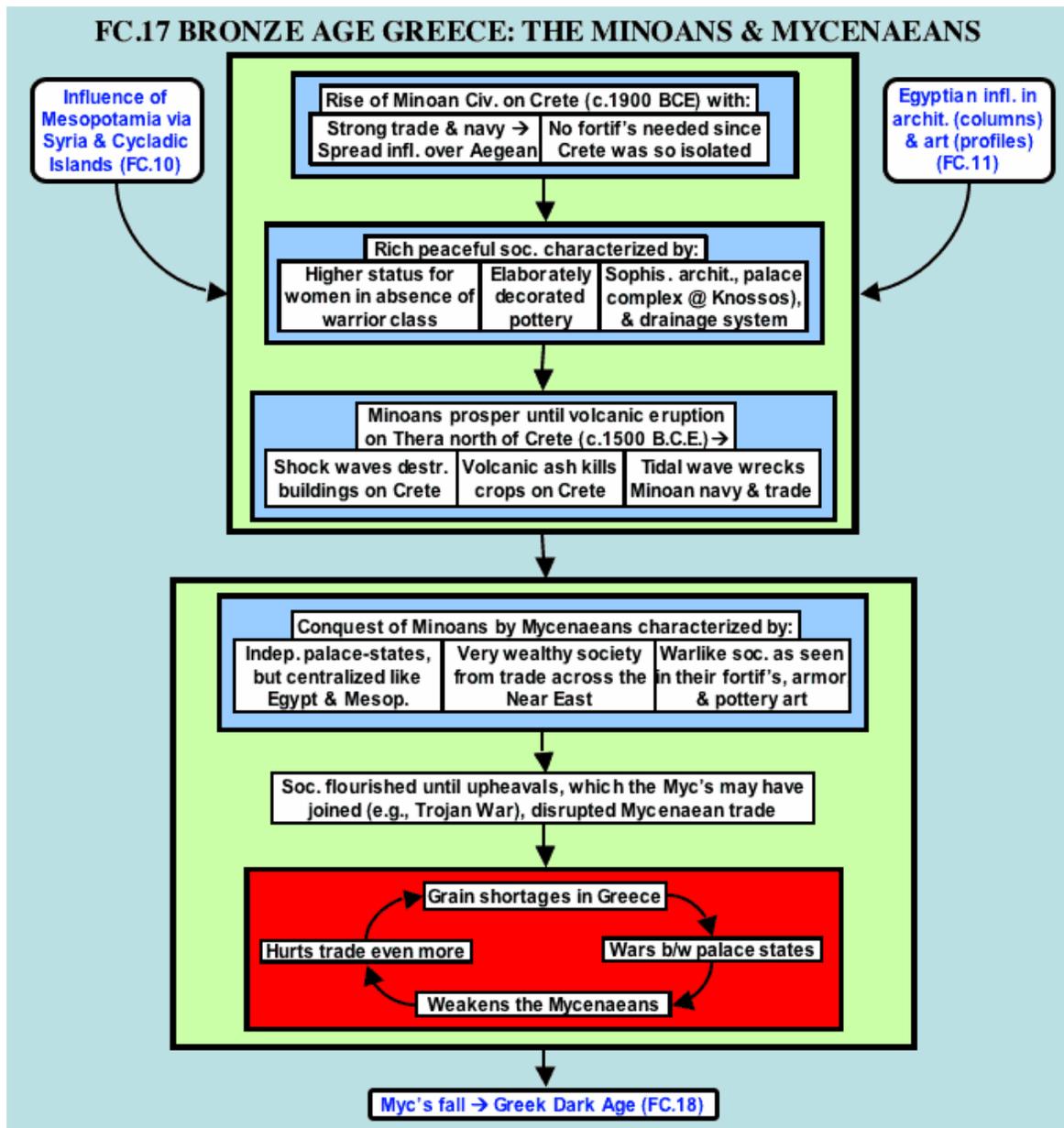


Birth of Western Civilization Birth of Western civilization: Greece, Rome, and Europe to c.1000 CE

The Ancient Greeks Unit 3: The Ancient Greeks

FC17 Bronze Age Greece: the Minoans & Mycenaeans (c.2500-1100 BCE)



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Introduction

While the peoples of the ancient Near East gave us civilization, the Greeks gave it forms and meanings that make us look to them as the founders of our own culture, Western Civilization. Greek genius and energy extended in numerous directions. Much of our math and science plus the idea of scientific research and the acquisition of knowledge apart from any religious or political authority goes back to the Greeks. The philosophy of such Greeks as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle laid the foundations for the way we look at the world today. Our art, architecture, drama, literature, and poetry are all firmly based on Greek models. And possibly most important, our ideas of democracy, the value of the individual in society, and toleration of dissent and open criticism as a means of improving society were all products of the Greek genius. Even those critical of our own society and Western Civilization overall have the Greeks, creators of Western Civilization, to thank for that right.

Greece's geography strongly affected its history. Greece was a hilly and mountainous land, breaking it up into literally hundreds of independent city-states. These city-states spent much of their time fighting one another rather than uniting

in a common cause. Greece was also by the sea with many natural harbors. This and the fact that it had poor soil and few natural resources forced the Greeks to be traders and sailors, following in the footsteps of the Phoenicians and eventually surpassing them.

The Minoans (c.2000-1500 B.C.E.)

The first Greek civilization was that of the Minoans on the island of Crete just south of Greece. Quite clearly, the Minoans were heavily influenced by two older Near Eastern civilizations, Mesopotamia and Egypt, by way of the Cycladic Islands, which formed natural stepping stones for the spread of people from Greece and of civilized ideas from the Middle East. Egyptian influence on the Minoans is especially apparent. Minoan architecture used columns much as Egyptian architecture did. Minoan art also seems to copy Egyptian art by only showing people in profile, never frontally. Still, the Minoans added their own touches, making their figures much more natural looking than the still figures we find in Egyptian art.

Since we have not been able to translate the few examples of their hieroglyphic script, known as Linear A, there are some very large gaps in the picture we have of these people. We do not even know what the people on Crete called themselves. The term *Minoans* comes from Greek myths concerning a legendary king of Crete, Minos, who supposedly ruled a vast sea empire. As with most myths, there is a grain of truth in this myth, for the Minoans were a seafaring people who depended on their navy and trade for power and prosperity.

Two things, both relating to Crete's maritime position, largely determined the nature of the Minoan's civilization. First, they had a large fleet, which was useful for both trade and defense. Second, Crete's isolated position meant there was no major threat to its security at this time and therefore little need for fortifications. These two factors helped create a peaceful and prosperous civilization reflected in three aspects of Minoan culture: its cities and architecture, the status of its women, and its art, especially its pottery.

The Minoans had several main cities centered around palace complexes which collected the island's surplus wealth as taxes and redistributed it to support the various activities that distinguish a civilization: arts, crafts, trade, and government. The largest of these centers was at Knossos, whose palace complex was so big and confusing to visitors, that it has come down to us in Greek myth as the Labyrinth, or maze, home of the legendary beast, the Minotaur. The sophistication of the Minoans is also shown by the fact that they had water pipes, sewers, and even toilets with pipes leading to outside drains. Since their island position eliminated the need for fortifications, Minoan cities were less crowded and more spread out than cities in other civilizations.

Minoan women seem to have had much higher status than their counterparts in many other ancient civilizations. One likely reason was that, in the absence of a powerful warrior class and a constant need for defense, they had more opportunity for attaining some social stature. This is reflected in their religion where the primary deity was an earth goddess. Minoan art also depicts women as being much freer, even participating with men in a dangerous gymnastic ritual of vaulting themselves over a charging bull.

Minoan art especially its pottery, also shows a peaceful prosperous society, depicting floral designs and such marine wildlife as dolphins and octopuses rather than scenes of war. Its diffusion around the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean shows that Minoan influence was quite widespread, extending throughout the Cycladic Islands and Southern Greece. The myth of Theseus and the Minotaur where Athens had to send a yearly sacrifice of its children to Crete, reflects Minoan rule and indicates that it might not always have been so peaceful. Recent archaeological evidence indicates the Minoans did at times practice human sacrifices.

Minoan civilization continued to prosper until it came to a sudden and mysterious end. A combination of archaeology and mythology provide clues to how this may have happened. The central event was a massive volcanic eruption that partially sank the island of Thera some eighty miles northeast of Crete and left a crater four times the size of that created by the eruption of Krakatoa in 1883, the largest recorded volcanic eruption in recorded history. This eruption had three devastating effects: a shock wave which levelled Crete's cities, a tidal wave which destroyed its navy, and massive fallout of volcanic ash which poisoned its crops. Together these weakened the Minoans enough to let another people, the Mycenaean Greeks eventually take over around 1450 B.C.E.

This seems to correspond to the myth of the lost continent of Atlantis, passed on to the Greeks from the Egyptians who had been frequent trading partners with the Minoans. When the Minoans, whose fleet was destroyed by the tidal wave,

suddenly stopped coming to visit Egypt, stories drifted southward about an island blown into the sea (i.e., Thera) which the Egyptians assumed was Crete. Over the centuries the stories kept growing until Crete became the vast mythical continent and empire of Atlantis set in the *Atlantic* Ocean. The Greeks picked up the story, which is found in its most complete form in Plato's dialogues, *Timaeus* and *Critias*.

The Mycenaeans (c.1500-1100 B.C.E.)

were Greeks from the mainland who took advantage of the Minoans' weakened state to conquer Crete and assume Minoan dominance of the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean. They were a vigorous and active people who engaged in trade and some piracy over a wide area extending from southern Italy in the west to Troy and the Black Sea in the northeast. We are almost as much in the dark about Mycenaean history and society as we are about the Minoans. We do have some written records in a script called Linear B which concern themselves mainly with official tax records and inventories.

Three types of evidence tell us at least a little about Mycenaean society. First of all, we know that they were divided into different city-states such as Mycenae, Pylos, Tiryns, and Athens. Most of these consisted of highly fortified central palace complexes which ruled over surrounding villages. The Mycenaeans tried to run these as highly centralized states such as existed in Egypt and Mesopotamia. We do not know if these city-states were completely independent or looked to one city, probably Mycenae, for leadership. However, sources, such as the *Iliad* tell us that the Mycenaeans could apparently unite in a common endeavor such as the Trojan War.

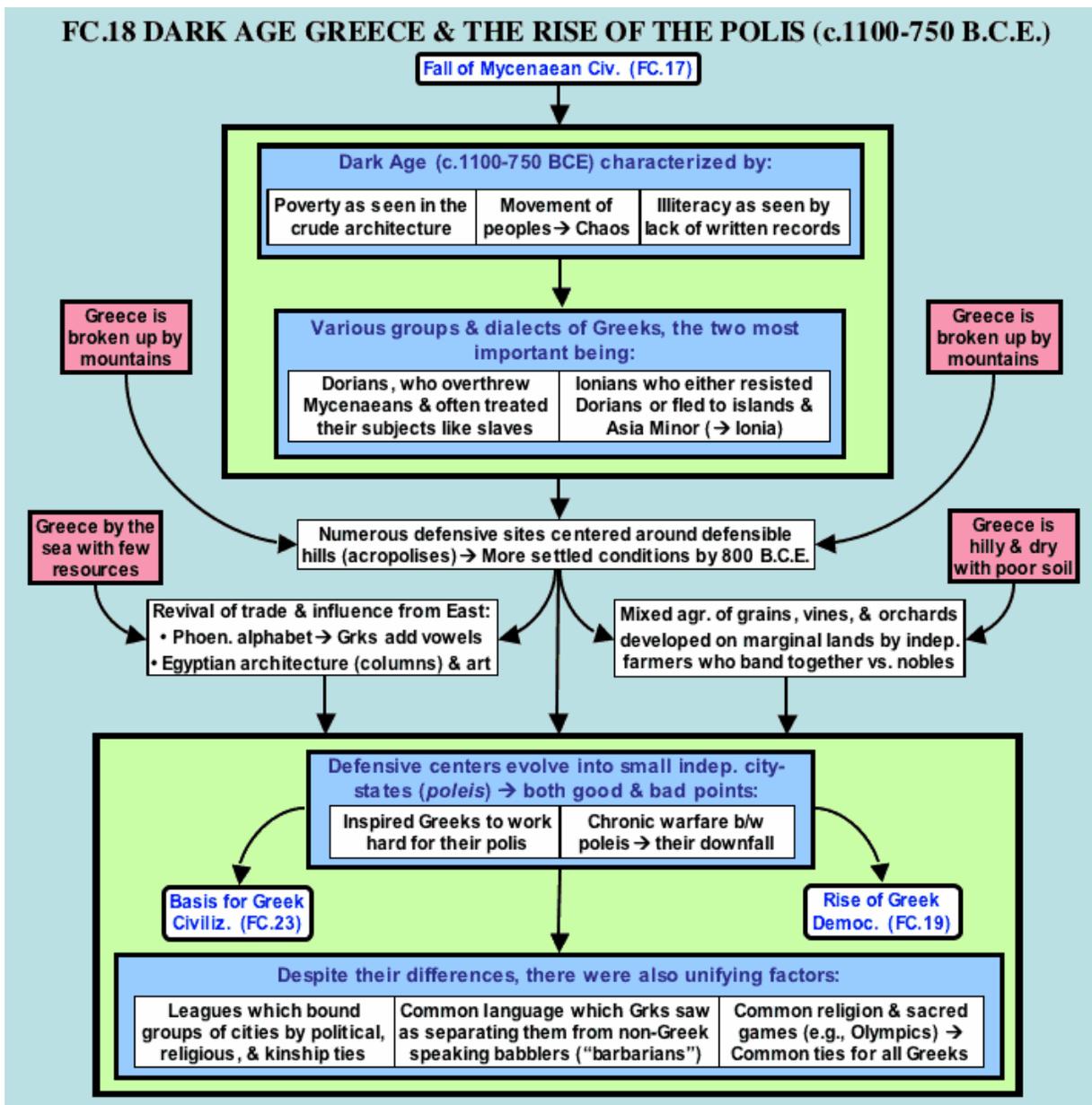
Second, the art, armor, and remains of fortifications, such as those at Mycenae, tell us the Mycenaeans were much more warlike than the Minoans. Later Greeks had no idea of the existence of Mycenaean civilization and thought these massive walls and gates had been built by a mythical race of giants known as the Cyclopes.

Finally, archaeological remains also tell us that the Mycenaeans, at least the upper classes, were fabulously wealthy from trade and probably occasional piracy. Gold funeral masks, jewelry, bronze weapons, tripods, and a storeroom with 2853 stemmed goblets all attest to the Mycenaeans' wealth. Keep in mind this is only what we have found. There is no telling how much of their wealth was plundered by grave robbers.

Around 1200 B.C.E., a period of migrations and turmoil began that would weaken and eventually help destroy Mycenaean civilization. Once again, the main troublemakers were the Sea Peoples whom we have seen destroy the Hittite Empire, conquer the coast of Palestine, and shake the Egyptian Empire to its very foundations. The Sea Peoples also hit the Mycenaeans, destroying some settlements and driving other inhabitants inland or across the sea away from their raids. The historical Trojan War and sack of Troy took place at this time at the hands of the Mycenaeans, who may have been running from and, in some cases, joining up with the Sea Peoples. Hittite records associate their own decline with people known as the *Ahiwaya*, translated as "Achaean" (Greeks).

Whatever role the Mycenaeans may have played in all these raids, the result was widespread turmoil as cities were sacked, populations displaced, and trade disrupted. Even though the Mycenaeans survived the actual onslaught of the Sea Peoples, they did not survive the aftermath of all this destruction. Reduced revenue from trade may have caused more warfare between the city-states over the meager resources left in Greece. This warfare would only serve to weaken the Mycenaeans further, wreck trade even more, aggravate grain shortages at home, and so on. This recurring feedback of problems opened the way for a new wave of Greek tribes, the Dorians, to move down and take over much of Greece. A period of anarchy and poverty now settled over the Greek world which virtually blotted out any memories of the Minoans and Mycenaeans. However, on top of the foundations laid by these early Greek cultures an even more creative and vibrant civilization would be built, that of the classical Greeks.

FC18The Dark Age of Greece & the Rise of the Polis (c.1100-750 BCE)



FC18 in the [Hyperflow of History](#).
Covered in multimedia lecture [#3519](#).

Introduction: the Dark Age of Greece

The centuries following the fall of the Mycenaeans are mostly obscured from our view by an extreme scarcity of records. As a result, this is known as the Dark Age of Greek history. Still, there are a few things that we know about this period that saw the transition from Mycenaean to classical Greek civilization. It was a period of chaos and the movements of peoples. New tribes of Greeks, the Dorians, moved in and displaced or conquered older inhabitants. Those peoples in turn would migrate, oftentimes overseas, in search of new homes. It was also a period of illiteracy and poverty leaving us no written records or sophisticated monuments to tell us about the culture of this period.

All this led to the Greek world at this time being divided up between various Greek-speaking peoples who were distinguishable from each other by slight differences in dialect and religious practices. However, their similarities were important enough so that we can talk about the Greeks as a people. Two of these Greek peoples in particular should be mentioned: the Dorians and Ionians. The Dorians were Greek invaders who came down from the north to conquer many of the Mycenaean strongholds around 1100 B.C.E. Sometimes they completely blended in with their pre-Dorian

subjects, and there was little class conflict in their city-states. In other places the Dorians did not intermarry and remained a distinct ruling class over the non-Dorian population. The most extreme cases of this were Sparta and Thessaly, where the non-Dorians were virtually enslaved and forced to work the soil for the ruling Dorians. Such situations posed a constant threat of violence within city-states.

The Ionians were pre-Dorian inhabitants who avoided conquest by the Dorians, either by fighting them off or by migrating. The region of Attica, centered around Athens, was one main pocket of resistance to Dorian conquest, as seen in the myth of the Athenian king, Codrus, who sacrificed himself in battle to ensure Athens' safety against a Dorian invasion. Many Ionians either chose to migrate overseas or were forced to do so by invaders. Most of them settled in the Cycladic Islands or on the western coast of Asia Minor, which became known as Ionia from the large number of Ionian Greeks there.

The birth of the Polis

The chaos and Greece's mountainous terrain forced people to huddle under the protection of a defensible hill known as an *acropolis*. By 800 B.C.E., these fortified centers had produced more security and settled conditions that triggered two important developments vital to the emergence of Greek culture. First, the more settled conditions plus the fact that Greece was by the sea and had few resources led to a revival of trade and contact with the older cultures to the East. For example, the Greeks adopted the Phoenician alphabet and added vowels to it, so literacy returned to Greece. Also, Egyptian influence can be seen in Greek architecture and sculpture. Here too we see the Greeks would add their own innovations, giving their pillars more slender and graceful lines, and creating more lifelike statues than the stiff formal Egyptian models they had to copy. These influences would lead to and be the partial basis of classical Greek civilization .

Also, the settled conditions along with Greece's poor soils and hilly and dry conditions led to a new type of agriculture and farmer at this time. Instead of the overly centralized agriculture of the Mycenaean period and the under-worked aristocratic estates of the earlier Dark Age, farmers started developing less desirable lands which the nobles probably did not even want. Rather than raising just grain crops or grazing livestock, they developed a mixed agriculture of grains, orchards, and vineyards that was better adapted to the varied conditions of their lands and climate. The intensive labor such farms required bred very independent farmers who would be largely responsible for the emergence of democracy in the Greek polis.

The revival of trade and development of small independent farms also combined to allow the settlements to grow into towns and cities (*poleis*) that spread out beyond the confines of their original acropolises. Later, in some cities, notably Athens, the acropolis would become a place to build temples to the gods while also serving as a reminder of earlier more turbulent times. In order to understand the Greeks, one must understand what this most distinctive of all Greek institutions, the *polis* (city-state), meant to them.

The word *polis* means city, but it was much more than that to the Greek citizen. It was the central focus of his political, cultural, religious, and social life. Much of this was because the Greek climate was ideal for people to spend most of their time outdoors. Therefore, they interacted with one another much more than we do and became more tightly knit as a community. Since poleis were so isolated from each other by mountains, they became largely self sufficient and self-conscious communities. Greeks generally saw their poleis as complete in themselves, not needing to unite with other Greek poleis for more security or fulfillment. We can see three main qualities that were typical of major and minor poleis alike.

1. *The polis was an independent political unit* with its own foreign policy, coinage, patron deity, and even calendar. For example, the tiny island of Ceos off the coast of Attica, had four independent city-states, each claiming the right to carry on its own business and wage war as it saw fit-- all this on an island no more than ten miles in length!
2. *The polis was on a small scale.* This is obvious from the example of Ceos. But consider a major city-state such as Corinth, which controlled an area of only some 320 square miles, considerably smaller than an average county in one of our states. Athens, by far the most influential of the city-states on our own culture, controlled an area only about the size of Rhode Island. Yet it is to Athens that we look for the birth of such things as our drama, philosophy, architecture, history, and democracy.

3. *The polis was personal in nature.* This follows logically from its small size. Greek philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato thought that a polis should be small enough for every citizen to know every other citizen. If it got any bigger, it would get too impersonal and not work for the individual citizen's benefit. Even in Athens, the most populous Greek city-state, some citizens could pay their taxes in very personal ways, such as by equipping and maintaining a warship for a year or by producing a dramatic play for the yearly festival dedicated to Dionysus. This tended to breed a healthy competition where citizens would strive to make their plays or warships the best ones possible, thus benefiting the polis as a whole.

The polis' small and personal nature bred an intense loyalty in its citizens that had both its good and bad points. On the plus side, it did inspire members of the community to work hard for the civic welfare. The incredible accomplishments of Athens in the fifth century B.C.E. are the most outstanding example of what this civic pride could accomplish.

On the negative side, the polis' narrow loyalties led to intense rivalries and chronic warfare between neighboring city-states. These wars could be long, bitter, and costly. Sparta and Argos were almost always in a state of war with each other or armed truce waiting for war. The Peloponnesian War between Sparta and Athens lasted 27 years, destroying Athens' empire and golden age. Sometimes city-states would be entirely destroyed in these wars, such as happened to Plataea and Sybaris. In addition, there was often civil strife within the city-state as well: between rich and poor, Dorians and non-Dorians, and citizens and non-citizens. This internal turmoil could be every bit as vicious and bloody as fighting between city-states. Ultimately, the Greeks sealed their own doom by wasting energy and resources in their own petty squabbles while other larger powers were waiting in the wings for the right moment to strike.

