrigue, having his ears cut off before he was beaten to death. Alaric tried again to negotiate with Honorius, but his demands (now even more moderate, only frontier land and food[[136]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEHeather2005226-137)) were inflated by the messenger and Honorius responded with insults, which were reported *verbatim* to Alaric.[[137]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994239-138) He broke off negotiations and the standoff continued. Honorius's court made overtures to the usurper [Constantine III](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constantine_III_(Western_Roman_Emperor)) in Gaul and arranged to bring Hunnic forces into Italy, Alaric ravaged Italy outside the fortified cities (which he could not garrison), and the Romans refused open battle (for which they had inadequate forces).[[138]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994238%E2%80%93239-139) Late in the year Alaric sent bishops to express his readiness to leave Italy if Honorius would only grant his people a supply of grain. Honorius, sensing weakness, flatly refused.[[139]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994240-140)

Alaric moved to Rome and captured [Galla Placidia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Galla_Placidia), sister of Honorius. The Senate in Rome, despite its loathing for Alaric, was now desperate enough to give him almost anything he wanted. They had no food to offer, but they tried to give him imperial legitimacy; with the Senate's acquiescence, he elevated [Priscus Attalus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Priscus_Attalus) as his puppet emperor, and he marched on Ravenna. Honorius was planning to flee to Constantinople when a reinforcing army of 4,000 soldiers from the East disembarked in Ravenna.[[140]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994242-141) These garrisoned the walls and Honorius held on. He had Constantine's principal court supporter executed and Constantine abandoned plans to march to Honorius's defence.[[141]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994243-142) Attalus failed to establish his control over the Diocese of Africa, and no grain arrived in Rome where the famine became even more frightful.[[142]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994243%E2%80%93244-143) [Jerome](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerome) reports cannibalism within the walls.[[143]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-Jerome-144) Attalus brought Alaric no real advantage, failing also to come to any useful agreement with Honorius (who was offered mutilation, humiliation, and exile). Indeed, Attalus's claim was a marker of threat to Honorius, and Alaric dethroned him after a few months.[[144]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEHeather2005239-145)

In 410 Alaric [took Rome](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sack_of_Rome_(410)) by starvation, sacked it for three days (there was relatively little destruction, and in some Christian holy places Alaric's men even refrained from wanton wrecking and rape), and invited its remaining barbarian slaves to join him, which many did. The city of Rome was the seat of the richest senatorial noble families and the centre of their cultural patronage; to pagans it was the sacred origin of the empire, and to Christians the seat of the heir of [Saint Peter](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Peter), [Pope Innocent I](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope_Innocent_I), the most authoritative bishop of the West. Rome had not fallen to an enemy since the [Battle of the Allia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_the_Allia) over eight centuries before. Refugees spread the news and their stories throughout the Empire, and the meaning of the fall was debated with religious fervour. Both Christians and pagans wrote embittered tracts, blaming paganism or Christianity respectively for the loss of Rome's supernatural protection, and blaming Stilicho's earthly failures in either case.[[145]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994228%E2%80%93231-146)[[104]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-Zosimus,_book_5-105) Some Christian responses anticipated the imminence of Judgement Day. [Augustine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustine) in his book "[City of God](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/City_of_God_(book))" ultimately rejected the pagan and Christian idea that religion should have worldly benefits; he developed the doctrine that the City of God in heaven, undamaged by mundane disasters, was the true objective of Christians.[[146]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEHeather2005229%E2%80%93232-147) More practically, Honorius was briefly persuaded to set aside the laws forbidding pagans to be military officers, so that one Generidus could re-establish Roman control in [Dalmatia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dalmatia). Generidus did this with unusual effectiveness; his techniques were remarkable for this period, in that they included training his troops, disciplining them, and giving them appropriate supplies even if he had to use his own money.[[147]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994196,_237,_238-148) The penal laws were reinstated no later than 25 August 410 and the overall trend of repression of paganism continued.[[148]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994238-149)

[Procopius](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Procopius) mentions a story in which Honorius, on hearing the news that Rome had "perished", was shocked, thinking the news was in reference to his favorite [chicken](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicken) he had named "Roma". On hearing that [Rome](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rome) itself had fallen he breathed a sigh of relief:

At that time they say that the Emperor Honorius in Ravenna received the message from one of the eunuchs, evidently a keeper of the poultry, that Roma had perished. And he cried out and said, "And yet it has just eaten from my hands!" For he had a very large cockerel, Roma by name; and the eunuch comprehending his words said that it was the city of Roma which had perished at the hands of Alaric, and the emperor with a sigh of relief answered quickly: "But I thought that my fowl Roma had perished." So great, they say, was the folly with which this emperor was possessed.

— [**Procopius**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Procopius)**, The Vandalic War (*De Bellis* III.2.25–26)**

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**TITLE:** The Goths move out of Italy

**CONTENT:**

Alaric then moved south, intending to sail to Africa, but his ships were wrecked in a storm and he shortly died of fever. His successor Ataulf, still regarded as an usurper and given only occasional and short-term grants of supplies, moved north into the turmoil of Gaul, where there was some prospect of food. His supergroup of barbarians are called the [Visigoths](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Visigoths) in modern works: they may now have been developing their own sense of identity.[[149]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBurns1994245-150)