

The Decline of Rome

In A.D. 330, the Roman Emperor Constantine moved his capital from Rome to the city of Byzantium on the Black Sea. This city was given a new name, Constantinople, "city of Constantine." After Constantine's death, the empire was divided into an eastern part centered at Constantinople and a western part centered at Rome. The Western Empire fell in 476. Its fall began a period of European history called the Middle Ages, or medieval (MEE•dee•EE•vuhl) period. This period lasted until about 1500. During these centuries, Europeans produced wonderful works of literature, philosophy, and art. However, the Middle Ages were also troubled by ignorance, superstition, war, and disease.

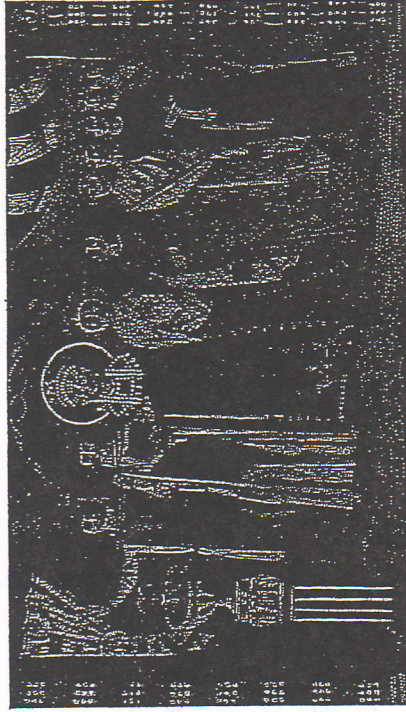
Barbarian Invasions

One cause for the decline of the Western Empire was attacks by Germanic people from eastern Europe. The Visigoths, Vandals, and Franks were among them. Another group, the Huns from central Asia, also attacked the Western Empire. In 410 the Visigoths attacked Rome itself. In 452, Rome was threatened again, this time by the Huns under Attila. Rome was spared when the pope convinced Attila to

withdraw. In 455, Rome was attacked again, this time by the Vandals. In 476, the last Roman emperor, a 14-year-old boy named Romulus Augustulus, was removed from the throne by a Germanic general. Roman power in the West had ended.

The Byzantine Empire

The Eastern Empire would last for over 1,000 years. It was called *Byzantine* (BIHZ•uhn•TEEN), after the original name of its capital, Byzantium. The Byzantine rulers saw themselves as Roman emperors. Like the Caesars, the Byzantine emperors ruled with absolute power. They also lived with the constant threat of violence. Of the 88 Byzantine emperors, 29 died violently. One of the greatest Byzantine emperors, Justinian, was nearly driven



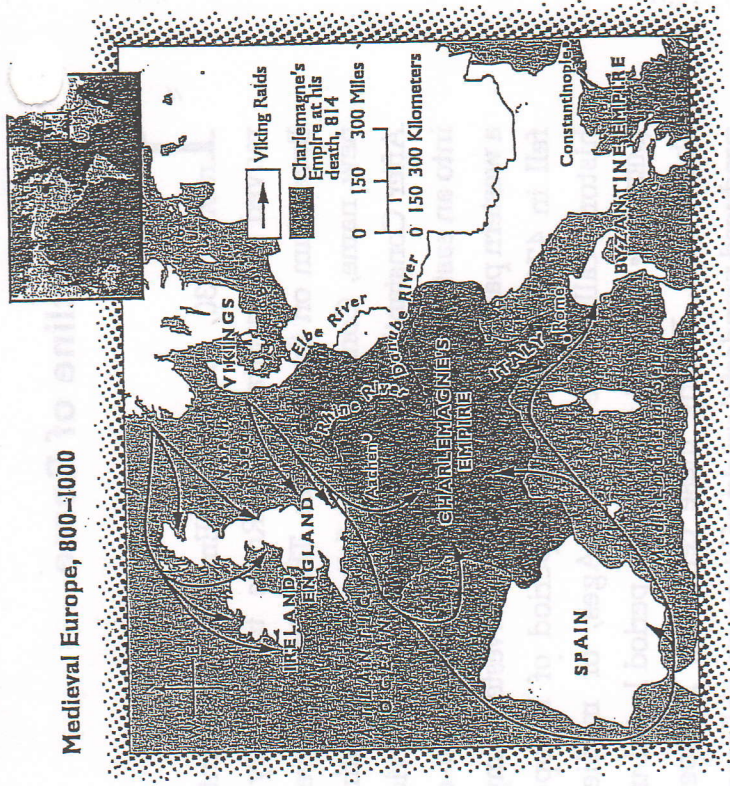
▲ The Byzantine empress Theodora stands with some of the people of her court.

from his throne. It was in 532, when mobs burned much of Constantinople during the Nika Revolt. Justinian was talked out of fleeing the capital by his brave wife, Theodora. One of Justinian's greatest acts was the Code of Justinian. This single body of law was based on Roman laws. Justinian's Code served the Byzantine Empire for hundreds of years. When Constantinople fell to the Ottoman Turks in 1453, the Eastern Roman Empire came to an end.

Charlemagne

During the late 400s, a Germanic people known as the Franks had built a large kingdom in the former Roman province of Gaul. By three centuries later, under the Frankish ruler Charlemagne (SHAHR•luh•MAYN) or "Charles the Great," this kingdom had grown much greater. Charlemagne ruled much of western Europe. His empire began to rival that of the old Western Roman Empire. In 800, Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne emperor. However, Charlemagne's empire broke up quickly under the weak rulers who followed him. One of the lasting things that Charlemagne did was to encourage learning. He surrounded himself with English, German, Italian, and Spanish scholars. He opened a palace school at his capital of Aachen (AH•kuhn).

Medieval Europe, 800-1000



Vikings

Between 800 and 1000, a new threat came from northern Europe. These invaders were a Germanic people known as Vikings or Northmen. They were skillful sailors and fierce warriors. The Vikings used their swift warships to carry out terrifying raids on the people of western Europe. These attacks helped to weaken Charlemagne's empire. The Christians of the Viking era prayed, "From the wrath of the Northmen, O Lord deliver us."