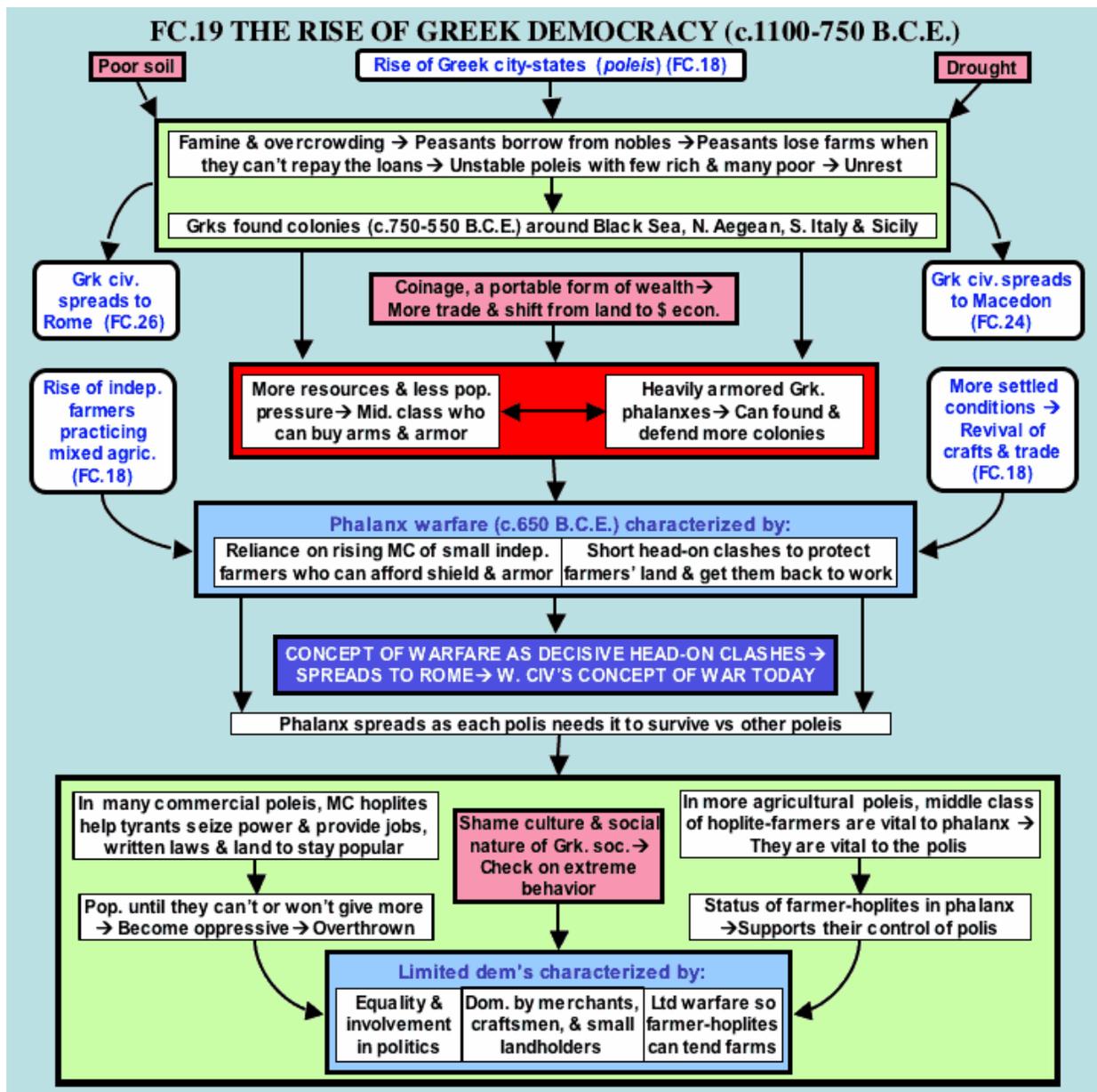
However, there were several factors that gave the Greeks a common identity and some degree of unity. First of all, the Greeks spoke a common language that largely gave them a common way of looking at things. The Greeks generally divided the world into those who spoke Greek and those who did not. Those who did not speak Greek were called *barbarians*, since, to the Greeks, they senselessly babbled ("bar-bar-bar").

Religion also gave the Greeks a common identity. Athletic contests in honor of the gods especially emphasized the Greeks' unity as a people. The most famous of these were the Olympic Games held every four years in honor of Zeus. During these games a truce was called between all Greek city-states, allowing Greeks to travel in peace to the games, even through the territory of hostile states. The modern Olympic Games, even though they are no more successful than the ancient games in putting an end to war, still serve as a symbol of peace in a less than peaceful world.

Finally, several city-states might combine into leagues. These leagues might be purely for the purpose of celebrating religious rites or kinship common to their cities. A good example was the Delphic Amphictyony, a league of twelve cities formed to promote and protect the Oracle of Delphi. Some leagues were for political and defensive purposes. The Peloponnesian League under Sparta and the Delian League under Athens were for such a purpose and together claimed the loyalties of most of the city-states in Greece and Ionia. This was good for preventing war between individual city-states. But it backfired when Sparta and Athens went to war in 431 B.C.E. and dragged most of the Greek world into the most tragic and destructive struggle in ancient Greek history.

By 750 B.C.E., the Greek world had largely taken shape as a collection of city-states, often at war with one another, but also feeling certain common ties of language, religion, and customs. At this point, there was nothing remarkable about the Greeks, but forces were at work that would transform Greece into the home of democracy and the birthplace of Western Civilization.

FC19The Rise of Greek Democracy (c.750-500 BCE)



FC19 in the [Hyperflow of History](#).
Covered in multimedia lecture #[3520](#).

The Age of Colonization (c.750-550 B.C.E)

Greece was not a rich land capable of supporting a large population. Yet the revival of stable conditions and the rise of a new class of independent farmers practicing a mixed agriculture of grains, vines, and orchards after 800 B.C.E brought population growth. This, in turn, brought problems, since family lands had to be split up among the surviving sons. These sons also had families to support, but on less land than their fathers had. Greece's poor soil and occasional droughts would lead to famines, forcing the victims of those crop failures to seek loans from the rich nobles. Of course, there was interest on the loan, generally equal to one-sixth of the peasants' crops. Failure to pay back the loan and interest in time led to the loss of the family lands or the personal freedom of the farmer and his family. Unfortunately, bad harvests often run in cycles of several years at a time. As a result, the Greek poleis in the eighth century B.C.E had a few rich nobles and a multitude of desperately poor people, creating an unstable situation for the polis and the nobles who controlled it. Therefore, many city-states started looking for new lands on which to settle their surplus populations. The Age of Colonization was born.

The Greeks looked for several qualities in a site for a colony: good soil, plentiful natural resources, defensible land, and a good location for trade. They especially found such sites along the coasts of the North Aegean and Black Seas to the northeast, and Sicily and Southern Italy to the west. However, Greek colonies dotted the map of the Mediterranean from Egypt and Cyrene in North Africa to Spain and Southern France in the West.

Founding a colony was no easy task. A leader and enough settlers had to be found, which often involved two city-states combining their efforts to found the colony. Finding a site for the colony was also a problem. Generally, colonists would ask the Oracle of Delphi for advice, usually getting a vague double-edged answer that could be interpreted in several ways, thus making the Oracle always right. For example, the colonists who founded Byzantium by the Black Sea were told to found their city across from the blind men. They figured the blind men were the settlers of nearby Chalcedon who had missed the much superior site of nearby Byzantium, since it controlled the trade routes between the Black and Aegean Seas and between Europe and Asia.

Although a colony was an independent city-state in its own right, it generally kept close relations with its mother city (*metropolis*), symbolized by taking part of the metropolis' sacred fire, representing its life, to light the fire of the new colony. Eventually, many Greek colonies, especially ones to the west such as Syracuse, Tarentum, and Neapolis (Naples), would surpass their mother cities in wealth and power. As a result, Southern Italy and Sicily came to be known as Magna Graecia, (Greater Greece).

Colonies triggered a feedback cycle that would help maintain the colonial movement and lead to dramatic economic, social, and political changes in the Greek homeland. First of all, colonies relieved population pressures at home and provided resources to their mother cities. This helped support the emergence of craftsmen who made such things as pottery and armor for export. It also made life easier for the free farmers who had more land now that there was less crowding. These two rising groups, craftsmen and free farmers, constituted a new group, the middle class, which could afford arms and armor and help defend their poleis.

That, in turn, allowed the Greeks to deploy into a *phalanx*, a much larger mass formation of heavily armored soldiers who together formed a sort of human tank. Thanks to this deadly new formation, the Greeks were better able to found and defend colonies in territories with large hostile populations. This would feed back into the beginning of the process whereby colonies would produce more wealth and resources that would add further to the rising middle class that could afford arms and armor, leading to more heavily armed Greeks who could found and defend more colonies, and so on.

Another development that helped this process was a new invention: coinage. Although for centuries, people had used gold and silver as common mediums of exchange to expedite trade, there were always problems of determining the accurate weight and purity of such metals to avoid being cheated. Then, around 600 B.C.E., the Lydians, neighbors of the Ionian Greeks in Asia Minor, issued the first coins, lumps of gold marked with a government stamp guaranteeing the weight and purity of those lumps. Greek poleis soon picked up on this practice and issued their own coins. Coinage created a more portable form of wealth that everyone agreed was valuable. Trade became much easier to carry on, thus increasing its volume and the fortunes of the merchants involved in it. Overall, this signaled a growing shift from the land-based economy dominated by the nobles to the more dynamic money economy controlled by the middle class.

The Western way of war

The cycle of colonization spread a new type of warfare across the Greek world. Previously, Greek warfare had been the domain of the nobles, since they were the only ones who could afford the arms and armor necessary for fighting in the front lines. While this put the brunt of the fighting on their shoulders, it also gave them prestige and power, since they had the weapons to enforce their will.

However, by the mid seventh century B.C.E, the wealth brought in by colonies led to a new type of warfare, the hoplite phalanx, a compact formation of heavily armored soldiers (hoplites, from the Greek word for shield) with overlapping shields and armed with spears. The idea was to use the weight of the phalanx to plow through the enemy. It wasn't elegant, but it was effective and brought into play two new revolutionary factors. First, since the phalanx's success relied on numbers, anyone able to afford heavy armor and shield had to be used. This meant including the rising middle class of independent farmers, craftsmen, and merchants, which would have a dramatic impact on the polis' political structure in the future.

Secondly, the hoplite phalanx created a new concept of warfare. Previously, when warfare had been primarily a matter of honor and power for a narrow group of kings and nobles who had nothing better to do, battles had mainly been a matter of hit-and-run tactics with some face-to-face combat. However, with middle class farmers now making up the bulk of the phalanx, warfare became a matter of defending their very livelihood. Therefore, the practice developed of meeting invaders in short, but brutal, head-on clashes to protect the defending farmers' lands and homes from ruin. Also, the fact that most of those fighting the battles had regular occupations to get back to reinforced this urge for a quick resolution of a war in one decisive battle.

This concept of resolving wars in decisive head-on clashes long outlived the Greek poleis that started it. The Romans would subscribe to this principle with systematic efficiency and pass it on to Western Civilization where it is still seen as *the* way to fight wars. Until the mid 1900s this strategy served Western powers well, but in recent decades it has not always proven effective, as the Vietnam War, Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, and American occupation in Iraq have shown.

Pheidon, the ruler of Argos, was the first to use the new hoplite phalanx against Sparta, defeating it in the process. Soon Sparta had adapted to these new tactics, and other Greek poleis quickly proceeded to arm their middle classes and form phalanxes of their own in order to survive. Soon the "Hoplite Revolution" had spread throughout Greece and its colonies.

By 550 B.C.E, the cycle of Greek colonization was running out as few good sites for new colonies remained. However, colonization had spread of Greek civilization to other peoples, notably the Macedonians to the north and the Romans to the west. Rome in particular would adapt Greek culture to its own needs and pass it on to Western Civilization.

The rise of Greek democracy

Increased prosperity oftentimes leads to trouble, for it creates expectations of power and status to go with it. People who have virtually nothing expect nothing more. People who have had a taste of something generally expect more and will even fight to get it. Such is the fuel of revolutions, and ancient Greece was no exception. The problem was that, while the middle class artisans and farmers had little or no social status or political power to go with the expectation to fight in the phalanx. Their frustration in more commercial poleis played itself out somewhat differently than in the more agricultural poleis, but ultimately with the same basic result.

In many, usually the more commercial poleis such as Corinth, Megara, and Athens, some disgruntled and ambitious nobles used the frustrated middle class to seize power from the ruling aristocracy. The government they set up was called a tyranny, from the Greek word *tyrannos*, meaning one-man rule. Such an arrangement was usually illegal, but not necessarily evil. That association with the word tyrant would come later.

In order to maintain his popularity, the tyrant typically did three things. First, he protected peoples' rights with a written law code, literally carved in stone, so that the laws could not be changed or interpreted upon the whim of the rich and powerful. Second, he confiscated the lands of the nobles he had driven from power and redistributed them among the poor. Finally, he provided jobs through building projects: harbors, fortifications, and stone temples with graceful fluted columns, a new Greek innovation. In addition, tyrants had the means to patronize the arts. Thus the sixth century B.C.E. saw a flourishing of Greek culture in such areas as architecture, sculpture, and poetry.

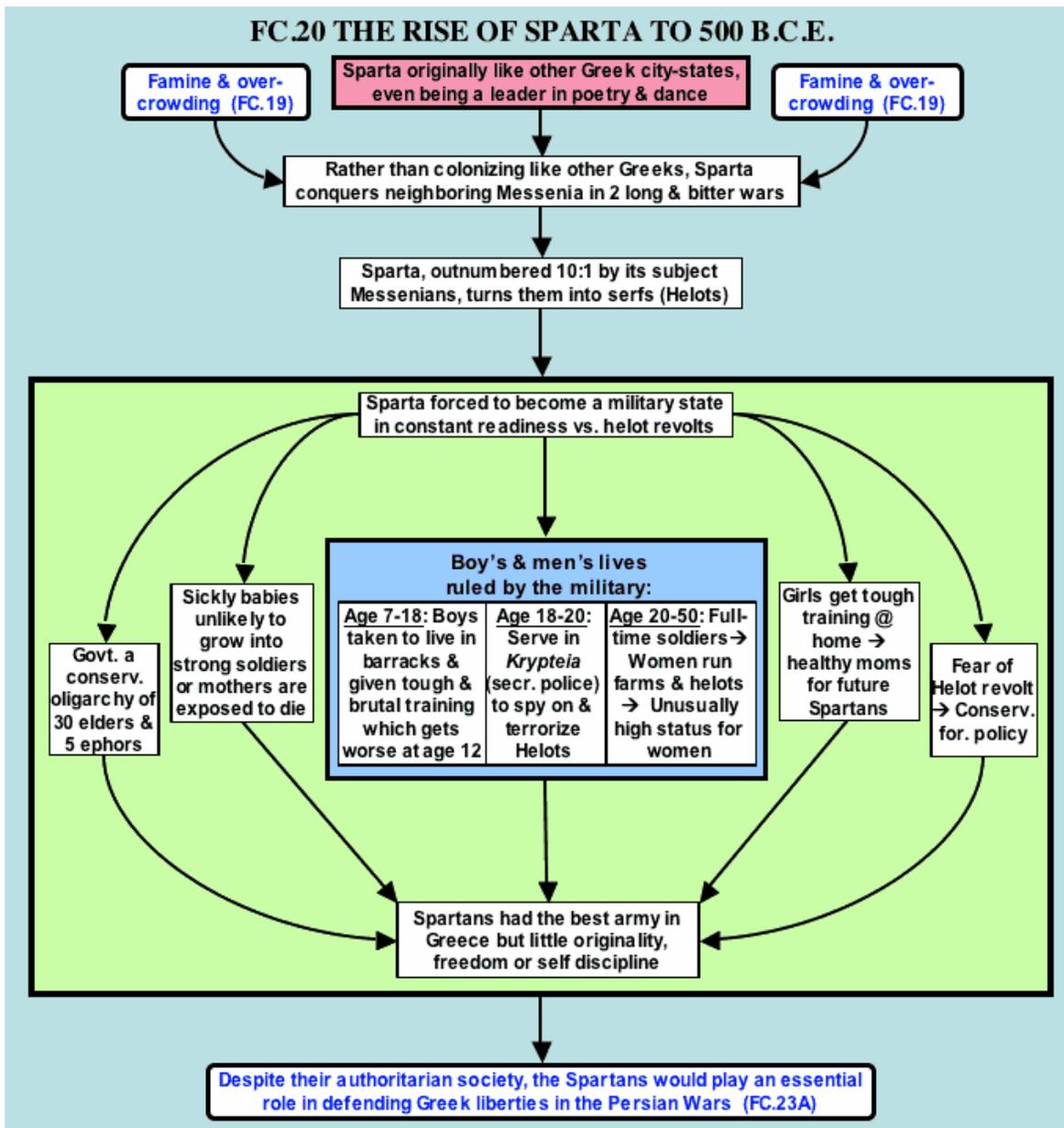
However, the increased prosperity brought on by the tyrants only gave the people a taste for more of the same. By the second or third generation, tyrants could not or would not meet those growing demands, and people grew resentful. In reaction to this resentment, tyrants would often resort to repressive measures, which just caused more resentment, more repression, and so on. Eventually, this feedback of resentment and repression would lead to a revolution to replace the tyrants with a limited democracy especially favoring the hoplite class of small landholding farmers, though excluding the poor, women, and slaves.

In the more agricultural poleis, the farmer-hoplites seem to have taken control more peacefully. Their dual status as farmers and hoplites supported each other in maintaining control. As farmers, they were the ones who could afford arms and armor and serve in the phalanx. And as hoplites in the phalanx, they were the ones with the power to run the state. Much like the states that experienced tyrannies, these agrarian poleis also established limited democracies favoring the small land-holding farmers. While these democracies may have excluded a majority of their populations,

they did exhibit several characteristics that made them a unique experiment in history and a giant step toward democracy.

1. *A high value was placed on equality, at least among the citizens ruling the polis.* This ethos of equality discouraged the accumulation of large fortunes and encouraged the rich to donate their services and wealth to the polis. This created a fine balance between individual rights and working for the welfare of the society as a whole that helped create fairly stable poleis.
2. *The polis was largely dominated by a middle class of small landholders, merchants, and craftsmen.* In addition to women and slaves, Greek democracies typically excluded freemen without any property from the full advantages of citizenship. However, despite its shortcomings, the moderate style of democracy born in Greece by 500 B.C.E was the basis for the later, much more broadly based democracy in Athens and our own idea of individuals controlling their own destinies.
3. *Hoplite warfare limited the scope and damage of warfare among the Greek poleis.* Since it was the farmers who both declared war and fought it for the polis, they made sure that it was short and decisive so it would not disrupt their agricultural work or damage their crops. A typical war might take only three days: one day to march into enemy territory, one day to fight, and one day to get back home to the crops. They also made sure it was cheap. Since hoplite warfare was simple and everyone supplied his own equipment and rations, there was no need for taxes to support generals and buy supplies. This limited, almost ritualistic, style of warfare maintained a stability among the Greek poleis despite the frequency of their wars.

FC20The Rise of Sparta to 500 BCE



[FC20](#) in the [Hyperflow of History](#).

Covered in multimedia lecture [#4545](#).

“Come home with your shield or on it.”— *Spartan women, to their men leaving for battle*

No Greek city-state aroused such great interest and admiration among other Greeks as Sparta. This was largely because the Spartans did about everything contrary to the way other Greeks did. For example, Sparta had no fortifications, claiming its men were its walls. While other Greeks emphasized their individuality with their own personal armor, the Spartans wore red uniforms that masked their individuality and any blood lost from wounds. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that we remember Sparta for being a military state always ready for war, but not against other city-states so much as against its own enserved subjects.

Originally, Sparta was much like other Greek city-states, being a leader in poetry and dance. However, by 750 B.C.E., population growth led to the need for expansion. Instead of colonizing overseas, like other Greeks did, the Spartans decided to attack their neighbors, the Messenians. In two bitterly fought wars, they subdued the Messenians and turned them into serfs (*Helots*) who had to work the soil for their masters. Unfortunately for the Spartans, the Helots vastly outnumbered them.

As a result, Sparta became a military state constantly on guard against the ever-present threat of a Helot revolt. This especially shaped five aspects of Spartan society: its infants, its boys, its girls, its government, and its foreign policy. Infants were the virtual property of the state from birth when state inspectors would examine them for any signs of weakness or defects. Babies judged unlikely to be able to serve as healthy soldiers or mothers were left to die on nearby Mt. Taygetus.

Boys were taken from home at age seven to live in the barracks. There they were formed into platoons under the command of an older man and the ablest of their number. Life in the barracks involved a lot of hard exercise and bullying by the older boys. At age twelve it got much worse. Adolescence brought the Spartan training at its worst. The boys received one flimsy garment, although they usually trained and exercised in the nude. They slept out in the open year round, only being allowed to make a bed of rushes that were picked by hand, not cut. They were fed very little, forcing them to steal food to supplement their diet and teaching them to forage the countryside as soldiers. Their training, games, and punishments were all extremely harsh. One notorious contest involved tying boys to the altar of Artemis Orthia and flogging them until they cried out. Reportedly, some of them kept silent until they died under the lash.

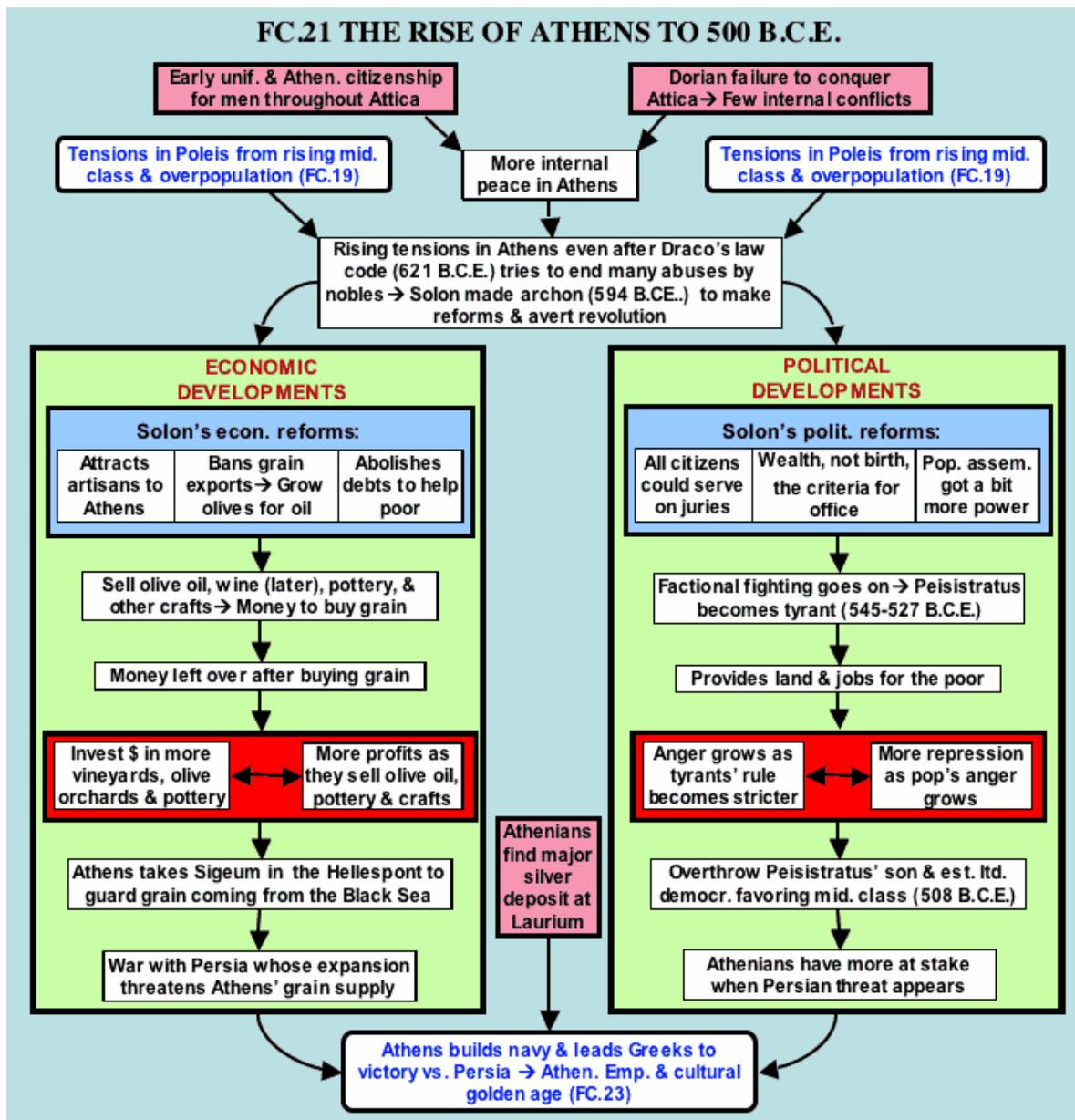
At age eighteen, the Spartan entered the *Krypteia*, or secret police, for two years. The *Krypteia*'s task was to spy on and terrorize the Helots in order to keep them from plotting revolt. The Spartans even declared ritual warfare on the Helots each year to remind themselves and the Helots of their situation and Spartan resolve to deal with it. At age twenty, the Spartan entered the army where he would spend the next thirty years. As an adult, he could grow his hair shoulder length in the Spartan fashion to look more terrifying to his enemies. Not surprisingly, he had little in the way of a family life. However, it was illegal *not* to marry in Sparta, since it was part of the Spartan's duty to produce strong healthy children for the next generation. After getting married, the young husband might have to sneak out of the barracks at night in order to see his wife and children. It was said some Spartan fathers went for years without seeing their families by the light of day. At age fifty, the Spartan could finally move home, although he remained on active reserve for ten more years.

