

The Roman Empire

Brief #3 (cont.)

Fast Fact

Nearly 30 Roman emperors were murdered or assassinated while in office.



Roman Emperors (cont.)

Probably one of the most infamous Roman Emperors is Nero. He ruled from 54 to 68 A.D. For both political and personal reasons, Nero is accused of murdering his stepbrother, his mother, and his wife. His leadership was so erratic that eventually he was declared an enemy of the state. Upon hearing this news, Nero committed suicide.

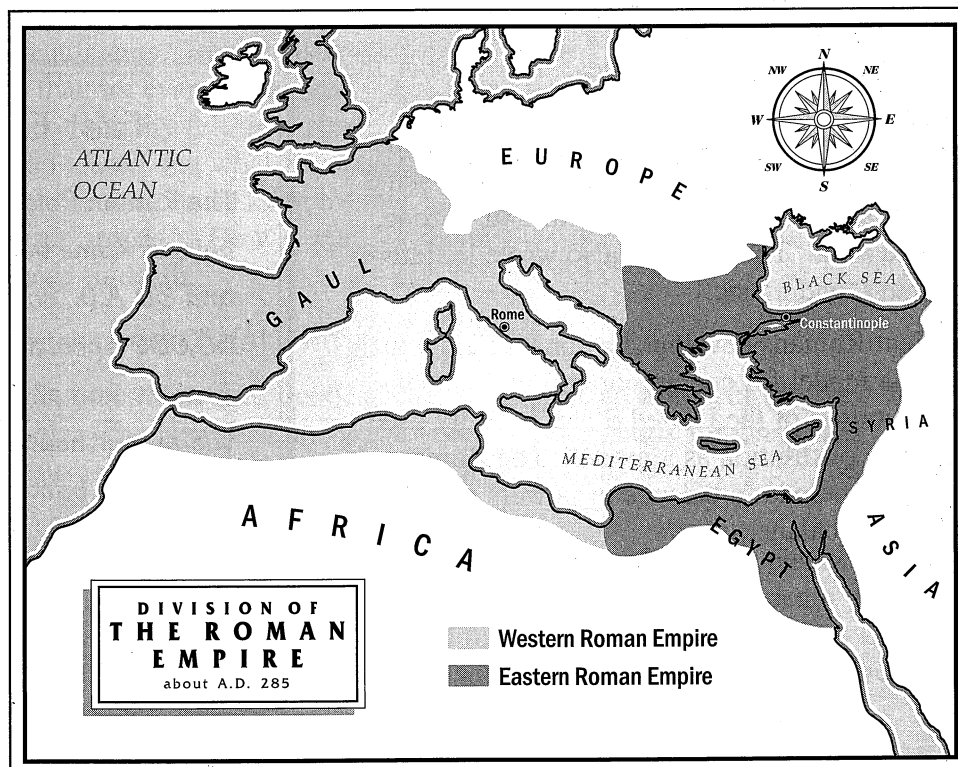


The Decline of the Roman Empire

After the death of Marcus Aurelius, one of the Five Good Emperors, the Roman Empire began to decline, or get weaker, and lose influence. One reason was that Commodus, the son of Marcus Aurelius who became emperor, was a very poor leader. He was both cruel and violent. Commodus was strangled to death while he took a bath.

Another factor that contributed to Rome's decline was its size. It was very hard to rule an empire as large as Rome. Armies in different Roman provinces fought with each other to see who could gain control of the seat of power.

In around 285 A.D., the then-emperor, Diocletian, divided the Roman Empire into two parts: the Western Roman Empire and the Eastern Roman Empire. He appointed a co-emperor named Maximian to help him rule.



The Roman Empire

Brief #3 (cont.)



The Decline of the Roman Empire (cont.)

The empire stayed divided but intact until 324 A.D. Then an emperor named Constantine came to power. He wanted to reunite the Roman Empire. But instead of having the capital of the reunited empire in Rome, where it always was, he built a new capital. This new capital was called Constantinople. It was in the eastern part of the empire. It was located in what we now call Turkey. Eventually, Constantinople would become the capital of the Byzantine Empire.

Although the Roman Empire was technically united, it really was two separate empires: the empire in the west with its capital in Rome, and the empire in the east with its capital in Constantinople. Different cultures were beginning to spring up in the two empires. Many of them had different religious traditions. At the same time, the western part of the Roman Empire was being invaded by people from different parts of Europe. The Huns, the Visigoths, and the Vandals invaded Rome in the 4th century A.D. They robbed the Romans and destroyed their homes and farms.

Eventually, the already-weakened western part of the Roman Empire collapsed in 476 A.D. The eastern half continued on for another thousand years, but the Roman Empire as it had been was over.

Fast Fact

Twelve-year-old Romulus Augustulus was the last emperor of Rome.



The Legacy of Ancient Rome

Like the ancient Egyptians, Chinese, and Greeks, the ancient Romans made a huge impact on civilization and left an enormous legacy. The ancient Romans built roads, aqueducts, and buildings that still stand today. You can see Roman architecture in Europe, Africa, and Asia. The Romans also wrote literature, poetry, plays, and music.

The ancient Romans developed a constitution which is used as a model for contemporary governments. The Constitution of the United States actually used the Roman Constitution as a model. The Roman Constitution includes a balance of powers and a series of checks and balances.

Fast Fact

The Roman Colosseum, built in Rome between 70 and 80 A.D., could seat 50,000 spectators. Ancient Romans came to the amphitheatre to watch gladiators battle wild animals and each other.