Girls did not have it much easier. Although they did live at home rather than in the barracks, they also went through arduous training and exercise. All of this was for one purpose: to produce strong healthy children for the next generation. Surprisingly, Spartan women were the most liberated women in ancient Greece. This was because the men were away with the army, leaving the women to supervise the Helots and run the farms. In fact, Spartan women scandalized other Greeks with how outspoken and free they were.

Spartan government, in sharp contrast with the democracies found in other city-states, kept elements of the old monarchy and aristocracy. They had two kings whose duty was to lead the army. Most power rested with five officials known as *ephors* and a council of thirty elders, the *Gerousia*. There was also an assembly of all Spartan men that voted only on issues the *Gerousia* presented them. The Spartans had a very conservative foreign policy, since they did not want to risk a Helot revolt while they were away at war. They did extend their influence through leadership of the Peloponnesian League, which contained most of the city-states in the Peloponnesus, making Sparta the most powerful Greek city-state, although its army was never very large.

Spartan discipline did produce magnificent soldiers, inured to hardship and blind obedience to authority, but with little talent for original thinking or self-discipline. However, in the Persian wars, the Spartans would do more than their share in the defense of freedom, as ironic as that may have sounded to them.

FC21Early Athens to c.500 BCE



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While Athens is the city we generally think of when the Greeks are mentioned, it did not always seem destined for glory. Rather, its greatness was the product of a long history laying the foundations for the great accomplishments of the fifth century B.C.E.

Two things in Athens' early history led to internal peace that made its history and development much easier. First of all, there was no Dorian conquest of *Attica*, the region surrounding Athens. The myth of the Athenian king, Codrus, who sacrificed himself in battle against the Dorians tells us there probably was Dorian pressure on Attica, but that it failed. Consequently, with no conflict of Dorians against non-Dorians, internal peace could reign in Athenian society. Second, Athens united all of Attica under its rule at a fairly early date and made all its subjects Athenian citizens. Therefore, they were more likely to work for Athens' interests in contrast to the Spartan Helots who were always looking for an opportunity to revolt.

Despite these advantages, the tensions that accompanied both a rising middle class and overpopulation in other poleis affected Athens as well. For example, there was a failed attempt to establish tyranny at Athens by a man named Cylon who seized the Acropolis with the aid of Megarian troops.

One issue causing discontent was the lack of a written law code. Since nobles controlled the religion, which was seen as the source of law, they could say the law was whatever they pleased and then change it at will. At last, in 621 B.C.E., they gave and commissioned Draco, whose name meant "dragon", to write down the laws. His law code was so harsh that even today we use the term "draconian" to describe something extremely severe. Some people claimed Draco's law code was written in blood rather than ink. But Draco did get the laws written down, which was a step forward for the people. And, of course, they wanted more.

By 600 B.C.E., the nobles in Athens were becoming more nervous as the complaints of the very poor and the rising middle class grew increasingly louder. As a result, they gave a man named Solon extraordinary powers to reform the state and ease the tensions between the different classes. Solon passed both economic and political reforms that laid the foundations for Athens' later greatness.

Economic reforms

Solon improved Athens' economy in several ways. First, since Attica's soil was particularly poor for farming wheat and barley, he outlawed the export of grain from Attica. This encouraged the cultivation of olive trees that were better suited for Attica's soil. The olive oil produced from these trees was a valuable commodity used for cleansing and as a fuel for light and cooking. Later, grapevines would also be cultivated, and Attica's wine became still another highly valued Athenian product. Second, Solon developed trade and manufacture in Athens, largely through attracting skilled craftsmen to settle there. He especially encouraged pottery since Attica had excellent clay for ceramics. In later years, Athenian pottery would come to be some of the most beautiful and highly valued in the Mediterranean. One other thing Solon did to relieve the poverty in Athens was to abolish debts and debt slavery. While this was not popular with the nobles, it did ease some of the tensions threatening Athenian society at that time.

The profits gained from selling olive oil, pottery, and wine were then used for buying grain from the Black Sea. Since Athens' economy now was much more suited to local conditions than when it was barely getting by on the old subsistence agriculture, it could buy the grain it needed and still have money left over. The Athenians could use this extra money for further developing their economy through more trade, industry, and olive orchards. This would lead to even more profits, and so on.

Solon's reforms set the stage for the Persian Wars and Athens' later cultural accomplishments. Since Athens was heavily dependent on the Black Sea for grain, it was very sensitive to any events in that part of the world, just as the United States today is sensitive to events in Middle East where it gets much of its oil. As a result, Athens expanded to the shores of the Black Sea, thus leading to a collision with Persia over control of that region.

Solon's political reforms

made the Athenian state more democratic in three ways. First, he changed the qualifications for holding public office from being determined by birth into a particular class to how much wealth one had. This meant that someone not born a noble still had a chance to rise up through society by means of his ability. Solon also admitted the poorest class of citizens to participate in the popular assembly and juries. Finally, he granted a few powers and privileges to the popular assembly, which opened the way for more sweeping democratic reforms a century later.

These measures delayed, but did not prevent, the overthrow of the aristocrats by a tyrant. Fighting in Athens continued between the Hill (peasants on small farms), Shore (artisans and traders), and Plain (nobles) factions. Eventually, the leader of the hill faction, Peisistratus, gained the upper hand and became tyrant. Peisistratus did two things important for Athens' future. For one thing, like other Greek tyrants, he enriched the lower classes by providing them with land and jobs on building projects. Second, he secured Athens' grain supply from the Black Sea by getting control of the town of Sigeum, which safeguarded Athens' grain ships in that area but also set Athens up for an eventual clash with Persia.

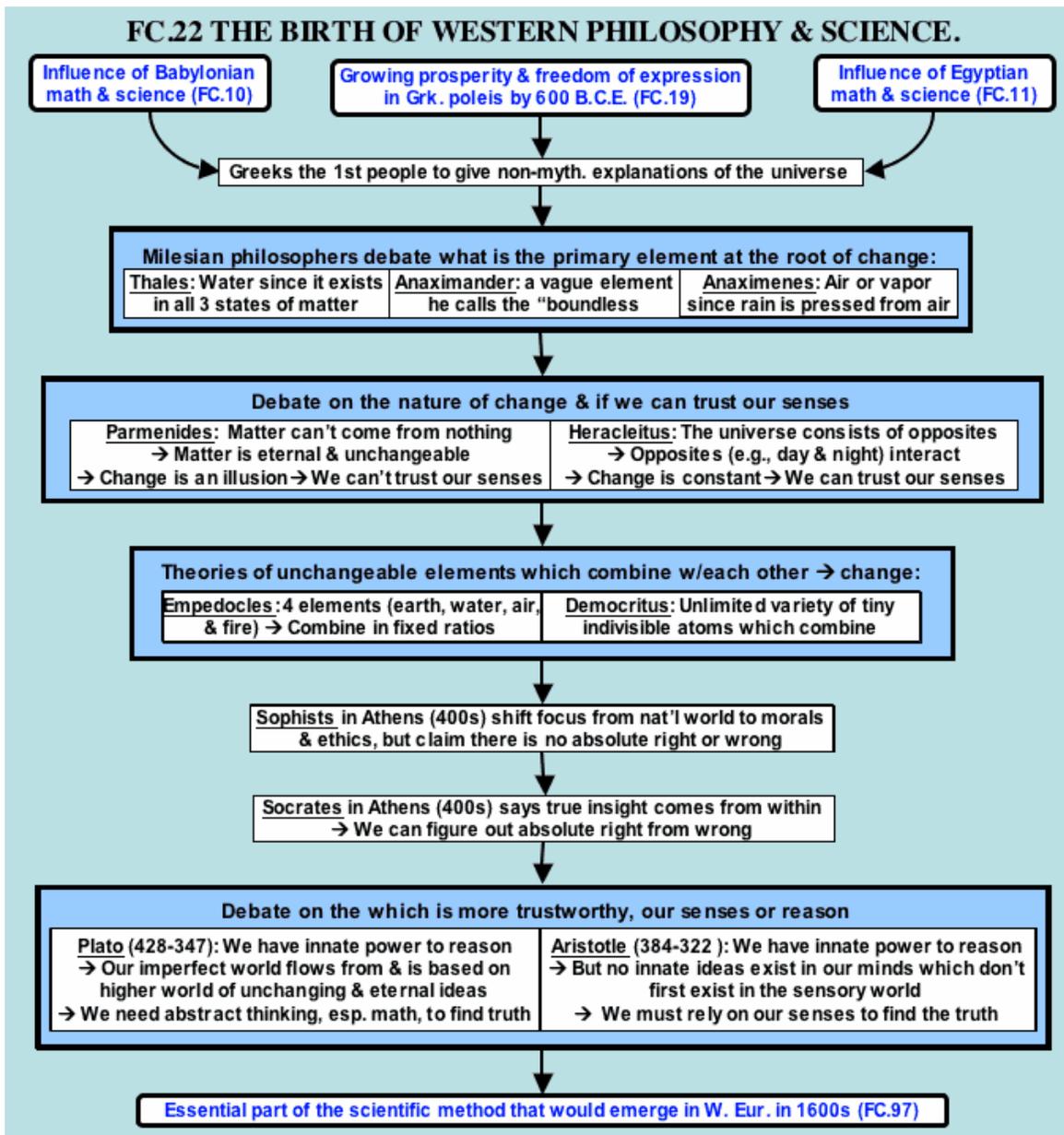
There were also cultural developments during Peisistratus' rule. For one thing, he gathered scholars to take all the different versions of Homer's *Iliad* and decide which was the definitive one. One other cultural accomplishment was the invention of tragic drama. This evolved from rather boisterous goat songs (*tragoidea*) dedicated to Dionysus, the god of song and revelry. However, by this time, these songs had become much more serious, and the addition of an actor to interact with the chorus of fifty led to the birth of drama.

As we have seen, in most poleis the first generation of tyrants would rule rather peacefully. For example, Cypselus, tyrant of Corinth, was so popular that he went about without so much as a bodyguard. However, the second or third generation of tyrants usually ran into problems, either because their rule was oppressive or people wanted more political rights to go along with their rising wealth. Athens was no exception. Peisistratus ruled and died peacefully, but his son, Hippias, ruled more oppressively, especially after an unsuccessful assassination attempt aroused his suspicions of all around him. Popular anger would grow, triggering more oppression, causing more anger, and so on. Finally, Hippias was driven out of Athens with help from the Spartans who then put a garrison of 700 soldiers in Athens' Acropolis. However, the Spartans were hardly the people to go along with the democratic aspirations of the Athenians, and their garrison had to be driven out of the Acropolis before democracy could be established. The man who did this, Cleisthenes, was also responsible for setting up a stable democracy at Athens.

Cleisthenes saw clearly that the friction between the factions of Hill, Shore, and Plain and between the four different tribes had to be stopped. He cleverly did this by breaking up the old tribes and replacing them with ten artificial tribes comprised of elements from different tribes and factions. Artificially mixing people from different loyalties tended to break up those old loyalties, leaving only loyalty to Athens. Cleisthenes also made the popular assembly the main law making body. The democracy that emerged, much like those in other poleis of the time, was a somewhat limited one favoring the middle class of farmers, merchants and craftsmen. However, it was still a democracy, which meant the Athenians had more than ever at stake Athens' security.

Therefore, the combination of this greater sense of commitment to Athens, the struggle with Persia over the security of the Black Sea grain supply, and the fortunate discovery of large deposits of silver at Laurium in Attica, would prompt the Athenians to use their economic power to build a navy with which to fight Persia. It was this navy which would lead the Greeks to victory over Persia and lay the foundations for the Athenian Empire in the fifth century B.C.E. That empire in turn would provide the wealth to support the cultural flowering at Athens that has been the basis for so much of Western Civilization.

FC22Greek Philosophy from Thales to Aristotle (c.600-300 BCE)



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Introduction

When people think of the ancient Greeks, they usually think of such things as Greek architecture, literature, and democracy. However, there is one other contribution they made that is central to Western Civilization: the birth of Western science.

There were three main factors that converged to help create Greek science. First of all, there was the influence of Egypt, especially in medicine, which the Greeks would draw heavily upon. Second, Mesopotamian civilization also had a significant impact, passing on its math and astronomy, including the ability to predict eclipses (although they did not know why they occurred). Third, there was the growing prosperity and freedom of expression in the polis, allowing the Greeks to break free of older mythological explanations and come up with totally new theories. All these factors combined to make the Greeks the first people to give non-mythological explanations of the universe. Such non-mythological explanations are what we call science.

However, there were also three basic limitations handicapping Greek scientists compared to scientists today. For one thing, they had no concept of science as we understand it. They thought of themselves as philosophers (literally "lovers of wisdom") who were seeking answers to all sorts of problems about their world: moral, ethical, and metaphysical as well as physical. The Greeks did not divide knowledge into separate disciplines the way we do. The philosopher, Plato, lectured on geometry as well as what we call philosophy, seeing them as closely intertwined, while Parmenides of Elea and Empedocles of Acragas wrote on physical science in poetic verse. Second, the Greeks had no guidelines on what they were supposed to be studying, since they were the first to ask these kinds of questions without relying on religious explanations. However, they did define certain issues and came up with the right questions to ask, which is a major part of solving a problem. Finally, they had no instruments to help them gather data, which slowed progress tremendously.

The Milesian philosophers

Greek science was born with the Ionian philosophers, especially in Miletus, around 600 B.C.E. The first of these philosophers, Thales of Miletus, successfully predicted a solar eclipse in 585 B.C.E., calculated the distance of ships at sea, and experimented with the strange magnetic properties of a rock near the city of Magnesia (from which we get the term "magnet"). However, the question that Thales and other Ionian philosophers wrestled with was: What is the primary element that is the root of all matter and change? Thales postulated that there is one primary element in nature, water, since it can exist in all three states of matter: solid, liquid, and gas.

Thales' student, Anaximander, proposed the theory that the stars and planets are concentric rings of fire surrounding the earth and that humans evolved from fish, since babies are too helpless at birth to survive on their own and therefore must arise from simpler more self-sufficient species. He disagreed with Thales over the primary element, saying water was not the primary element since it does not give rise to fire. Therefore, the primary element should be some indeterminate element with built-in opposites (e.g., hot vs. cold; wet vs. dry). For lack of a better name, he called this element the "Boundless." Another Milesian, Anaximenes, said the primary element was air or vapor, since rain is pressed from the air.

The nature of change

All these speculations were based on the assumption there is one eternal and unchanging element that is the basis for all matter. Yet, if there is just one unchanging element, how does one account for all the apparent diversity and change one apparently sees in nature? From this time, Greek science was largely split into two camps: those who said we can trust our senses and those who said we cannot.

Among those who distrusted the senses was Parmenides of Elea, who, through some rather interesting logic, said there is no such thing as motion. He based this on the premise that there is no such thing as nothingness or empty space since it is illogical to assume that something can arise from nothing. Therefore, matter cannot be destroyed, since that would create empty space. Also, we cannot move, since that would involve moving into empty space, which of course, cannot exist. The implication was that any movement we perceive is an illusion, thus showing we cannot trust our senses.

On the other hand, there was Heraclitus of Ephesus, who said the world consists largely of opposites, such as day and night, hot and cold, wet and dry, etc. These opposites act upon one another to create change. Therefore not only does change occur, but is constant. As Heraclitus would say, you cannot put your foot into the same river twice, since it is always different water flowing by. However, since we perceive change, we must trust our senses at least to an extent.

A partial reconciliation of these views was worked out by two different philosophers postulating the general idea of numerous unchanging elements that could combine with each other in various ways. First, there was Empedocles of Acragas who said that the mind can be deceived as well as the senses, so we should use both. This led to his theory of four elements, earth, water, air, and fire, where any substance is defined by a fixed proportion of one or more of these elements (e.g., bone = 4 parts fire, 2 parts water, and 2 parts earth). Although the specifics were wrong, Empedocles' idea of a Law of Fixed Proportions is an important part of chemistry today.

In the fifth century B.C.E., Democritus of Abdera developed the first atomic theory, saying the universe consists both of void and tiny indestructible atoms. He said these atoms are in perpetual motion and collision causing constant

change and new compounds. Differences in substance are supposedly due to the shapes of the atoms and their positions and arrangements relative to one another.

In the fifth century B.C.E., Athens, with its powerful empire and money, became the new center of philosophy, drawing learned men from all over the Greek world. Many of these men were known as the Sophists. They doubted our ability to discover the answers to the riddles of nature, and therefore turned philosophy's focus more to issues concerning Man and his place in society. As one philosopher, Protagoras, put it, "Man is the measure of all things." Being widely traveled, the Sophists doubted the existence of absolute right and wrong since they had seen different cultures react differently to moral issues, such as public nudity, which did not bother the Greeks. As a result, they claimed that morals were socially induced and changeable from society to society. Some Sophists supposedly boasted they could teach their students to prove the right side of an argument to be wrong. This, plus the fact that they taught for money, discredited them in many people's eyes.

Socrates (470-399 B.C.E.)

was one of Athens' most famous philosophers at this time. Like the Sophists, with whom he was wrongly associated, he focused on Man and society rather than the forces of nature. As the Roman philosopher, Cicero, put it, "Socrates called philosophy down from the sky..." Unlike the Sophists, he did not see morals as relative to different societies and situations. He saw right and wrong as absolute and worked to show that we each have within us the innate ability to arrive at that truth. Therefore, his method of teaching, known even today as the Socratic method, was to question his students' ideas rather than lecture on his own. Through a series of leading questions he would help his students realize the truth for themselves.

Unfortunately, such a technique practiced in public tended to embarrass a number of people trapped by Socrates' logic, thus making him several enemies. In 399 B.C.E., he was tried and executed for corrupting the youth and introducing new gods into the state. Although Socrates left us no writings, his pupil Plato preserved his teachings in a number of written dialogues. Socrates influenced two other giants in Greek philosophy, Plato and Aristotle, who both agreed with Socrates on our innate ability to reason. However, they differed greatly on the old question of whether or not we can trust our senses.

Plato (428-347)

was the first of these philosophers. He was also influenced by the early philosopher and mathematician, Pythagoras of Croton in South Italy, who is most famous for the Pythagorean theorem for finding the length of the hypotenuse in a right triangle. Pythagoras thought that all the principles of the universe were bound up with the mystical properties of numbers. He felt the whole universe can be perceived as a harmony of numbers, even defining objects as numbers (e.g., justice = 4). He saw music as mathematical and, in the process, discovered the principles of octaves and fifths. He also thought the universe orbited around a central fire, a theory that would ultimately influence Copernicus in his heliocentric theory 2000 years later.

Plato drew upon Pythagoras' idea of a central fire and proposed there are two worlds: the perfect World of Being and this world, which is the imperfect World of Becoming where things are constantly changing. This makes it impossible for us to truly know anything, since this world is only a dim reflection of the perfect World of Being. As Plato put it, our perception of reality was no better than that of a man in a cave, trying to perceive the outside world through viewing the shadows cast against the wall of the cave by a fire. Since our senses alone cannot be trusted, Plato said we should rely on abstract reason, especially math, much as Pythagoras had. The sign over the entrance to Plato's school, the Academy, reflected this quite well: "Let no one unskilled in geometry enter."

Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E.)

was a pupil at Plato's Academy, but held a very different view of the world from his old teacher, believing in the value of the senses as well as the mind. Although he agreed with Plato on our innate power of reasoning, he asserted that nothing exists in our minds that does not first exist in the sensory world. Therefore, we must rely on our senses and experiment to discover the truth.

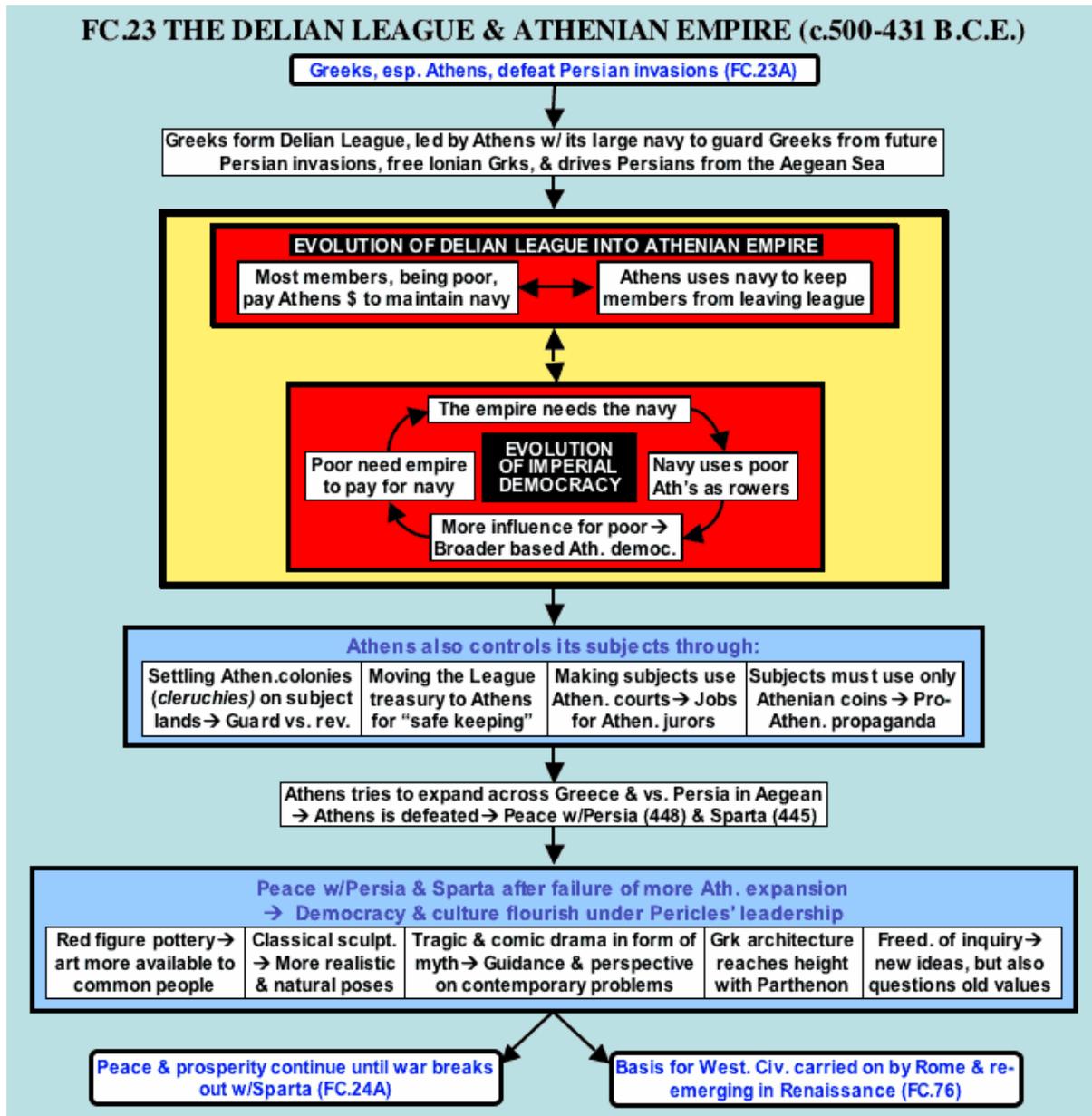
Aristotle accepted the theory of four elements and the idea that the elements were defined on the basis of two sets of contrasting qualities: hot vs. cold, and wet vs. dry, with earth being cold and dry, water being cold and wet, air being

hot and wet, and fire being hot and dry. Thus, according to Aristotle, we should be able to change substances by changing their qualities. The best example was heating cold and wet water to make it into hot and wet air (vapor). This idea would inspire generations of alchemists in the fruitless pursuit of a means of turning lead into gold.

Aristotle said the four elements have a natural tendency to move toward the center of the universe, with the heavier substances (earth and water) displacing the lighter ones (air and fire), so that water rests on land, air on top of water, and fire on top of air. He also said there was a celestial element, ether, which was perfect and unchanging and moved in perfect circles around the center of the universe, which is earth where all terrestrial elements are clustered.

Aristotle's theories of the elements and universe were highly logical and interlocking, making it hard to disprove one part without attacking the whole system. Although Aristotle often failed to test his own theories (so that he reported the wrong number of horse's teeth and men's ribs), his theories were easier to understand than Plato's and reinstated the value of the senses, compiling data, and experimenting in order to find the truth. Although Plato's theories would not be the most widely accepted over the next 2000 years, they would survive and be revived during the Italian Renaissance. Since then, the idea of using math to verify scientific theories has also been an essential part of Western Science. While both Plato and Aristotle had flaws in their theories, they each contributed powerful ideas that would have profound effects on Western civilization for 2000 years until the Scientific Revolution of the 1700's.

FC23The Delian League and the Athenian Empire (478-431 BCE)



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Formation of the Delian League

We can well imagine the Greeks' incredible feelings of pride and accomplishment in 478 B.C.E. after defeating the Persian Empire. The Athenians felt that they in particular had done more than their part with their army at Marathon and their navy at Salamis and Mycale. It was this incredible victory which gave them the self-confidence and drive to lead Greece in its political and cultural golden age for the next half century.

However, victory had been won at a heavy price. Fields, orchards, and vineyards lay devastated throughout much of Greece, and it would take decades for the vineyards and olive groves in particular to be restored. Athens itself was in ruins, being burned by the Persians in vengeance for the destruction of Sardis during the Ionian Revolt. Therefore, the Athenians immediately set to work to rebuild their city, and in particular its fortifications. The Spartans, probably through fear or jealousy of Athens' growing power, tried to convince the Athenians not to rebuild their walls. They said that if the Persians came back and recaptured Athens, they could use it as a fortified base against other Greeks. The Athenian leader, Themistocles, stalled the Spartans on the issue until his fellow Athenians had enough time to

erect defensible fortifications. (This was later extended by what was known as the Long Walls to connect Athens to its port, Piraeus, so it could not be cut off from its fleet.) By the time Sparta realized what was happening, it was too late to do anything. One could already see bad relations starting to emerge between Athens and Sparta. In time, they would get much worse.

Since the Athenians and other Greeks could not assume that the Persians would not come back, they decided the best defense was a good offense, and formed an alliance known as the Delian League. The League's main goals were to liberate the Ionian Greeks from Persian rule and to safeguard the islands in the Aegean from further Persian aggression. The key to doing this was sea power, and that made Athens the natural leader, since it had by far the largest navy and also the incentive to strike back at Persia. At first, Sparta had been offered leadership in the league because of its military reputation. However, constant fear of Helot revolts made the Spartans reluctant to commit themselves overseas. Also, their king, Pausanias, had angered the other Greeks by showing that typical Spartan lust for gold. As a result, he was recalled, leaving Athens to lead the way.

The Persian navy, or what was left of it, was in no shape to halt the Greek advance after taking two serious beatings from the Greeks in the recent war. Ionia was stripped from the Great King's grasp, and the Persians were swept from the Aegean sea island by island. Within a few years, the Delian League controlled virtually all the Greeks in the islands and coastal regions of the Aegean.

From Delian League to Athenian Empire

At first each polis liberated from Persia was expected to join the league and contribute ships for the common navy. However, most of these states were so small that the construction and maintenance of even one ship was a heavy burden. Therefore, most of these states started paying money to Athens which used their combined contributions to build and man the League's navy. This triggered a feedback cycle where Athens came to have the only powerful navy in the Aegean, putting the other Greeks at its mercy. Athens could then use its navy to keep league members under control, forcing them to pay more money to maintain the fleet which kept them under control, and so on.

The changing nature of the league became apparent a decade after the defeat of the Persians when the island states of Naxos (469 B.C.) and Thasos (465 B.C) felt secure enough to try to pull out of the League. However, Athens and its navy immediately pushed them back in, claiming the Persian threat was still there. The Naxians and Thasians could do little about it since the only navy they had was the one they were paying Athens to build and man. And that was being used to keep them *in* the League so they could keep paying Athens more money. The Delian League was turning into an Athenian Empire.

The cycle supporting Athens' grip on its empire also supported (and was itself reinforced by) another feedback loop that expanded and supported the Athenian democracy. It started with the empire needing the fleet as its main source of power and control. Likewise, the fleet needed the poor people of Athens to serve as its rowers. Since these people, even more than the middle class hoplites, were the mainstay of Athens' power, they gained political influence to go with their military importance, thus making Athens a much more broadly based democracy. The poor at Athens in turn needed the empire and its taxes to support their jobs in the fleet and their status in Athens. This fed back into the empire needing the navy, and so on.

The Athenian democracy likewise strongly enforced collection of league dues to maintain what in essence was now an "imperial democracy. Thus the navy was the critical connecting link between empire and democracy, holding the empire together on the one hand, while providing the basis for democratic power on the other. The Athenian democratic leader, Pericles, especially broadened Athenian democracy by providing pay for public offices so the poor could afford to participate in their polis' government.

Athens further tightened its hold on its empire by settling Athenian citizens in colonies (*cleruchies*) on the lands of cities it suspected of disloyalty, making their subjects come to Athens to try certain cases in Athenian courts, thus supplying them with extra revenues, and moving the league treasury from its original home on the island of Delos to Athens where the Athenians claimed it would be safer from Persian aggression. Athens installed or supported democracies in its subject states, feeling they would be friendlier to Athenian policies since they owed their power to Athens. It also allowed the minting and use of only Athenian coins. This provided the empire with a stable and standard coinage as well as exposing everyone in the empire to Athenian propaganda every time they looked at a coin and saw the Athenian symbols of the owl and Athena.

When Pericles came to power in 460 B.C.E., the Athenians were trying to extend their power and influence in mainland Greece while also supporting a major revolt against the Persians in Egypt. However, Athens overextended itself in these ventures that, after initial successes, both failed miserably. Sparta led a coalition of Greeks to stop Athens' expansion in Greece, while the Persians trapped and destroyed a large Athenian fleet on the Nile by diverting the course of the river and leaving the Athenian ships stuck in the mud. As a result, Pericles abandoned Egypt to the Persians, left the rest of mainland Greece to the other Greeks, and restricted Athens' activity to consolidating its hold on its Aegean empire. By 445 BC, peace Persia and Sparta, recognizing each others' spheres of control allowed Athens to concentrate on more cultural pursuits which flourished in a number of areas.

In sculpture, the *severe classical* style succeeded the stiffer Archaic style after the Persian Wars. One key to this was the practice, known as *contrapposto*, of portraying a figure with its weight shifted more to one foot than the other, which, of course is how we normally stand. The body was also turned in a more naturalistic pose and the face was given a serene, but more realistic expression. The severe style was quite restrained and moderate compared to later developments, expressing the typical Greek belief in moderation in all things, whether in art, politics, or personal lifestyle. The overall result was a lifelike portrayal of the human body that seemed to declare the emergence of a much more self assured humanity along with Greek independence from older Near Eastern artistic forms. Other art forms showed similar energy and creativity.

In architecture, Pericles used the surplus from the league treasury for an ambitious building program, paid for with funds from the league treasury to adorn Athens' Acropolis. This also provided jobs for the poor, resulting in widespread popular support for Pericles' policies. Foremost among these buildings was the Parthenon. Constructed almost entirely of marble (even the roof) it is considered the pinnacle of Classical architecture with its perfectly measured proportions and simplicity. Ironically, there is hardly a straight line in the building. The architects, realizing perfectly straight lines would give the illusion of imperfection, created slight bulges in the floor and columns to make it *look* perfect. Although in ruins from an explosion in 1687 resulting from its use as a gunpowder magazine, the Parthenon still stands as a powerful, yet elegant testament to Athenian and Greek civilization in its golden age.

Another important, if less spectacular art form that flourished at this time was pottery. Around 530 B.C., the Greeks developed a new way of vase painting known as the red figure style. Instead of the earlier technique of painting black figures on a red background (known as the black figure style), potters put red figures on a black background with details painted in black or etched in with a needle. This technique, combined with the refined skills of the vase painters' working on such an awkward surface, gave Athenian pottery unsurpassed beauty and elegance, putting it in high demand throughout the Mediterranean.

In addition to its artistic value, Athenian pottery provides an invaluable record of nearly all aspects of Greek daily life, especially ones of which we would have little evidence otherwise, such as the lives of women, working conditions and techniques of various crafts, and social (including sexual) practices. Given these themes and the large number of surviving pieces, Greek pottery also reflected the more democratic nature of Greek society, since it was available to more people than had been true in earlier societies where high art was generally reserved for kings and nobles with the power and wealth to command the services of artisans.

Possibly the most creative expression of the Greek genius at this time was in the realm of tragic and comic drama, itself a uniquely Greek institution. While still sacred to the god of wine and revelry, Dionysus, Greek drama at this time developed into a vibrant art form that also formed a vital aspect of public discourse on contemporary problems facing the Athenian democracy. However, being part of a state supported religious festival still overtly concerned with religious or mythological themes, the tragedians' expressed their views indirectly by putting new twists on old myths. This kept discussion of the themes treated in the plays on a more remote and philosophical level. That, in turn, allowed the Athenians to reflect on moral issues that were relative to, if not directly about, current problems that they could then understand and deal with more effectively.

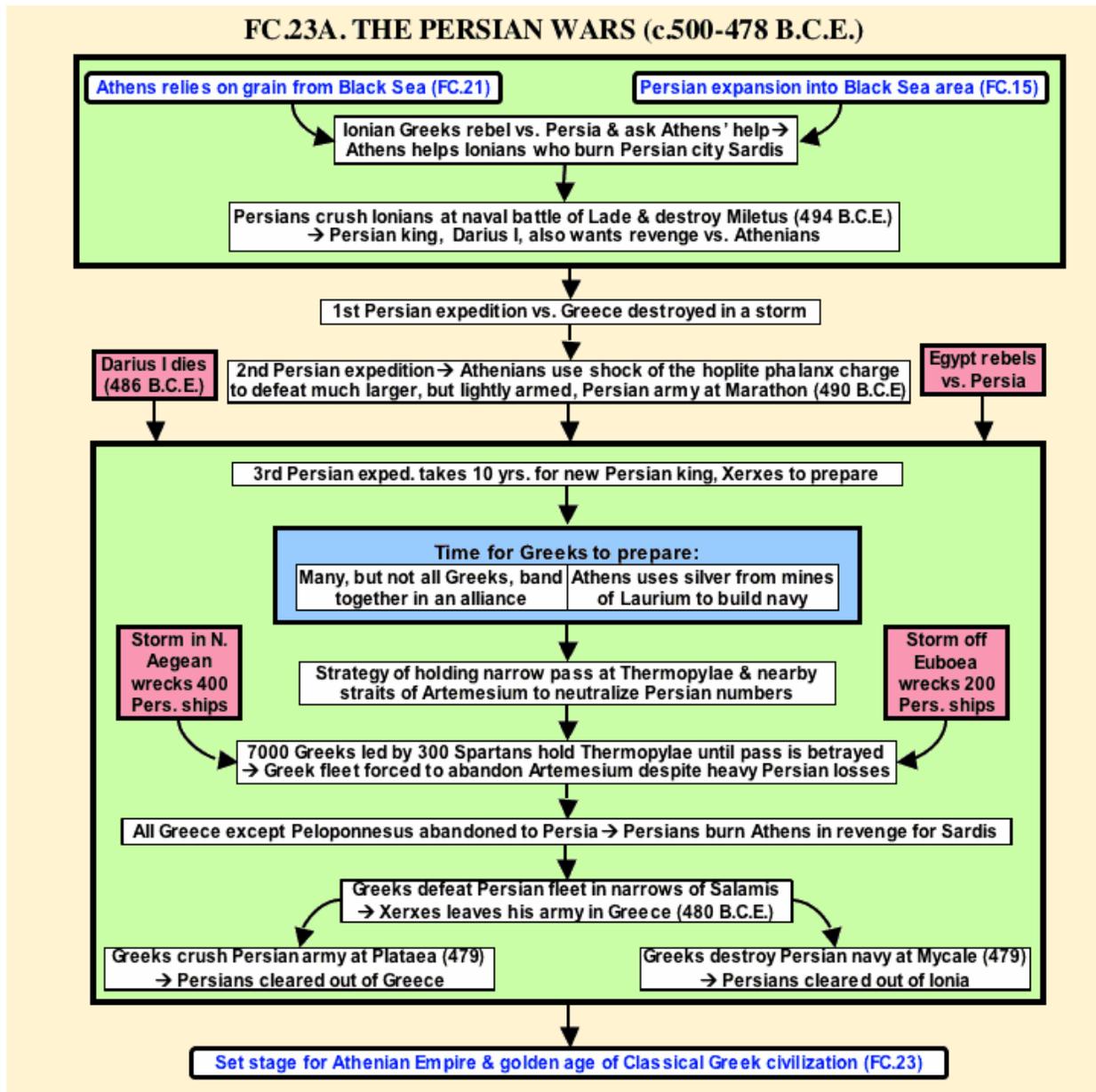
For example, Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* on one level was about flawed leadership which, no matter how well intentioned, could lead to disastrous results, in this case a plague afflicting Thebes for some mysterious reason. However, this play was produced soon after a devastating plague had swept through Athens and killed its leader, Pericles, who had led Athens into the Peloponnesian War. must have given the Athenians watching it reason to reflect on their own similar problems and what had caused them.

Greek comedy was best represented by Aristophanes, sometimes referred to as the Father of Comedy. Whereas Greek tragedians expressed their ideas with some restraint, comedy cut loose practically all restraints in its satirical attacks on contemporary policies, social practices, and politicians. Where else, in the midst of a desperate war, could one get away with staging such anti-war plays as *Lysistrata*, where the women of warring Athens and Sparta band together in a sex strike until the men come to their senses and end the war?

Such freedom of expression was also found in the realm of philosophy. We have seen how the most famous philosopher of the time, Socrates, "called philosophy down from the skies" to examine moral and ethical issues. In addition to Socrates, there arose a number of independent thinkers, referred to collectively as the Sophists, who were drawn to Athens' free and creative atmosphere. Inspired by the rapid advances in the arts, architecture, urban planning, and sciences, they believed human potential was virtually unlimited. One Sophist, Protagoras, said that, since the existence of the gods cannot be proven or disproven, Man is the measure of all things who determines what is real or not. This opened the floodgates to a whole variety of new ideas that also challenged traditional values. In his play, *The Clouds*, Aristophanes mercilessly satirized the Sophists as men who boasted they could argue either side of an argument and make it seem right. This belief that there is no real basis for truth would especially affect a younger generation of Athenians. Some of them, ungrounded in any sense of values, would mistake cleverness for wisdom and lead Athens down the road to ruin.

It is incredible to think that Western Civilization is firmly rooted in this short, but intense outpouring of creative energy from a single city-state with perhaps a total of 40,000 citizens. However, Athens' golden age would be short-lived as growing tensions would trigger a series of wars that would end the age of the polis.

FC23A The Persian Wars (480-478 BCE)



[FC23A](#) in the [Hyperflow of History](#).

Covered in multimedia lecture #[4115](#).

“In winter, on your soft couch by the fire, full of food, drinking sweet wine and cracking nuts, say this to the chance traveler at your door: ‘What is your name, my good friend? Where do you live? How many years can you number? How old were you when the Persians came...?’— *Xenophanes*

The Persian Wars (510-478 B.C.E.)

To the Greeks, there was one defining event in their history: the Persian Wars. Even today, we see a good deal of truth in this assessment, for the Greek victory in the Persian Wars triggered the building of the Athenian navy, which led to the Athenian Empire, the expansion of the concept of democracy, and the means to develop Greek civilization to its height.

Two main factors led to the Persian Wars. First, there was Persian expansion into Western Asia Minor, (bringing Ionian Greeks under their control) and into Thrace on the European side of the Aegean in search of gold. Second, Solon's reforms and Peisistratus' seizing control of Sigeum had made Athens especially sensitive to any threats to its

grain route from the Black Sea. Further complicating this was the fact that several Athenian nobles held lands in the North Aegean. The spark igniting this into war with Persians was a revolt of the Ionian Greeks.

The Ionian Revolt (510-494 B.C.E.)

The Ionian Greeks had peacefully submitted to Persian rule and lived under Persian appointed Greek tyrants since the time of Cyrus the Great. Then in 510 B.C.E., the Ionian Greeks raised the standard of revolt and drove their tyrants out. Realizing they needed help against the mighty Great King, Darius, they appealed to their cousins across the Aegean for aid. Sparta, ever wary of a Helot revolt, refused to help. However, Athens and another city-state, Eretria, did send ships and troops who joined the Ionians, marched inland, and burned the provincial capital, Sardis, to the ground. After a Persian force defeated the Greeks as they were returning from Sardis, the Ionian Greeks decided to stake everything on a naval battle at Lade (494 B.C.E.). Unfortunately, the combination of disunity in their ranks and Persian promises of leniency caused the naval squadron of one polis after another to defect to the Persians and Ionian resistance to collapse. Miletus, leader of the revolt was sacked and the rest of Ionia fell back under Persian sway.

Athens alone (494-490 B.C.E.)

The Athenians and Eretrians had eluded the Ionian disaster, but not Darius' notice. After finding out who the Athenians were, Darius supposedly appointed a slave to remind him of them daily until he had punished them. In 492 B.C.E., an expedition set sail, but much of it was shipwrecked off the coast of Thrace and the rest of it was forced to return home. Nothing daunted, Darius prepared another invasion force which set out in 490 B.C.E.. Persian ambassadors had preceded the army to demand earth and water as signs of submission from all the Greeks. Most gave in rather than face the might of the Great King. However, the Athenians supposedly threw them into a pit and told them to take as much earth as they wanted, while the Spartans, equally defiant, gave them their water by throwing them into a well.

Later that year, a Persian force of some 20,000 men landed at Marathon in Attica. Unfortunately, the Spartans, being as superstitious as they were defiant, could not march before the end of a festival on the full moon. Thus the Athenians were left to face the might of Persia all alone, or nearly alone, since the tiny city-state of Plataea sent its army of 1000 men to stand bravely by Athens. The Greeks still faced an army twice as numerous as their own and reputedly invincible in battle. Therefore, they did the last thing the lightly clad and overconfident Persians expected: they charged. The Persians hardly had time to unleash a volley of arrows before the Greeks were upon them. The shock of this human tank of heavily armored Greek hoplites crashing into their lines sent them reeling back and scurrying for their ships. The Persian fleet made a quick dash for defenseless Athens, only to find the Athenians had doubled back to meet them. Having lost their stomach for anymore fighting, they sailed for home.

Xerxes' invasion (480-478 B.C.E.)

The Athenians and other Greeks knew they had little cause for celebration, for the Persians would surely be back. It took ten years for the next invasion to materialize, because Egypt rebelled, as usual, and then Darius died. His son and successor, Xerxes, needed a decade to set his house in order and create a new army to invade Greece. Hoping to crush the Greeks by weight of numbers, this new army was nearly ten times as big as the one that lost at Marathon. Greek preparations were more thorough this time. For one thing, many, although by no means all, the city-states banded together in a defensive league with Sparta as its leader. The Athenians let their leader, Themistocles convince them to use the extra money from a large lode of silver found at Laurium in Attica to pay for a larger fleet, believing sea power would be the key to victory.

The Greeks sent an advance force of some 7000 Greeks under the Spartan king Leonidas to hold the narrow pass of Thermopylae in northern Greece. Nearby was a Greek fleet holding the narrow straits of Artemesium. Fighting in such narrow spaces would prevent the Persians from using their superior numbers to advantage. For several days, the Greeks, led by the Spartans, severely repulsed any Persian assaults at Thermopylae and threatened to stall Xerxes' whole invasion. Unfortunately, treachery accomplished what frontal assaults could not, for a local shepherd showed the Persians another path behind the Greeks. Before the trap was closed, most of the Greeks escaped. However, Leonidas and his picked guard of 300 Spartans along with 700 troops from Thespiis chose to stay and fought to the last man, selling their lives dearly in the process. When Thermopylae fell, the Greek fleet defending nearby Artemesium had to retreat after some hard fighting.

As the Persian multitude spread southward, city after city surrendered or was abandoned, until the Peloponnesus was about the only part of Greece left free. Even the Athenians had to evacuate their population to the nearby island of Salamis and watch their city go up in flames as they waited for the decisive battle to decide the issue. That battle took place at sea in the strait of water between Salamis and Attica. The Greeks, under the leadership of the Athenian Themistocles, lured the Persians into the narrows where they were ambushed, crushed together so they could not maneuver, and destroyed ship by ship. This victory proved decisive enough to convince Xerxes to go home, leaving part of his army to finish the job.

However, it was the Greeks who would finish the job. First they crushed the Persian army at Plataea in 479 B.C.E., with the Spartans carrying off the honors for valor, to no one's surprise. Then the remainder of the Persian fleet was caught and destroyed at Mycale. This led to another, more successful Ionian revolt, so the Ionians were finally free. It also left the way open for the Greeks to destroy the bridge of boats that the Persians had used to cross the Hellespont from Asia into Europe. The destruction of that bridge signaled the end of the Persian wars, although no one at that time could assume the Persians would not come back.

Formation of the Delian League

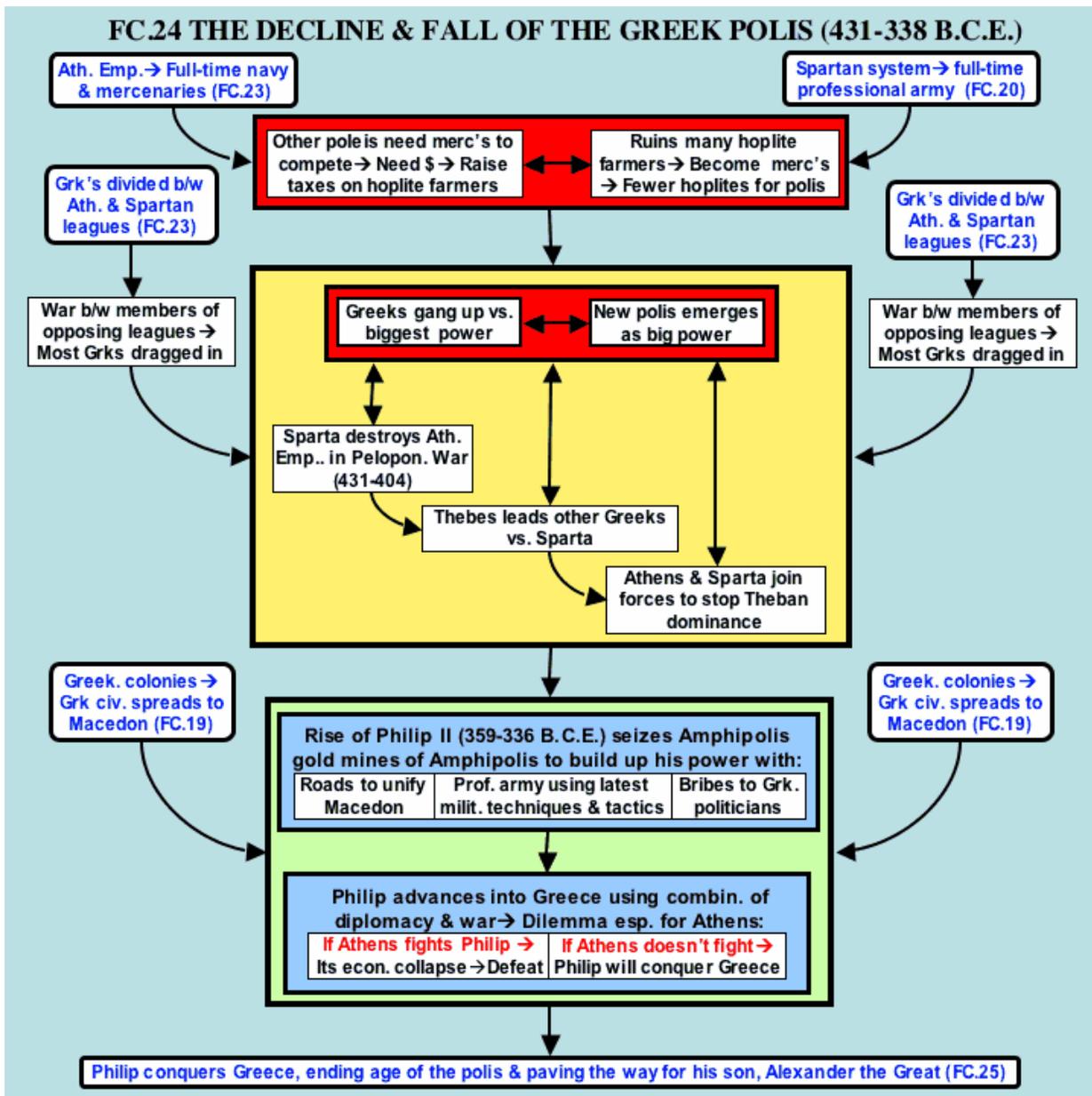
We can well imagine the Greeks' incredible feelings of pride and accomplishment in 478 B.C.E. after defeating the Persian Empire. The Athenians felt that they in particular had done more than their part with their army at Marathon and their navy at Salamis and Mycale. It was this incredible victory which gave them the self-confidence and drive to lead Greece in its political and cultural golden age for the next half century.

However, victory had been won at a heavy price. Fields, orchards, and vineyards lay devastated throughout much of Greece, and it would take decades for the vineyards and olive groves in particular to be restored. Athens itself was in ruins, being burned by the Persians in vengeance for the destruction of Sardis during the Ionian Revolt. Therefore, the Athenians immediately set to work to rebuild their city, and in particular its fortifications. The Spartans, probably through fear or jealousy of Athens' growing power, tried to convince the Athenians not to rebuild their walls. They said that if the Persians came back and recaptured Athens, they could use it as a fortified base against other Greeks. The Athenian leader, Themistocles, stalled the Spartans on the issue until his fellow Athenians had enough time to erect defensible fortifications. (This was later extended by what was known as the Long Walls to connect Athens to its port, Piraeus, so it could not be cut off from its fleet.) By the time Sparta realized what was happening, it was too late to do anything. One could already see bad relations starting to emerge between Athens and Sparta. In time, they would get much worse.

Since the Athenians and other Greeks could not assume that the Persians would not come back, they decided the best defense was a good offense, and formed an alliance known as the Delian League. The League's main goals were to liberate the Ionian Greeks from Persian rule and to safeguard the islands in the Aegean from further Persian aggression. The key to doing this was sea power, and that made Athens the natural leader, since it had by far the largest navy and also the incentive to strike back at Persia. At first, Sparta had been offered leadership in the league because of its military reputation. However, constant fear of Helot revolts made the Spartans reluctant to commit themselves overseas. Also, their king, Pausanias, had angered the other Greeks by showing that typical Spartan lust for gold. As a result, he was recalled, leaving Athens to lead the way.

The Persian navy, or what was left of it, was in no shape to halt the Greek advance after taking two serious beatings from the Greeks in the recent war. Ionia was stripped from the Great King's grasp, and the Persians were swept from the Aegean sea island by island. Within a few years, the Delian League controlled virtually all the Greeks in the islands and coastal regions of the Aegean.

FC24The Decline & fall of the Greek Polis (431-336 BCE)



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Covered in multimedia lecture [#4572](#).

If the Persian Wars were the great epic of Greek history, the century of conflict between Greek poleis from 431 to 338 B.C.E. was its great tragedy. During this time, the Greeks wasted their energies fighting one another and left the way open for an outside power, Macedon, to come in and take over. There were three main lines of development that led to the final fall of the polis in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.E.

Economic and military changes

First of all, the Persian wars exposed the Greeks to a wider world of trade as well as different military tactics that could threaten the powerful, but largely immobile hoplite phalanx. Athens especially adapted to these new challenges, relying more on trade, foreign grain, and a money economy, along with the navy and Long Walls to protect its empire. Growing fear of Athens and the resulting Peloponnesian War would force other poleis to adapt in order to be able to compete with Athens. Sparta, in particular, built a navy and, after the Peloponnesian War, relied increasingly on mercenaries to bolster its power. In addition, lightly armed troops known as peltasts were used to give Greek armies more flexibility.

As a result, more and more Greeks were drawn from the countryside by the lure of riches to be made as traders and mercenaries. Trade and a money economy grew in importance compared to the small family farms that had previously been the mainstay of the polis' economy. Also, warfare became professional, sophisticated, chronic, and expensive. This contrasted sharply with the previous style of cheap, amateur, and less destructive warfare waged by hoplite farmers over the last 250 years. Rising taxes to support this new style of warfare put increasing burdens on the farmer hoplites who started to decline economically, militarily, and politically. Gradually, large estates worked by tenant farmers or slaves would replace the small family owned farms worked by independent farmers. And once these farmers, the backbone of the traditional polis, went into decline, so did the polis itself. The Greeks were still a dynamic people, but the polis itself was starting to decay.

The spread of Greek civilization

by way of its colonies to peoples outside of Greece triggered the second long term process affecting the polis. Many of these people assumed at least a veneer of Greek culture and built quasi-Greek states that mimicked the Greeks in their organization, military institutions, and culture. Most notable of these states was Macedon, a region to the north of Greece that had acted as a buffer against aggressive tribes further north. In 359 B.C.E., one of these tribes, the Illyrians, killed a Macedonian king in battle. It was his successor, Philip II, who would build a strong kingdom on the ruins of this disaster. Like the economic changes then taking place, this spread of Greek civilization to Macedon would contribute to the downfall of the Greek polis.

Chronic warfare

, beginning with the Peloponnesian war, was the third reason for the decline of the polis. There were three basic causes for this war which itself would trigger a self-destructive cycle. First, there was a basic underlying fear other poleis had of the dominant Greek state, which at this time was Athens. Second, there was the mutual hostility between individual poleis such as Corinth against Corcyra, Athens against Megara, and Thebes against Plataea. Finally, there was a fatal flaw infecting Greek diplomacy at this time. Since most poleis were tied to either the Peloponnesian League (Sparta's alliance) or the Athenian Empire, any conflict between individual members of the opposing alliances could eventually drag the whole Greek world into a much larger and more destructive war. It was such a flaw of interlocking alliances that would pull all of Europe and eventually much of the world into World War I in 1914.

All these factors led to an unfortunate pattern of wars that also would eventually destroy the polis. Triggering this pattern was a tendency of the poleis to gang up against the most powerful Greek state at that time. This would bring about not only the downfall of that state, but also the rise of another polis to dominance, causing the other poleis to gang up on *that* state, and so on. This cycle would repeat itself three times: first in the Peloponnesian War to bring down Athens, next in a series of wars that wrecked Sparta's power and brought Thebes to pre-eminence, and finally in the struggle against Thebes that would leave all of Greece open to attack by the growing Macedonian kingdom to the north.

Continuing warfare after the Peloponnesian War (404-355 B.C.E.)

We have already seen in detail how Sparta defeated Athens in the Peloponnesian War. However, Sparta's victory hardly meant peace for the Greek world. Many of Athens' subjects had joined Sparta, believing they would be free to run their own lives. Instead, the Spartans installed pro-Spartan oligarchies that were watched over by Spartan governors and garrisons in many poleis. Sparta also failed to turn over Ionia to Persia in return for its aid against Athens. Naturally, such high-handed actions angered both Persia and most other Greeks. Leading the way were the Athenians who replaced the Spartan backed and repressive oligarchy of The Thirty with a new democracy.

All this led to the Corinthian War (395-387 B.C.E.). The Spartans in Ionia could more than hold their own against the Persian forces there. However, what Persian armies could not accomplish, Persian gold could by funding Athens, Thebes, and Corinth against Sparta, which drew the Spartan forces out of Ionia and back to Greece. Persia also gave Athens a navy that crushed the Spartan fleet, sailed to Athens, and oversaw the rebuilding of the Long Walls. Sparta's gains from the Peloponnesian War were quickly slipping away.

Faced with such a powerful coalition, Sparta made peace with Persia, handing Ionia over in return for help against the other Greeks. In 387 B.C.E. Persia dictated a treaty called the King's Peace to all the Greeks, taking Ionia for itself,

and putting its ally Sparta back on top of the Greek world. The irony of it all was that the Persians, without striking a blow, had accomplished what Xerxes' huge army had failed to do a century before.

Naturally, the Greeks, did not abide by this decision for long, with Thebes and Athens leading the resistance against Sparta. The Thebans drove the Spartan garrison from their citadel and formed the Boeotian League in direct defiance of Sparta and the King's Peace. At Leuctra in 371 B.C.E., the Theban general, Epaminondas stacked one flank of his phalanx 50 ranks deep, crushed the opposing Spartan wing, and then rolled up the rest of their army. A similar battle at Mantinea nine years later destroyed the mystique of Spartan invincibility, and with it most of Sparta's power and influence. Unfortunately for Thebes, Epaminondas was killed, and with him died Thebes' main hope to dominate the Greek world.

Meanwhile, the Athenians had formed a second Delian League with various Aegean states, promising to treat them better than they had treated the first Delian League. But Athens soon reverted to its old imperialist behavior. This triggered a revolt known as the Social War that ended Athens' imperial ambitions once and for all. Thus by 355 B.C.E., after 75 years of almost constant warfare, Athens' empire was gone, Sparta's army and reputation were wrecked, and Thebes' hopes for dominance were virtually laid to rest with Epaminondas. The polis' resulting exhaustion combined with the long-range forces undermining the polis due to the Persian Wars and Greek colonization left the polis in serious decline opened the way for a new power to step in.

The rise of Macedon (355-336 B.C.E.)

Macedon was a country north of Greece inhabited by tribes speaking a dialect related to Greek. While the Greeks considered them barbarians, the Macedonians liked to think of themselves as Greeks, and had played a minor role in Greek history from time to time. However, Macedon had never been a strong power until Philip II came to the throne in 359 B.C.E. after invading tribes from the north had killed his predecessor.

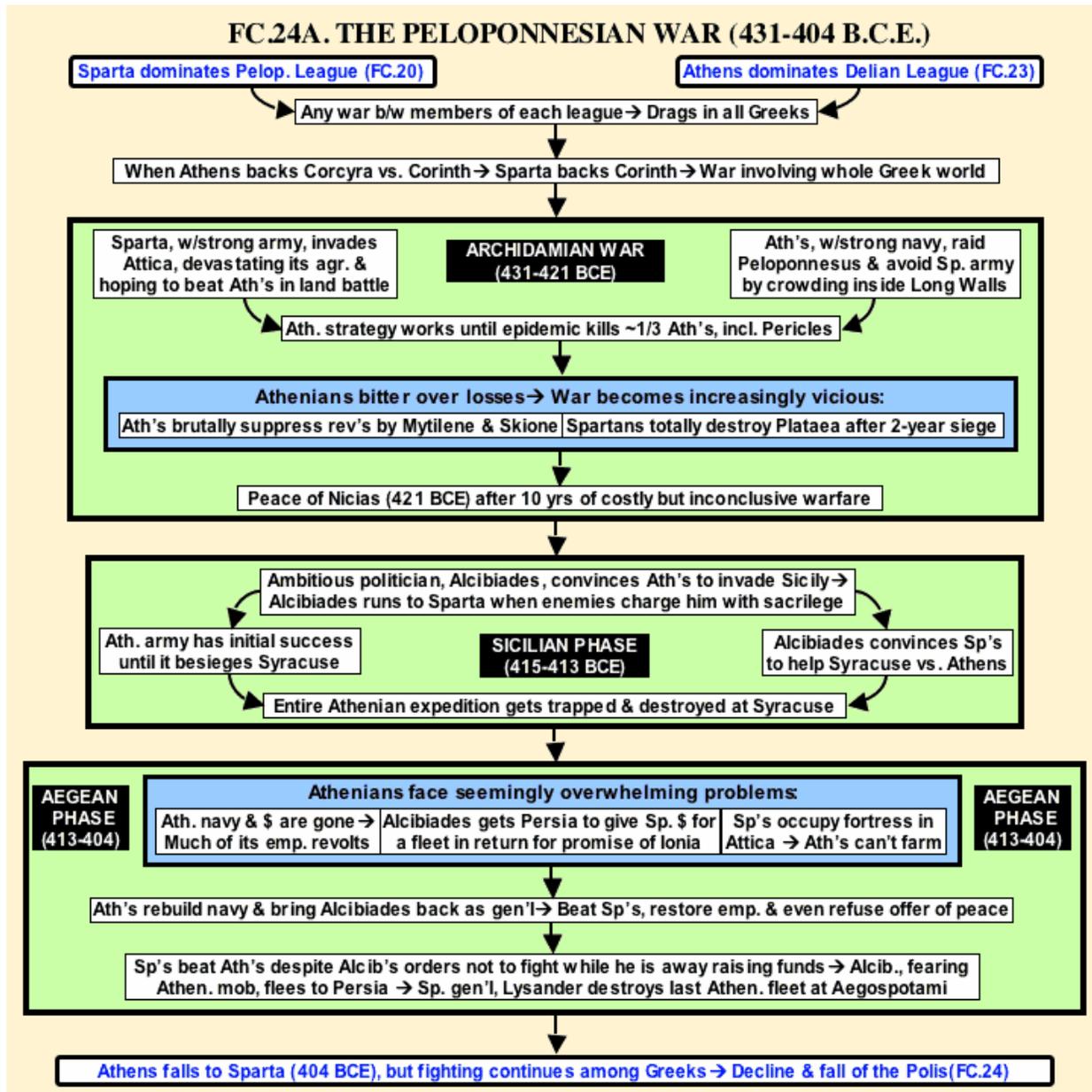
Philip was one of the most remarkable figures in Greek history, only being overshadowed by his son Alexander. He was a shrewd, ambitious, and unscrupulous politician who knew how to exploit the hopes, fears, and mutual hatreds of the Greeks to his own advantage. The key to much of Philip's success was control of the gold mines of Amphipolis, which gave him the money to do three things: build roads to tie his country together, bribe Greek politicians, and build up his army. Philip was an outstanding organizer and general who built what was probably the best army up to that point in history. Its main striking arm was an excellent cavalry, but it also utilized a phalanx armed with thirteen-foot long pikes (spears) and lightly armed peltasts. Together, these gave him the flexibility and coordination to deal with almost any situation on a battlefield.

Preferring diplomacy to fighting whenever possible, Philip was able to work his way into the confidence of various Greek states to undermine their resistance to him when he finally decided to strike. For example, he gained a foothold in Greece by defending Delphi from another city-state, Phokis. He also undermined Athens' power by taking and then freeing one of its allies and posing as the champion of all Greek liberties. Bit by bit, Philip worked his way southward, with only a few Greeks recognizing what was happening. Among these was Demosthenes, probably the greatest orator of the ancient world. In a masterful series of speeches known as *Philippics*, he repeatedly warned the Athenians of the danger to the north, but they did little.

Historians through the ages have blamed the Athenians for their failure to react well to the Macedonian threat. However, in all fairness, the Athens faced a difficult dilemma, since acting against Philip could have been as ruinous as not moving to stop him. On the one hand, failing to act against Philip would allow him to conquer Greece. However, on the other hand, without an empire to provide it with the full treasury it had the previous century, Athens could no longer sustain a prolonged war against such a power as Macedon. Therefore, fighting such a war very likely would have wrecked Athens' finances and given Philip the victory anyway.

Athens and Thebes did finally band together to meet the Macedonians at Chaeronea in 338 B.C. A tricky back-stepping maneuver by the Macedonian phalanx lured the Athenians out of position, exposing the Thebans to the decisive cavalry charge led by Philip's eighteen-year old son, Alexander. Demosthenes and others fled the field, leaving their shields and Greek liberty in the dust. For all intents and purposes, the age of the Greek polis was dead. The age of Alexander the Great and the Hellenistic kingdoms was about to dawn.

FC24A The Peloponnesian War (431-404 BCE)



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Covered in multimedia lecture [#4116](#).

The conflict that triggered the long collapse of the polis was the Peloponnesian War. It started when Athens, wanting to control trade to the west with Southern Italy and Sicily, helped Corcyra in a dispute with its founding city, Corinth. In retaliation, Corinth helped another of its former colonies, Potidaea, in a revolt against Athens and also turned to Sparta for help. This prompted Athens' leader, Pericles, to issue the Megarian Decree, cutting off all the empire's trade with another Spartan ally, Megara. As Megara joined Corinth in pressuring Sparta to take action against Athens, war fever grew on both sides.

In 431 B.C.E., as war with Sparta loomed, Euripides (485-406 B.C.E.), the third of the great tragic playwrights staged *Medea*. Its title character, the barbarian princess who had helped Jason get the Golden Fleece, is rejected by Jason in favor of a more desirable marriage to a princess of Corinth. Medea exacts a grisly revenge, murdering, not only Jason's new bride, but her own children to keep them from her enemies. At the end of the play, however, she is

granted asylum in Athens. Did *Medea* represent the Athenians' own ruthlessness as they prepared for war, or possibly the civil strife in Corcyra that Athens had recently allied with against its enemy, Corinth? Either way, Euripides' closing lines warn the Athenians against the uncertainty of the future: "Many things are determined by Zeus on Olympus, and many wishes are unexpectedly granted by the gods. But many things we expect to happen do not come to pass, for the gods continue to bring about what we did not expect." Euripides' warning went unheeded and war was declared.

Our main source for the period is Thucydides, whose *History of the Peloponnesian War* set the standard for historical accuracy and impartiality until the modern era. His history is especially valuable for its portrayal of the psychological effects of war on the human spirit. And just as the plays of the time let us use tragedy as history, Thucydides' account of the prolonged agony of the Peloponnesian War presents history as a form of tragedy. His history along with the tragic dramas of the time and Aristophanes' satirical comedies chronicle the long descent into madness that seemed to overtake the Athenians as the war dragged on.

Since Sparta was a land power and Athens was a naval power, Pericles, decided to rely on the navy to protect the empire and raid the coasts of the Peloponnesus. When the Spartans marched into Attica, he would pull the rural population inside the Long Walls, abandoning the countryside to the enemy until they left. As long as its grain routes were open, Athens should be able to hold out until Sparta tired of the war and gave up.

It was not easy to convince the Athenians to leave the countryside and passively watch from the Long Walls as their homes and fields went up in flames. However, Pericles' policy might have worked except for one thing that he had not counted on. In the second year of war, an epidemic broke out in Athens. Ordinarily, any epidemic would have been bad enough, but the crowded and unsanitary conditions of Athens under siege in the heat of summer intensified its effects. Thucydides gives a frightening account of the disease:

"The crowding of the people out of the country into the city aggravated the misery; and the newly arrived suffered most. For, having no houses of their own, but inhabiting in the height of summer stifling huts, the mortality among them was dreadful, and they perished in wild disorder. The dead lay as they had died, one upon another, while others hardly alive wallowed in the streets and crawled about every fountain craving for water. The temples in which they lodged were full of the corpses of those who died in them; for the violence of the calamity was such that men, not knowing where to turn, grew reckless of all law, human and divine. The customs that had hitherto been observed at funerals were universally violated, and they buried their dead each one as best he could. Many, having no proper appliances, because the deaths in their household had been so frequent, made no scruple of using the burial-place of others. When one man had raised a funeral pyre, others would come, and throwing on their dead first, set fire to it; or when some other corpse was already burning, before they could be stopped would throw their own dead upon it and depart.

"There were other and worse forms of lawlessness which the plague introduced at Athens. Men who had hitherto concealed their indulgence in pleasure now grew bolder. For, seeing the sudden change, how the rich died in a moment, and those who had nothing immediately inherited their property, they reflected that life and riches were alike transitory, and they resolved to enjoy themselves while they could, and to think only of pleasure...for offenses against human law no punishment was to be feared; no one would live long enough to be called to account. Already a far heavier sentence had been passed and was hanging over a man's head; before that fell, why should he not take a little pleasure? (II,48-49; 52-53)

Among the epidemic's victims was Pericles whose moderate and reasonable leadership would be sorely missed by Athens. Afterwards, men of much narrower vision would guide the polis on less trustworthy paths, and eventually to ruin. Soon afterwards, Sophocles staged *Oedipus the King*, considered by many as the greatest of Greek tragedies. Taking place in Thebes that is also suffering from a mysterious plague, an oracle says the murderer of the previous king, Laius, must be found and punished. The present king, Oedipus, who does not realize he himself unwittingly had killed Laius years before, launches an investigation. When Oedipus finally realizes he is the killer, he blinds himself and goes into exile to free Thebes from the curse. Given the time it was written, one could see Sophocles comparing Pericles to Oedipus, both being great leaders with the best intentions for their respective cities. However, some fatal unforeseen flaw in each leads, however unjustly, to disaster. The play ends with a somber warning by the chorus on the uncertainty of life:

“People of Thebes, my countrymen, look on Oedipus
 He solved the famous riddle with his brilliance,
 he rose to power, a man beyond all power.
 Who could behold his greatness without envy?
 Now what a black sea of terror has overwhelmed him.
 Now as we keep our watch and wait the final day
 count no man happy till he dies, free of pain at last.”

The first phase of the struggle, known as the Archidamian War, lasted ten years and became increasingly vicious the longer it lasted. Athens brutally put down revolts by the city-states, Mytiline and Skione, totally destroying the latter when it fell. Likewise, Thebes besieged and finally destroyed Athens' ally, Plataea, which had bravely stood by Athens at the Battle of Marathon sixty years earlier. Thucydides gives a grim analysis of the effects of war and the resulting civil strife within the various city-states:

“In peace and prosperity, both states and individuals are more generous, because they are not under pressure; but war, which cuts down the margin of comfort in daily life, is a teacher of violence, and assimilates ordinary people's characters to their conditions.

“Revolution now became endemic;... even the former prestige of words was changed. Reckless daring was counted the courage of a good party man; prudent hesitation cowardice in disguise; moderation, a cover for weakness, and the ability to see all sides, inability to do anything...The bitter speaker was always trusted, and his opponent held suspect. The successful conspirator was reckoned intelligent, and he who detected a plot more brilliant still, but he who planned not to need such methods was accused of splitting the party and being afraid of the enemy...

“The tie of party took precedence over that of the family;...Most people would rather be called clever knaves (if knave is what they are) than honest fools; they are ashamed of the latter label, but proud of the former.

“The cause of the whole trouble was the pursuit of power for the sake of greed and personal ambition...Leaders everywhere used honorable slogans—'political equality for the masses' or 'the rule of a wise elite'; but the commonwealth which they served in name was the prize that they fought for...And moderate men fell victims to both sides...And the cruder intellects generally survived better; for conscious of their deficiencies and their opponents' cleverness, and fearing that they might get the worst of it in debate and be victims of some cunning plot if they delayed, they struck boldly and at once; but the others, contemptuously sure that they could see danger in time and had no need to take by force what they could get by wit, were more often caught off their guard and destroyed.”

At this time, comic drama, also sacred to Dionysus, was becoming increasingly popular in Athens, with two annual festivals, also sacred to Dionysus, being devoted to comedy. Whereas tragic drama skillfully veiled its messages in myth, Aristophanes, the most prominent of the comic playwrights, blatantly attacked his targets head-on, whether they be the war (during which he wrote numerous anti-war plays), social and political ills, specific public figures, or the Athenian democracy itself. Aristophanes, a conservative upset with the disturbing trends of the times, pulled no punches and, to the Athenians' credit, got away with it all. One of his favorite victims was the popular, but crude and brutal politician, Cleon the Tanner, whose character and tactics Thucydides seemed to be specifically describing in the passage cited above. Supposedly, when no actor could be found with the nerve to play Cleon in *The Knights*, Aristophanes himself played the role.

In Aristophanes' oldest surviving play, *The Acharnians* (425 B.C.E.), Dicaeopolis, a farmer ruined by the war, makes a separate peace with Sparta. The resulting prosperity (including wine and dancing girls) for Dicaeopolis and his neighbors is contrasted with a returning general who has only wounds to show for his efforts.

The Knights (424 B.C.E.) raked both Cleon and the Athenian democracy over the coals. Lord Demos ("Democracy") has two slaves, Nicias and Demosthenes (two conservative politicians) who are ruled by the cruel overseer, the Paphlagonian leather monger, an obvious reference to Cleon the Tanner. The two slaves recruit a crude sausage seller, Agoracritus, who engages Cleon in a shameless bribery contest for the favor of Lord Demos, offering cheap fish, fresh rabbit meat, pillows for the stone assembly seats, and even world dominion. Agoracritus finally wins by offering the aged Lord Demos renewed youth. Thus the democracy is revived as young, energetic, and statesmanlike just as in the

good old days. This appeased the democratic audience that had been portrayed as old, conceited, and easily fooled. Cleon was not so lucky, being accused in the play of bribery, slander, lies, threatening opponents with the charge of treason, and false accusations. Coming at the peak of Cleon's popularity after he had won a victory over the Spartans and then arrogantly refused to make peace, *The Knights* helped deflate his ego and won Aristophanes first prize in the dramatic competition

In *The Wasps* (422 B.B.), Aristophanes took on the addiction many Athenians had to serving as jurors in the courts. He also lambasts Cleon who had raised the jurors' pay, largely funding the raise with fines and legal fees paid by political enemies whom he brought to court. As the chorus tells the jurors, "*You deprive yourself of your own pay if you don't find the accused guilty.*" At another point the character, Philocleon ("Lover of Cleon"), himself a chronic juror, says "*We are the only ones whom Cleon, the great bawler, does not badger. On the contrary he protects and caresses us; he keeps off the flies...*" Philocleon's son, Bdelycleon ("Hater of Cleon") finally breaks his father's addiction to the courts by letting him stage mock trials at home. In one he tries the family dog, Labes, for stealing some cheese. A second dog testifies against Labes, saying he refused to share the cheese. Bdelycleon, defending Labes, brings in her puppies, urging them to "*yap up on your haunches, beg and whine*" to win the court's sympathy (a common tactic then). Philocleon at last acquits the dog.

Disaster and Collapse (421-404 B.C.E.)

After Cleon was killed in battle, peace was signed with Sparta in 421 B.C.E. Neither side gained anything, supposedly returning any lands taken during the war. However, neither side abided by these terms, keeping tensions high and the likelihood of a lasting peace correspondingly low. In 417 B.C.E. Athens attacked the small island state of Melos for no good reason. Thucydides' dialogue between Melian and Athenian delegates reveals how deeply the Athenians had become corrupted by power:

“Athenians: Well, then, we Athenians will use no fine words; we will not go out of our way to prove at length that we have a right to rule, because we overthrew the Persians; or that we attack you now because we are suffering any injury at your hands. We should not convince you if we did; nor must you expect to convince us by arguing that, although a colony of the Lacedaemonians (Spartans), you have taken no part in their expeditions, or that you have never done us any wrong. But you and we should say what we really think, and aim only at what is possible, for we both alike know that into the discussion of human affairs the question of justice only enters where the pressure of necessity is equal, and that the powerful exact what they can, and the weak grant what they must...And we will now endeavor to show that we have come in the interests of our empire, and that in what we are about to say we are only seeking the preservation of your city. For we want to make you ours with the least trouble to ourselves, and it is for the interest of us both that you should not be destroyed.

Melians: It may be your interest to be our masters, but how can it be ours to be your slaves?

Athenians: To you the gain will be that by submission you will avert the worst; and we shall be all the richer for your preservation.

Melians: But must we be your enemies? Will you not receive us as your friends if we are neutral and remain at peace with you?

Athenians: No your enmity is not half so mischievous to us as your friendship; for the one is in the eyes of our subjects an argument of our power, the other of our weakness.

Melians: But are your subjects really unable to distinguish between states in which you have no concern, and those which are chiefly your own colonies, and in some cases have revolted and been subdued by you?

Athenians: Why, they do not doubt that both of them have a good deal to say for themselves on the score of justice, but they think that states like yours are left free because they are able to defend themselves, and that we do not attack them because we dare not. So that your subjection will give us an increase of security, as well as an extension of empire. For we are masters of the sea, and you who are islanders, and insignificant islanders too, must not be allowed to escape us.”

When Melos fell in 415 B.C.E. the Athenians mercilessly slaughtered the men and enslaved the women and children. Euripides expressed his outrage at this reckless abuse of power in *The Trojan Women*, possibly the most powerful statement until modern times on the senseless suffering caused by war. The scene is Troy after its brutal destruction as seen through the eyes of the victims, the various Trojan women being parceled out as slaves to different Greek warriors. One by one, they learn of their individual fates, including the murder of Hector's baby son, Astyanax. Poseidon at the start of the play utters a grim warning to the Greeks for their sacrileges in the sack of Troy, but one that could as well apply to the Athenians for their recent actions: "***How are ye blind, ye treaders down of cities, ye that cast temples to desolation and lay waste tombs, the untrodden sanctuaries where lie the ancient dead; yourselves so soon to die!***"

Convincing the Athenians to carry out the horrible massacre of the Melians was Alcibiades, a brilliant and handsome young politician and former student of Socrates. We have already seen how clever, although lacking in perspective, this young man was in the dialogue with his uncle Pericles on the definition of law. He was equally unscrupulous in his pursuit of power and publicity, at one point entering seven chariots in the Olympics and at another buying a very expensive dog and cutting off its tail so people would talk about him.

The Sicilian Expedition

In 415 B.C.E. Alcibiades convinced the Assembly to invade Sicily, blinding them to the realities and difficulties of the undertaking with the lure of untold riches. Therefore, the Athenians, sent a large fleet and army under Alcibiades and Nicias (who was opposed to the expedition to start with). Alcibiades might have carried out the whole scheme if he had been allowed to. However, he was summoned home on what were probably trumped up charges of defacing some statues sacred to Hermes. Instead of facing a hostile jury, he jumped ship, went to Sparta, and convinced it to declare war on Athens while it was occupied in Sicily.

All this left Nicias in command in Sicily. Considering his lack of enthusiasm and slow-moving, superstitious ways, he made remarkable success, besieging Syracuse and almost cutting it off from outside help. However, Nicias' failure to act quickly let the Syracusans turn the tables on him, and soon it was the Athenians who were in danger of being cut off from escape. A second army and fleet came to relieve Nicias' force, but soon they too found themselves in a trap that was quickly closing. Unfortunately, a lunar eclipse caused the superstitious Nicias to wait twenty-seven days before letting the Athenians make their move. By then it was too late. After a desperate and futile effort to break out of Syracuse's harbor, the Athenians abandoned their waterlogged fleet and tried to escape overland. The army, demoralized by defeat and decimated by hunger, thirst, and disease, came to an end in a pathetic mob scene described by Thucydides.

“When the day dawned Nicias led forward his army, and the Syracusans and the allies again assailed them on every side, hurling javelins and other missiles at them. The Athenians hurried on to the river Assinarus. They hoped to gain a little relief if they forded the river, for the mass of horsemen and other troops overwhelmed and crushed them; and they were worn out by fatigue and thirst. But no sooner did they reach the water than they lost all order and rushed in; every man was trying to cross first, and, the enemy pressing upon them at the same time, the passage of the river became hopeless. Being compelled to keep close together they fell one upon another, and trampled each other under foot; some at once perished, pierced by their own spears; others got entangled in the baggage and were carried down the stream. The Syracusans stood upon the further bank of the river, which was steep, and hurled missiles from above on the Athenians, who were huddled together in the deep bed of the stream and for the most part were drinking greedily. The Peloponnesians came down the bank and slaughtered them, falling chiefly upon those who were in the river. Whereupon the water at once became foul but was drunk all the same, although muddy and dyed with blood, and the crowd fought for it.”

Nearly all the Athenians were either killed or captured by the Syracusans. Because of their great number, the prisoners were kept in a quarry where exposure to the elements killed most of them off. Some who could recite passages from Euripides' plays, which were popular in Syracuse, were rescued by rich families. These who eventually returned home made a point of thanking Euripides for saving their lives..

Athens' comeback and final fall (413-404 B.C.E.)

Hardly an Athenian family was left untouched by the Sicilian disaster, while Athens itself had lost two fleets and armies. Now trouble piled on top of trouble as much of Athens' empire rose up in revolt. Thanks to Alcibiades, the Spartans now continuously occupied a fort in Attica to keep the Athenians huddled behind their Long Walls. Worst of all, Alcibiades had arranged for the Spartans to ally with Persia, getting Persian money and ships in return for promising to turn Ionia over to the Great King. An oligarchic revolution even briefly replaced Athens' democracy.

Despite these adversities, the Athenians bounced back, scraping together enough money and men to build a new fleet and carry on the war for nine more years. Alcibiades even returned to the graces of the Athenians and led their fleet to several decisive victories that at least partially restored Athens' crumbling empire. On two different occasions, Sparta even asked for peace, and was twice turned down by the Athenians, a foolish response since Persia could easily rebuild any Spartan fleets the Athenians destroyed.

In the midst of all this Aristophanes produced possibly his most outrageous, and profound statement on the war, *Lysistrata* in 411 B.C.E. In it the main character, Lysistrata ("she who disbands armies") organizes the women of Athens and Sparta, who are all sick of the war, to stage a sex strike and seize the treasury on the Acropolis until the men agree to make peace. The lowly women, who abound in common sense, triumph, and peace is happily made. Unfortunately, in real life, the war went on.

Another crisis erupted when an old drinking friend of Alcibiades, whom he had irresponsibly left in command of the fleet during his absence, offered battle against orders and was defeated. The Athenians, blaming Alcibiades, exiled him a second time. With him went Athens' best chance to win the war. In 406 B.C.E., stormy conditions after an Athenian victory at Arginusae prevented the rescue of several thousand shipwrecked Athenians. The mob blamed the six Athenian generals in charge of the fleet and had them tried and executed.

These events inspired Euripides' frightening portrayal of human madness, *The Bacchae*, produced a year after his death in 406 B.C.E. In it Dionysus returns to Thebes and incites wild frenzies in the forest by the local women who become his followers, the Maenads. When the king, Pentheus, who represents civilized rationality, tries to save Thebes from the wild irrational Dionysiac rites, he is torn apart by the Maenads. Madness reigns supreme as his own mother returns to town with his head on a stick, thinking it is a lion. Greek audiences must have been especially shaken as they watched the one thing on which they especially prided themselves, their moderate rationality, drowning in a sea of madness, whether on stage or in war.

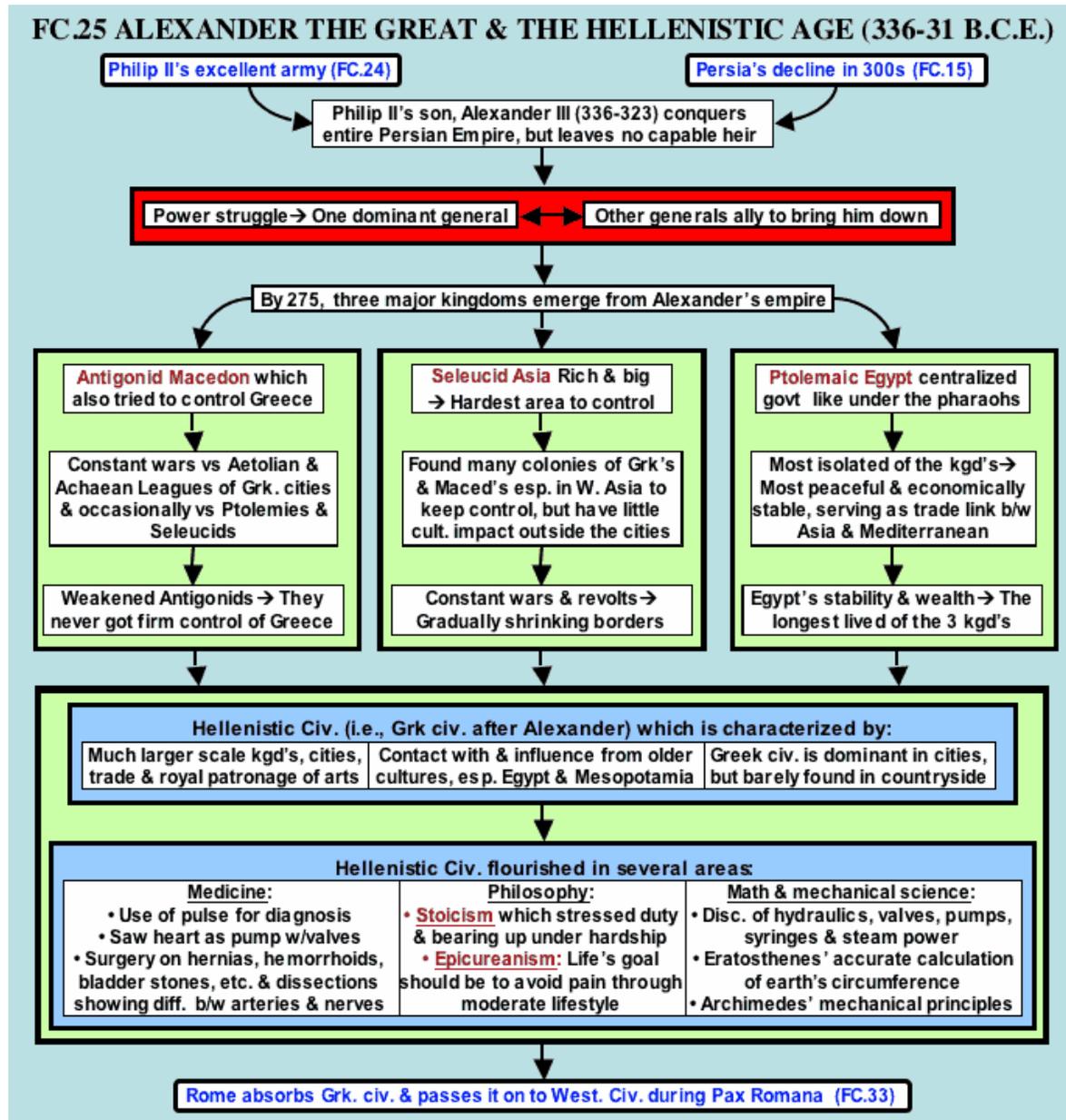
Unlike the earlier days when the playwrights could help guide the democracy on a wise course, it seemed they could no longer offer guidance through the morass of problems Athens had gotten itself into. Now they could only point out the shocking failure of its leaders and assembly in the policies they pursued. And after the deaths of Euripides and Sophocles, there seemed to no playwrights with the talents to do that.

Therefore, in Aristophanes' play, *The Frogs*, Dionysus goes down to Hades to retrieve a good playwright from the dead. A poetry contest between Aeschylus and Euripides, with the verses weighed on a cheese scale, ensues to decide who gets to return to earth. Aeschylus wins first place and Sophocles gets second, even though he is not even in the contest. The play ends with the chorus of frogs escorting Aeschylus back to earth, urging him to ***“heal the sick state, fight the ignoble, cowardly, inward foe, and bring us peace.”***

However the Athenians continued to ignore the wiser counsels of their playwrights. In 405 B.C.E. they built one last fleet, paying for it by stripping the gold from the temples and statues. However, a clever Spartan general, Lysander, lulled the Athenian generals into a false sense of security and then destroyed their fleet in a surprise attack at Aegospotami. Athens fell the next year after a long desperate siege. The Long Walls were torn down and its empire was stripped away, although Sparta did spare the city from destruction, probably as a counterweight against the rising power of Thebes. The democracy was replaced by an oligarchy of thirty men led by another of Socrates' old students, Critias, who conducted a vicious reign of terror.

Several years later, the Athenians were able to restore their independence, democracy and even the Long Walls. However, peace was no more in sight than it had been twenty-seven years before. In 399 B.C.E., Socrates was tried and executed for corrupting the youth of the city with his teachings. That event, as much as any, symbolized the end of Athens' cultural golden age.

FC25 Alexander the Great and the Hellenistic era (336 BCE-31 BCE)



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The period of the Greek polis before the Macedonian conquest of Greece and Alexander the Great's conquests is known as the *Hellenic Age* and is concerned primarily with the narrow world of Greek poleis in Greece and the Aegean. The three centuries following Alexander's death are known as the *Hellenistic Age*, during which period Greek influence was spread across Asia far beyond the Greek homeland.

Alexander the Great (336-323 B.C.E.)

Philip of Macedon was smart enough to realize that it would be wise to rule the Greeks as leniently as possible. Therefore, instead of occupying Greece, he formed all the poleis (except Sparta which he left alone) into a league whose purpose was to invade Persia and supposedly avenge Xerxes' invasion from 150 years before. He even called it the Corinthian League to make the Greeks think it was for their benefit. But, with Philip as president, everyone recognized quite well who was in charge and that the era of the free polis was over, at least for the time being. Then, in 336 B.C.E., the opportunity for revolt suddenly presented itself when Philip was assassinated.

Philip's successor was Alexander III of Macedon, known to us as Alexander the Great. Few figures in history have inspired so many tales of romance and adventure. This is easy to understand when one looks at a map of Alexander's empire, and considers it took him only eleven years to conquer it.

When Alexander came to the throne, he was only twenty years old, although he had excellent training and experience for someone so young. He had received a tough, almost Spartan, training from a man named Leonidas. Then, at age thirteen, he was tutored by the Greek philosopher, Aristotle, who trained Alexander's intellect as intensively as Leonidas had trained his body. Largely because of his education, Alexander displayed both an incredible physical toughness and intellectual genius. Those qualities, combined with early campaigns against northern tribes and at the battle of Chaeronea, made the young king more than ready to assume power. However, the various Greek city-states did not realize this until it was too late. Almost immediately after Philip's death, the Greeks, led by Thebes and Athens, raised the standard of revolt. The young king was at their gates so quickly that they could not believe it was really Alexander. A quick surrender saved them this time, but a second revolt by Thebes upon a rumor that Alexander had died while campaigning against tribes in the north led to a second rapid descent by the Macedonian king and the destruction of Thebes as a warning to other Greeks.

Alexander then prepared to pursue his father's plans to conquer Persia. For the next eleven years, from 334 to 323 B.C.E., he carried out one of the most amazing campaigns of conquest in history, only being rivaled by the Mongols under Chinghis Khan. During that time, his army marched over 21,000 miles, covering terrain ranging from the hot plains of Mesopotamia to the Hindu Kush Mountains and the hot humid environment of India. He even conquered Bactria, modern Afghanistan, something Soviet forces failed to do in the 1980's using advanced modern weaponry. Such feats required Alexander's brilliant and flexible mind. Whether faced with the massive armies of Darius III, the island fortress of Tyre, the mountain stronghold known as the Sogdian Rock in Bactria, or crossing the rain swollen waters of the Jhelum River in the face of a hostile Indian army, Alexander could always come up with an ingenious, and usually unexpected solution to the problem.

Alexander's success was also largely due to his charismatic personality. He knew thousands of his troops by name, and shared the dangers of battle and the fruits of victory equally with them. He could put down a mutiny with a mere speech reminding his soldiers of their shared exploits, or shame his troops to action by leading an assault alone. Ironically, in the end, the only army that halted his advance into Asia was his own. Tired from years of marching and fighting, and thousands of miles from home in the hot, humid plains of India, they refused to go any further. It was only then that Alexander turned around and went back. Soon afterwards in Babylon, he died, struck down by fever. Although on his deathbed, he let his troops file through his tent for one last farewell to their dying king and comrade. He was only thirty-three years of age when he died.

Various factors besides his personality aided Alexander. His father left him an excellent, well-drilled army that Alexander constantly experimented with to adapt to the changing conditions of his campaigns. The Persian Empire at that time was also in a state of decay and ruled by a timid king, Darius III, whose tendency to panic in battle cost him two large armies and his empire. Still, Alexander met some fierce resistance, especially in Bactria and India, and had to prove his abilities as a general constantly. In the end, Alexander's immortality was assured by his early death that gave rise to a wealth of romantic legends surrounding this handsome young man who conquered most of the known world.

Alexander's successors and the establishment of a new order (323-c.275B.C.E.)

Alexander died leaving only a mentally unfit half brother, Philip Arrhidaeus, and a pregnant wife, Roxanne, who eventually gave birth to a son, Alexander IV. Neither of these was capable of ruling, which left the job of organizing and ruling Alexander's empire to his generals. Rarely, if ever, has a more capable and ambitious group of men been

gathered in one place with such an empire at stake. As one might expect, a long and bitter struggle for control of the empire ensued.

The basic pattern of these wars was that one general would gather a large amount of power into his hands, which would drive the other generals to unite against him before he took everything and destroyed them. As a result, no one was able to control all of Alexander's empire, which had fragmented by 275 B.C.E. into three large kingdoms: Antigonid Macedon, Seleucid Asia, and Ptolemaic Egypt.

The first of these kingdoms, Macedon, was ruled by the Antigonid dynasty. The Antigonids also tried to maintain control of Greece, but were only able to hold onto various strategic cities from time to time. Opposing the Antigonids and each other were the Aetolian and Achaean Leagues, which commanded the allegiance of most of the cities in Greece. Greece during this period saw a confusing and continuous power struggle between these leagues, Macedon, and various independent city-states such as Athens and Sparta. In the end, no one gained control and everyone was worn out from all this constant bickering. This set the stage for Rome to come in and finally establish long lasting peace and stability through its conquest of Greece in 146 B.C.E.

The bulk of Alexander's Asian lands were united under the Seleucid dynasty, founded by Seleucus I. Because of the size of their Empire, the Seleucids did what they could to attract Greek and Macedonian soldiers, artisans, and merchants to settle in their realms. Although many Greeks and Macedonians were willing to abandon their poorer homelands for the promise of wealthier horizons to the east, they were still few in number compared to the native population they ruled. Most Greeks and Macedonians coming to settle in Asia were concentrated in the many Greek style poleis founded by the Hellenistic monarchs. The Seleucids in particular were great founders of cities, seeing each one as an island of Greek power and culture in the midst of a hostile Asian sea. Outside of these Greek cities, native culture continued, largely untouched by Greek civilization. Most of these colonies were concentrated in the western parts of the empire, especially in Asia Minor and Syria, the most famous being the Syrian city of Antioch. In the vast interior of the eastern part of the empire, the cities were few and far between, and the influence of Greek culture was confined to the cities, reaching very little into the countryside. Even in the western parts of the empire, Greek influence rarely spread outside of the cities.

Such a widespread realm had virtually no cohesion, making it very difficult to hold together. Almost immediately after Seleucus I founded his dynasty, the fringes of the empire started to splinter. Seleucus first let his Indian lands go to the great Indian king, Chandragupta, in return for 500 war elephants. Asia Minor also started to fragment when Attalus, king of the city-state of Pergamum, started to carve out a kingdom in the western and southern parts of the peninsula. Soon other states such as Bithynia, Pontus, and Cappadocia were also emerging in Asia Minor. This left Syria, Palestine, and the Asian heartland to the Seleucids. A new tribe, known as the Parthians, invaded from the northeast and kept chipping away at the Seleucid lands until all that remained were the lands around Antioch in Syria. In 64 B.C.E., the Roman general, Pompey, finally put an end to these pathetic remnants and replaced Greek rule in the East with that of Rome.

The last, most successful, and longest-lived kingdom was in Egypt, founded by another of Alexander's generals, Ptolemy. He clearly saw that no one would be able to hold all of Alexander's empire together. Therefore, he went for a more realistic and limited goal, taking Egypt, which was rich and fairly isolated from invasion. All the kings of this dynasty were named Ptolemy and ruled much as the pharaohs had done for centuries. They were absolute rulers over a highly centralized state. All land was owned by the king and worked by the peasants for his benefit. Government monopolies on grain, oil, metals, glass, and papyrus also swelled the king's treasury, making Ptolemaic Egypt the richest of the Hellenistic kingdoms.

The showpiece of the Ptolemaic kingdom was Alexandria, which was founded by Alexander in 330 B.C.E. and destined to be the greatest of all Hellenistic cities. It was here that the Ptolemies established possibly the finest library and university up to that point in history. The library had an estimated 700,000 scrolls and was the largest collection of books in the ancient world. Unfortunately, it was destroyed by several fires set off by wars and riots that occasionally rocked Alexandria throughout its history. There is no telling how much ancient knowledge was lost as a result.

The Museum, or university, in Alexandria was also another splendid example of royal patronage. It had some 14,000 students along with botanical gardens, a zoological park, and a medical school. It was here that many of the greatest minds of the day converged to develop and show off their talents. As a result, ancient Greek science saw many of its greatest advances in Alexandria during this period. Finally, there was the Lighthouse of Pharos, which was 100 feet

tall and cast a beacon for 30 miles. It supposedly had a steam-powered foghorn and a system of mirrors much like a periscope, so that people on ground level could survey the horizon from the perspective of being on top.

The Ptolemies' main rivals were the Seleucid rulers of Asia. These two powers clashed constantly for a century over control of Syria and Palestine, with the Seleucids finally winning the struggle. The Ptolemies also built a large navy and had political and economic interests in Asia Minor. Egypt's wealth and stability made it the last of the Hellenistic kingdoms to fall, as with the others, at the hands of Rome. In 31 B.C.E., in a naval battle at Actium off the coast of Greece, the combined fleets of the Roman general, Marc Antony, and Cleopatra were destroyed by another Roman, Octavian. This marked the end of Hellenistic Egypt, and also the Hellenistic era, although to a large extent, Roman civilization was a continuation of Hellenistic civilization.

Hellenistic civilization

differed in several respects from that of the preceding age of the polis and was characterized by three features. First of all, Hellenistic civilization was on a much larger scale than that of the polis. For example, Hellenistic armies were much larger than the armies of the old Greek city-states. Whereas before, a Greek army of 10,000 hoplites was considered large, Hellenistic armies often totaled 60-70,000 men. There were also many non-Greek elements in Hellenistic armies, in particular large stables of war elephants whose purpose was to overpower and trample enemy formations much like modern tanks do. However, the heart of the Hellenistic army was still a phalanx of Greek and Macedonian troops. Navies were also larger in size and number. The limited numbers of skilled rowers led to a return to boarding and grappling tactics that required less skill and finesse than ramming and clipping.

Along these lines, trade was on a much larger scale than in the old Greek world centered around the Eastern Mediterranean and Aegean Seas. Alexander's conquests largely fused the Greeks' Mediterranean centered economy with the Asian centered economy of Persia. Commerce flourished between the Greek and Persian worlds, with trade links being established as far east as India and China, creating a virtual world economy. The volume of trade was also large. Ptolemaic Egypt was able to export an estimated 20,000,000 bushels of grain each year. This made Hellenistic civilization much richer than the older Hellenic civilization, which made much more money available for the patronage of cultural pursuits. The best example of this was in Alexandria, the capital of Ptolemaic Egypt, already discussed above.

The second feature of Hellenistic Civilization caused by its large scale was the large number of older cultures it ruled over and was subsequently influenced by. Babylonian math and Egyptian medicine were the most notable examples of this influence. However, the fusion of cultures took place as far away as India and Bactria, where an interesting dialogue was written down between a Buddhist monk and Menander, the Greek ruler of a Greek kingdom which controlled Bactria and Northwest India in the third and second centuries B.C.E. Greek sculpture also had its influence on the Gandharan style of Buddhist sculpture as seen by the portrayal of curly haired Buddhas, even though the Greeks were the only ones in the area with curly hair. This influence even filtered as far east as China where the curly haired motif of Buddhas showed up.

The third aspect of Hellenistic civilization to note was that Greek influence was dominant and spread widely across Alexander's empire, especially throughout the Middle East as seen in the widespread use of Koine (common) Greek in the cities there. For example, the New Testament of the Bible was written in Koine Greek rather than Hebrew since it could reach more people that way. However, as mentioned above, the small numbers of Greeks and Macedonians compared to the numbers of peoples they ruled meant that they stayed concentrated in the cities and their cultural influence rarely reached the peasants in the countryside.

Hellenistic accomplishments

Because of the expansion of trade, its wealth, and contact with other cultures and ideas, Hellenistic civilization flourished in a variety of areas. Prominent among these were medicine, philosophy, math, and mechanical science. In medicine, the center of research and development was Alexandria, where researchers came up with several new findings. They used dissections to show the distinction between arteries and nerves. They learned to use the pulse for diagnosis and saw the heart as a pump with valves. They were even able to control bleeding with tourniquets and surgically remove hernias, bladder stones, and hemorrhoids.

Despite these findings, there was still no comprehensive understanding of how the human body operates as an integrated system of organs. For example, Greek physicians thought the heart only pumped blood out of the heart and had no concept of the circulatory system, believing the body produced new blood rather than recirculating and oxygenating it in the lungs. It would not be until the 1600's that serious progress would be made beyond the Greeks in our understanding of human anatomy and physiology.

In philosophy, several new ideas emerged. One of these, Stoicism (named after the colonnaded walkway, or *stoa*, in which it was taught in Athens), stressed, among other things, doing one's duty and bearing up under hardship. Even today, the term *stoic* is used to denote someone who bears adversity with strength and courage. The other major new philosophy to emerge was Epicureanism. This said our main goal in life is to avoid pain. Many people misinterpreted this to mean we should live a hedonistic, "eat, drink, and be merry" lifestyle. The term *epicurean* still denotes this sort of attitude. However, Epicureus, the founder of this philosophy, saw such a lifestyle as ultimately destructive, and therefore exactly the opposite of what he was striving for. Rather, we should live moderate sensible lives. This and his idea that God exists, but is totally detached from events on earth, would have a profound influence on the philosophy of Deism during the Enlightenment in the 1700's.

There were also considerable accomplishments in mathematics and mechanical science during the Hellenistic Age. Greek mathematicians mainly excelled in geometry, since they did not have place value digits or the zero, both of which are needed for higher level computations. Euclid wrote a geometry book whose proofs are still used in schools today. Eratosthenes, another mathematician working in Ptolemaic Egypt, accurately calculated the circumference of the earth by measuring the different lengths of shadows of two sticks two hundred miles apart at high noon on the summer solstice. However, Eratosthenes' calculation was ignored in favor of a much smaller estimate of the earth's size. This was important, since the smaller estimate of the size of the globe would give captains the courage to sail the high seas during the Age of Exploration.

In mechanical science, the steam engine was invented by Hiero of Alexandria and used for various toys and tricks to amaze people, such as opening temple doors. However, people having plenty of cheap slave or poor labor, found few practical uses for steam power, and it was eventually forgotten until the 1600's in Western Europe when there was a need for labor saving devices. Finally, there was Archimedes of Syracuse who demonstrated the properties of water displacement. He also defended his city from a besieging Roman army by designing catapults and fantastic machines, such as giant cranes for picking up and dropping enemy ships beneath Syracuse's walls. Thanks largely to Archimedes' devices, Syracuse held out for two years before the Romans broke in. Archimedes died in the sack of the city, totally absorbed in a math problem and oblivious to the havoc going on around him.

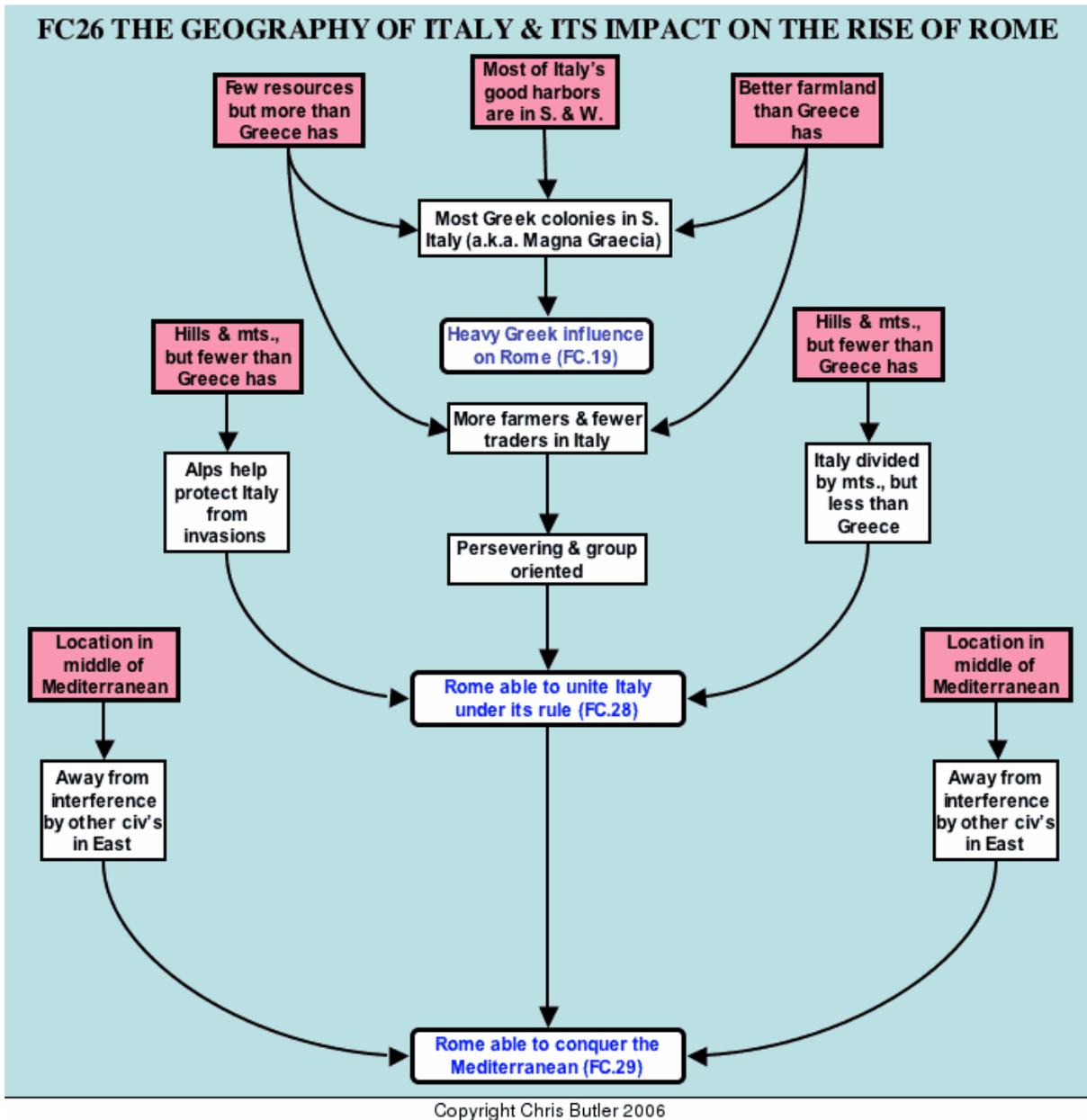
Conclusion

If one looks only at how many people were directly affected by Greek culture during the Hellenistic Age, then the Greeks would seem to have failed to spread their culture. However, looking at numbers alone to assess the success of the Hellenistic Greeks is deceptive. While Greek culture was largely confined to Greek cities, the high culture of most civilizations was also confined to their cities as well. It is true that Greek culture had little lasting impact in Mesopotamia and farther east. However, its impact in Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt was quite profound. The fact that Koine Greek became the common language spoken throughout the Eastern Mediterranean cities and was the original language of the New Testament says a great deal about Greek influence.

Just as important, if not more, the Romans, coming into contact with the Hellenistic East, would adopt Greek culture as their own and pass it on to our culture developing in Western Europe. The Romans' successors in the East, the medieval Byzantines (Greeks), would also pass Greek civilization directly on to Western Europe and to the Muslim Arabs. They, in turn, would add to Greek math and science and then pass it on to Western Europe through Muslim Spain. Thus Europe received its Greek heritage from three separate sources. That alone should show the importance of the Greeks to our own culture, and how, thanks to the diffusion of Greek culture during the Hellenistic Age, the Greeks are still very much with us.

RomeUnit 4: Rome

FC26 The Impact of Geography on Ancient Italy



FC26 in the [Hyperflow of History](#).
Covered in multimedia lecture [#4542](#).

Introduction

When we think of the Greeks, we think of a bold, intelligent people who gave us so much in the way of art, architecture, drama, democracy, science, and math. When we think of the Romans, we think of empire builders. They were a more down to earth people who may have done little that was original compared to what the Greeks did. But they built and maintained an empire that peacefully embraced the entire Mediterranean Sea for some two centuries, an accomplishment unparalleled in history. The Romans also spread civilization into Western Europe. In that sense, they were the bridge between the older cultures of the ancient Near East and our culture, known as Western Civilization.

There is probably no story that better illustrates what the early Romans were all about than that of the founding of Rome by the twin brothers, Romulus and Remus. According to this legend, there was disagreement over where to found the city. When omens from the gods failed to settle the dispute, Romulus just started digging the *pomerium* (sacred boundary) of Rome where he thought the gods wanted it. Remus mockingly leaped over this trench and Romulus killed him, declaring that such a fate should befall all who dared to breach the walls of Rome. The story of Romulus and Remus shows that the Roman sense of honor, duty, and loyalty to Rome ran even deeper than family and kinship ties. Other Roman legends also had this theme of honor and duty running through them: the story of Horatius, who single-handedly defended a bridge against invading Etruscans in order to buy his city time to prepare a defense; the consul Brutus who had his own sons executed for plotting treason against Rome; and Lucretia, who committed suicide rather than live with dishonor to herself and Rome. Such stories idealize the Roman character, but also raise the question of what factors shaped it and pushed Rome to greatness. And, of course, the first place to look is the environment surrounding Rome and its people.

Geopolitics

At the time of its founding around 750 B.C.E., there was little to hint that Rome and Italy would be the center of the greatest empire in antiquity. Italy did have good soil along with some resources and good harbors in the South. These features attracted Greek colonists whose culture would exercise an immense influence on Roman civilization. Also, Italy's soil tended to make its people farmers rather than artisans and merchants.

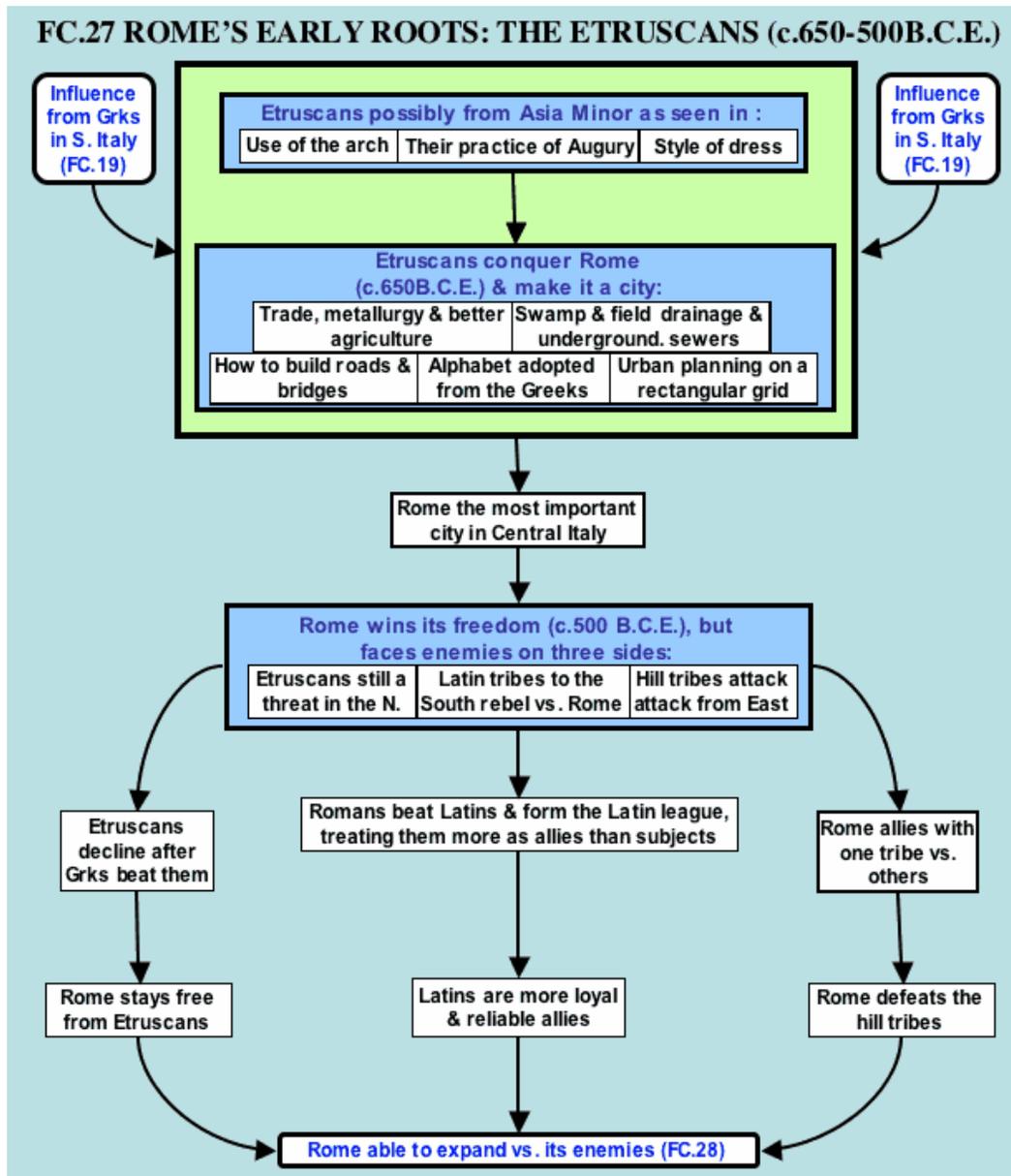
These factors, in particular the close ties to the soil, largely molded the Romans' personality as a people. While it is dangerous to stereotype a whole people's character, there are certain values and circumstances that any people as a whole share which helps define how they think and act. The quick-witted Greeks, whom the sea and lack of resources forced into becoming clever and resourceful traders, looked upon the agricultural Romans as slow and dull. But there were several characteristics that would help the Romans become great empire builders. First of all, being farmers bred a certain ability and willingness to persevere through hardships. Nothing shows this better than Rome's dogged perseverance and eventual victories in its first two wars against Carthage, wars which dragged on for 23 and 17 years respectively. Agriculture tended to make the Romans somewhat more conservative and wary of change. They were also a tightly knit society, more willing to submit to the rule of law than the quarrelsome Greeks ever were. This Roman discipline produced magnificent soldiers and the most efficient and effective armies in the ancient world. It also produced an intense desire for the rule of law that made the Romans possibly the greatest lawgivers in history. Many Western European countries today base their law codes directly on earlier Roman law codes.

One other characteristic marked the Romans for greatness: a willingness to adapt other peoples' ideas for their own purposes. All people borrow ideas, but few have been so adept at it as the Romans. Their art, architecture, technology, city planning, and military tactics all owed a great deal to other peoples' influences. Indeed, there was little that the Romans did that was totally original. But the sum total of what they did was uniquely Roman and marked them out as one of the most remarkable peoples in history.

Italy's topography also had an impact. The Alps to the North provided some protection, although occasionally invaders, such as the Gauls and Carthaginians, did break in. Another mountain range, the Apennines, ran along the length of the peninsula much like a backbone. While this had the effect of dividing Italy into various city-states, it was not nearly to the extent that Greece was broken up by its mountains. These two factors, plus the Roman character, allowed Rome to unite Italy relatively free from outside interference.

Finally, Italy's location favored it in two ways. It had a strategic position that divided the Mediterranean into western and eastern halves. Also, it was far enough away from the older civilizations of antiquity to allow it to develop on its own without too much outside interference. Therefore, once Italy was unified, its geographic position allowed Rome to unite the Mediterranean under its rule.

FC27The Etruscans & their influence on Rome (c.800-500 BCE)



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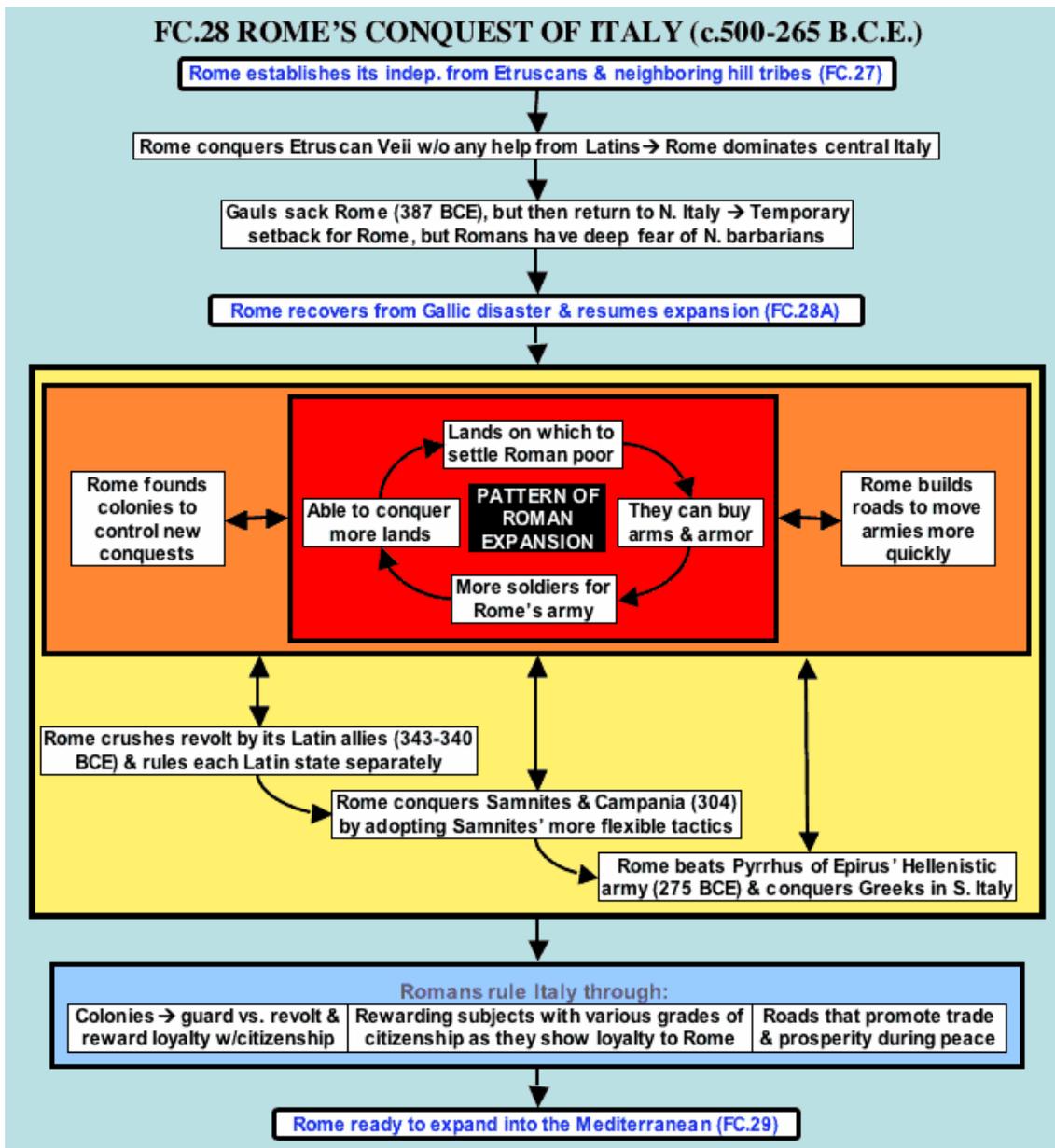
Although there is evidence in Roman myth and archaeology of various shepherd villages on Rome's seven hills, the city's history really started with the Etruscans. The origins of this mysterious people are obscure. Some ancient sources liked to trace them back to Asia Minor because of their religious practices such as augury (reading flights of birds to tell the future), style of dress (in particular their pointed shoes which resembled those of the Hittites), their use of the arch in architecture, and their obscure language. However, even to this day, the origins of the Etruscans remain a mystery.

The Etruscans were organized into a loose confederation of city-states to the north of Rome. Around 650 B.C.E., they took control of the site of Rome, with its defensible hills and location on a ford of the Tiber River. They did a number of things to transform this crude collection of shepherds' huts into a true city. The Etruscans introduced rectangular urban planning. They drained the surrounding marshes and built underground sewers. They built public works using the arch and vault, and laid out roads and bridges. They promoted trade, the development of metallurgy, and better agriculture in and around Rome. The Etruscans, being heavily influenced by the Greeks, also introduced the Greek alphabet, thus introducing Greek influence into Roman culture. In fact, Roman nobles during this period would send their sons to be educated in Etruscan schools much as they would later send their sons to Greece for an education. The

dark and gloomy Etruscan religion, in particular the custom of gladiators fighting to the death at the funeral of a king or noble, also had a significant impact on Rome. This is seen much later in Christian images of demons that seem to be modeled after Etruscan demons. Overall, the Romans owed a great deal to the Etruscans. The genius they would show for urban planning, road and bridge building, and civil engineering projects such as public aqueducts and baths, was a direct result of the legacy left by the Etruscans.

By 500 B.C.E., the Etruscans had also made Rome most important city in the central Italian region of Latium. This enabled it to dominate its close neighbors, the Latins and finally encouraged it to rebel against its masters. Two other factors aided the Romans in their struggle. First of all, Rome's hills and fortifications helped defend it against attack. Second, the Etruscans' loose organization into a confederacy of independent city-states made them vulnerable to attack by the Greeks in South Italy who were their rivals for trade and sea power. The Greeks won a decisive victory, which allowed Rome to successfully shake off Etruscan rule around 500 B.C.E. or later. However, Etruscan aggression remained a serious threat for the better part of a century. Therefore, it was not until around 400 B.C.E. that Rome was secure enough to embark upon its own path of conquest.

FC28 The Roman conquest of Italy (c.500-265 BCE)



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Rome's pattern of conquest

Except for the brief interruption of the Gallic disaster, Roman expansion in Italy was almost uninterrupted in the period 400-265 B.C.E. Among its first victims was the Etruscan city, Veii, which Rome attacked on its own without any help from its Latin allies. Therefore, when Veii fell, Rome gained a large amount of land for itself without having to share it with the Latins. It gave much of this land to poor Roman citizens, which set into motion a recurring pattern that would eventually help Rome conquer Italy. Since more Romans had land, they could now afford the arms and armor to serve in the army. This gave Rome a larger army, which meant it could conquer more land, distribute it to more citizens, further increase its army, and so on.

Two other Roman practices came out of this cycle and led back into it to help Rome in its path of conquest. One was the practice of founding colonies to gain and secure their hold on a region. The other was the building of roads to help Roman armies move more quickly and easily than their enemies to threatened areas.

After the fall of Veii, Rome would sweep from one conquest to another, first crushing a revolt by its Latin allies, next conquering the Samnites and Campania in two hard-fought wars, and finally defeating the Hellenistic army of Pyrrhus of Epirus to bring the Greeks in Southern Italy under control. And with each conquest, more Romans would get land, buy arms and armor, and increase Rome's army, conquests, etc.

Rome's campaigns of conquest (387-265 B.C.E.)

Rome's recovery from the Gallic invasion was swift. It quickly put down a revolt of the Latin allies and then replaced the Latin League with separate treaties between Rome and each Latin state, thus tying each city to Rome alone.

Rome's victory now got it involved in affairs in Campania. When southern hill tribes, known as Samnites, started threatening the rich cities of Campania, they looked to Rome for help. This touched off the Second Samnite War (326-304 B.C.E.). The Romans quickly ran into serious problems fighting the Samnites in the hills. Up to this point they had used the Greek style phalanx as their main tactical unit. This was ill suited to fighting in mountain passes. An entire Roman army was even captured in a pass known as the Caudine Forks. The Roman, being ever adaptable, copied their Samnite enemies who used more open and flexible formations with soldiers equipped with throwing javelins, swords, and lighter armor. These formations, called *maniples*, were arranged in a checkerboard fashion that allowed the Romans to advance fresh troops into a battle and withdraw tired ones from it. The new Roman legions might bend, but they rarely broke. Not only did they win the Samnite wars and Italy for Rome, but, with a few modifications, they would eventually conquer the entire Mediterranean.

The Second Samnite War was a long, hard fought affair that saw Rome initiate two other policies: road building and colonies. In 312 B.C.E., the Romans built the first of their military roads, the Appian Way, to move troops quickly in times of war. However, the Appian Way and other such roads would also be highways of trade and commerce in peacetime. Eventually, there would be 51,000 miles of paved roads linking different parts of the Roman Empire together. Rome also founded colonies to cut Samnite supply lines and communications and established firm Roman control in the area.

Because of their military reforms, roads, and colonies, the Romans finally defeated the Samnites in 304 B.C.E. They were lenient with their defeated enemies, but this allowed the Samnites to start a third war (298-290 B.C.E.). However, the Roman system of maniples, roads, and military colonies on their enemies' borders gradually strangled the Samnites into submission once again.

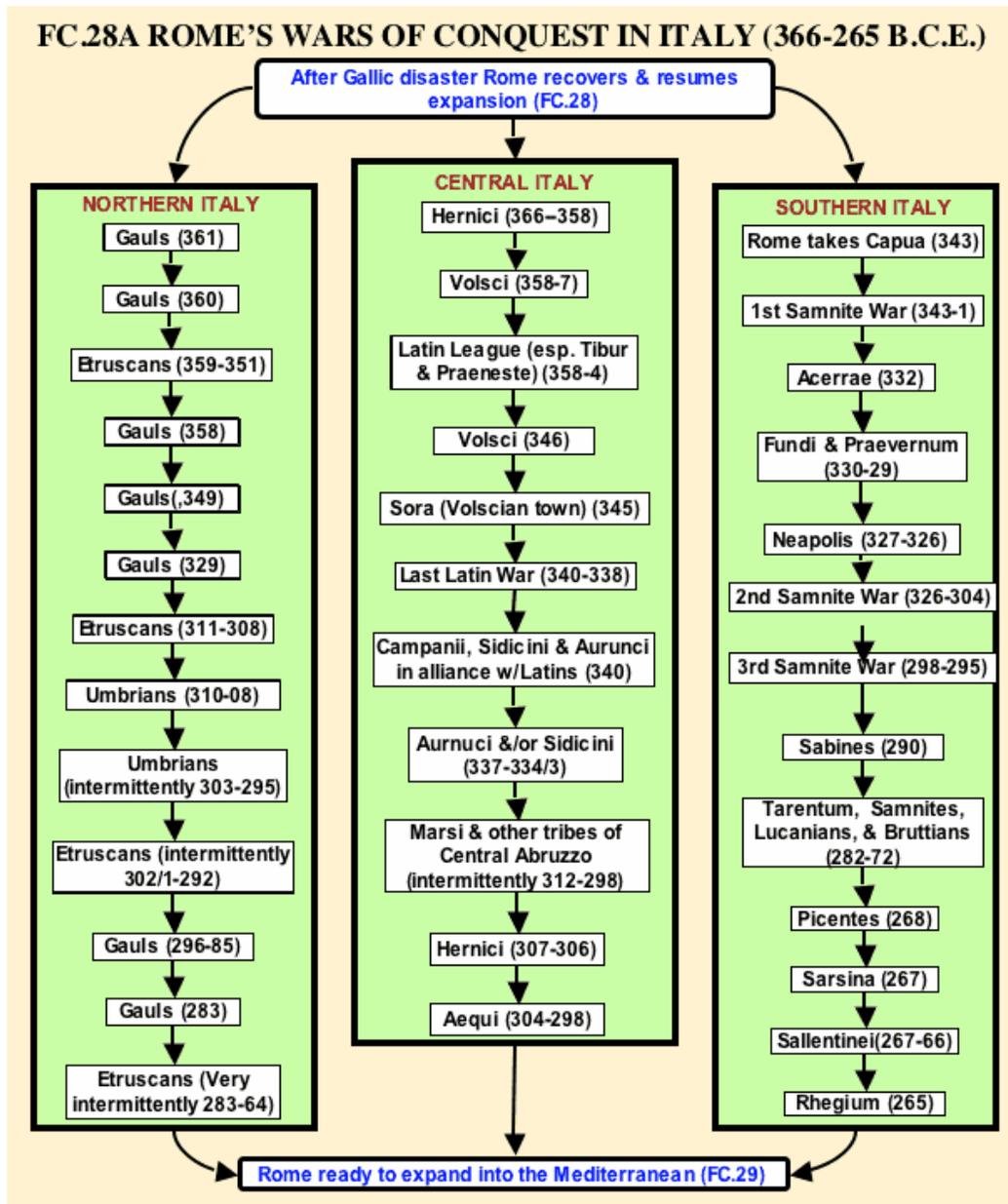
Except for Cisalpine Gaul, only the Greeks in the very south were now free of Roman control. Growing increasingly nervous about Rome's intentions, the most powerful of these cities, Tarentum, went to war with Rome in 280 B.C.E. Tarentum had great wealth, but little fighting spirit. Therefore, it had the unusual habit of hiring foreign kings to fight its wars. In this case, it called in Pyrrhus, a cousin of Alexander the Great and ruler of the kingdom of Epirus, north of Greece. For the first time, the Romans were up against a military system more sophisticated than their own, using the dreaded Macedonian phalanx and war elephants. The more flexible maniples fought bravely on the plains of Heraclea and Ausculum, but were beaten. However, Pyrrhus' victories were so costly compared to what he gained that even today we refer to such victories as "pyrrhic". In the face of such defeats Roman perseverance shone forth, the Senate refusing to make peace until every last Macedonian had left Italian soil. In 275 B.C.E., the Romans beat the Macedonian phalanx by luring it onto hilly or broken ground. Pyrrhus beat a hasty retreat back to Epirus, and Italy now belonged to Rome.

Conquering a region is one thing. Ruling it is another. And it was here that the Romans showed their true greatness. Instead of ruling like tyrants, they offered various grades of Roman citizenship and the chance to share the benefits of Roman rule with the Italians in return for their loyalty. Newly conquered cities were made allies that had trade and marriage privileges with Romans. As a city gradually proved its loyalty to Rome, it would receive the status of partial, or Latin, citizenship. Eventually, a city proving its loyalty over a long period of time would be granted full Roman citizenship. All of Rome's subjects were expected to supply troops for war and give up their independent foreign policies. However, Rome did let them keep their local governments and customs, but they tended to resemble those of the Romans more and more with the passage of time. Rome also kept building roads and founding colonies. Colonies with Latin citizenship were especially popular, since they were a bit more independent than full Roman colonies, while still providing Rome with troops.

The value of Rome's system for governing Italy should be obvious. Instead of constantly worrying about rebellions, it had a reliable source of loyal manpower and resources to help increase its power. The greatest test of this was when Hannibal tried to conquer Italy, thinking the Italians would flock to his standard against the Roman tyrant. Instead, most of Italy, especially the parts under Roman rule the longest, stood fast by Rome, despite the fact that Hannibal's army was in Italy for sixteen years. The Romans would continue this policy of offering citizenship to their subjects. In fact, in 212 A.D., the Roman emperor, Caracalla, completed this process by offering Roman citizenship to all freeborn men in the empire.

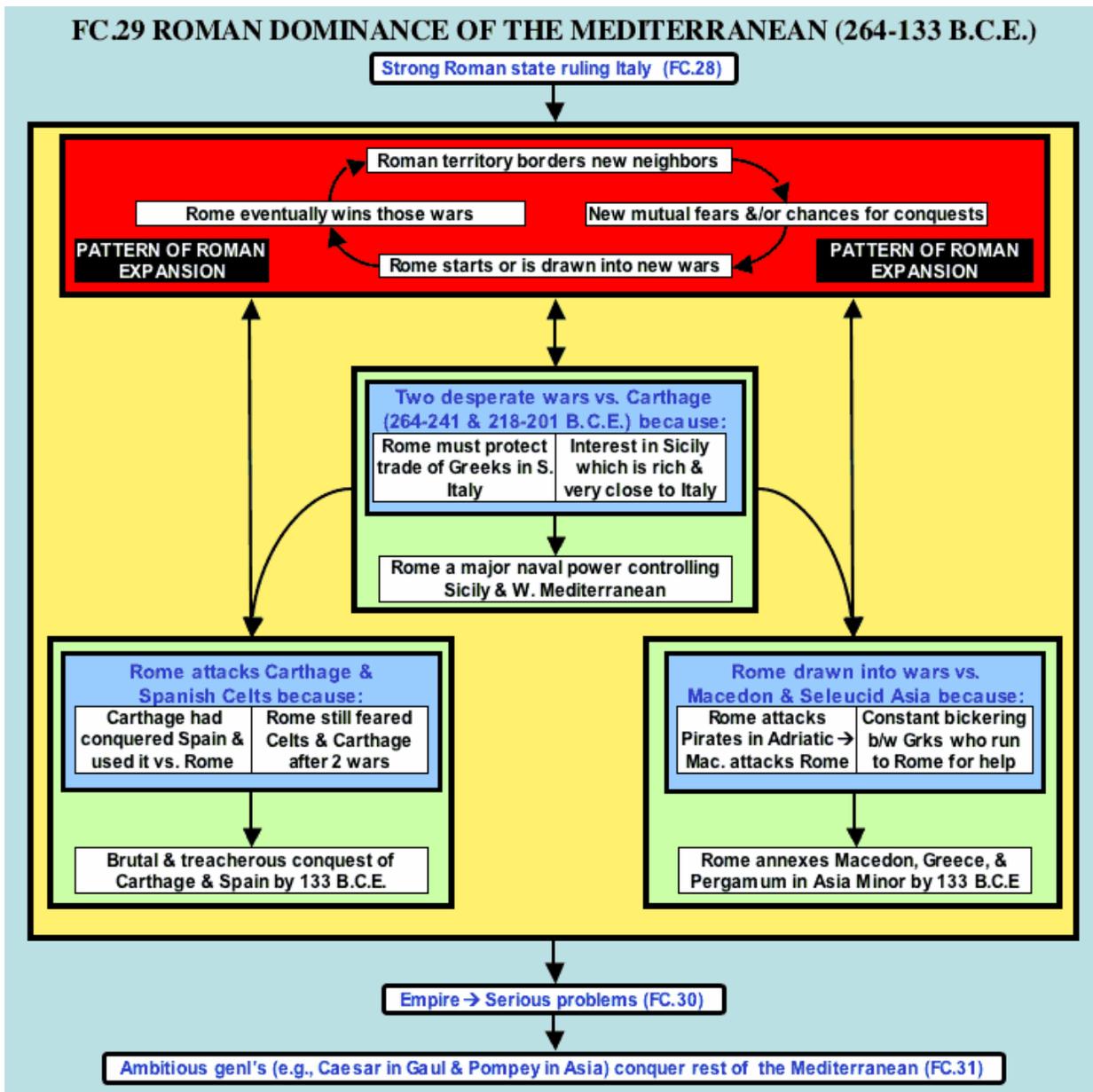
By 265 B.C.E., Rome had a strong stable government and Italy firmly under its control, secured by the lure of citizenship, a growing network of military roads and colonies, and probably the best-trained and most efficient army of its day. Given such a large, well organized, and energetic power, it should come as no surprise that Rome was ready for further expansion. Across the narrow strait of water to the south beckoned Sicily. Expansion there would mean war with a great naval power, Carthage, and the start of the road to empire.

FC28ARome's Wars of Conquest in Italy (366-265 B.C.E.)



Reading in Development

FC29 The Roman conquest of the Mediterranean (264-133 BCE)



[FC29](#) in the [Hyperflow of History](#).
Covered in multimedia lecture [#6667](#).

Just as Rome got caught up in a cycle of expansion that led to the conquest of Italy, it experienced another such cycle that led to their dominance of the Mediterranean. In this case, what triggered the pattern was the mere fact that each new conquest brought Rome into contact with a new set of neighbors. This would lead to new opportunities for conquest, but also mutual fears and suspicions on each side. Either way, Rome would get drawn into a new set of wars, which it would eventually win with new conquests. This, of course, would present Rome with some more new neighbors and the pattern would repeat itself until Rome had conquered the Mediterranean.

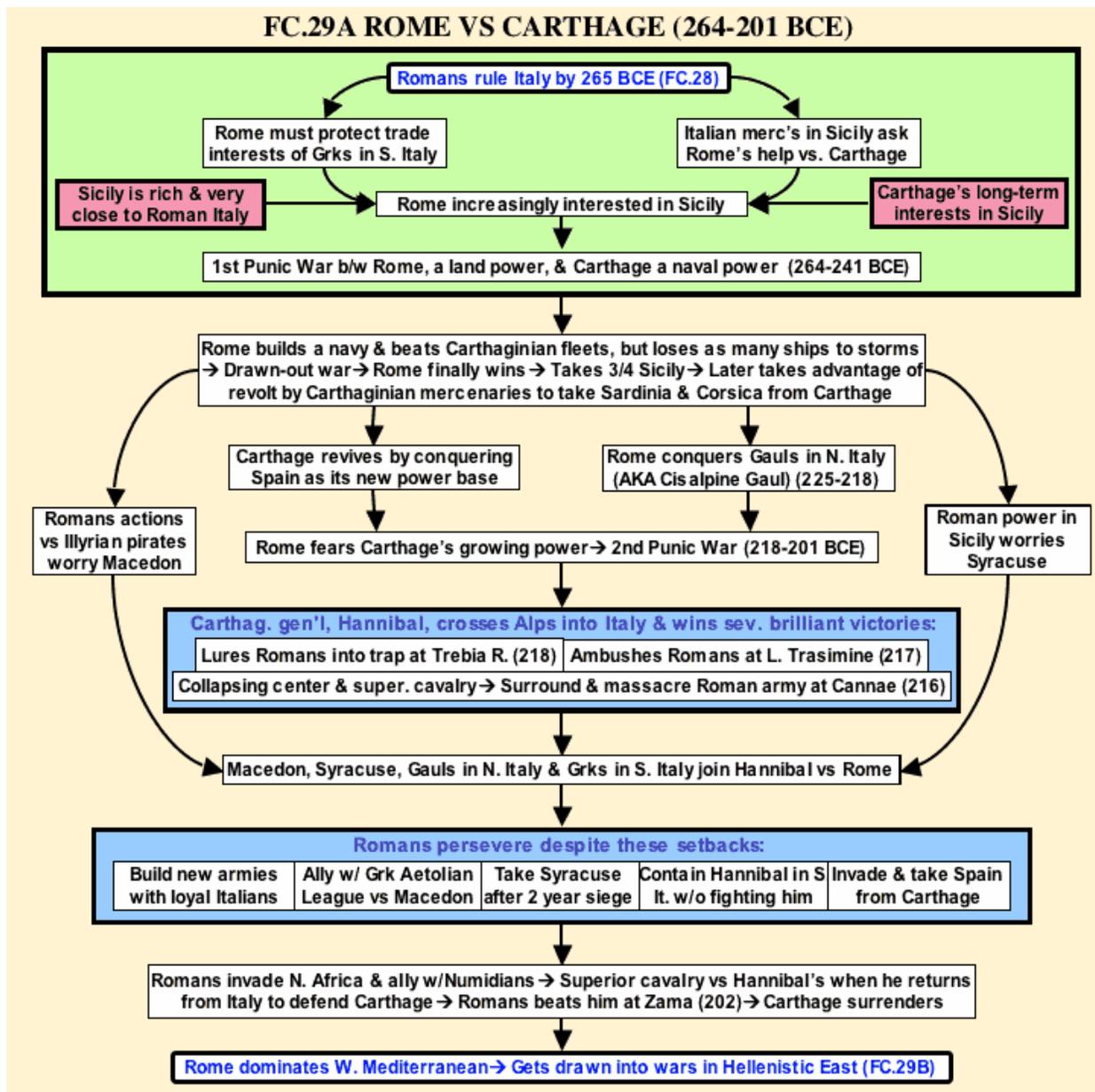
The first phase of this expansion involved Rome in two desperate wars against Carthage (264-241 & 218-201 B.C.E.). Initially, this struggle was over Sicily, since it was rich, very close to Italy, and Rome had to protect the trade of its Greek subjects in Southern Italy against Carthaginian encroachment. Rome's victory in these wars made it a major naval power controlling Sicily and dominating the Western Mediterranean. Feeding back into the cycle of expansion, this also led to contact and conflict with new peoples in the Eastern and Western Mediterranean.

In the West, Rome got involved in wars with Carthage and the Celts in Spain, both of whom Rome feared from previous wars. Therefore, Rome conquered and destroyed Carthage in 146 B.C.E. and the Spanish Celts by 133 B.C.E., both of them in rather brutal and treacherous fashion.

In the East, Rome was more reluctantly drawn into wars against Antigonid Macedon and Seleucid Asia by two main factors. For one thing, Macedon, suspicious of Rome since it had crushed the Illyrian pirates close to Macedon's shores, had declared war on Rome during its darkest days of the Second Punic War. While nothing much came of this First Macedonian War (215-205 B.C.E.), Rome was naturally suspicious of Macedon. Feeding this suspicion was the second factor, various Greek states running to Rome for protection, at first against Macedon and the Seleucids, and later against each other. As Rome was drawn increasingly into affairs in the East, its frustrations grew until it annexed Macedon (149 B.C.E.), Greece (146 B.C.E.) and Pergamum in Asia Minor, which was willed to Rome by its king in 133 B.C.E.

By 133 B.C.E., Rome was the dominant power in the Mediterranean. Unfortunately, having an empire would put stresses and strains on Roman society, including the creation of ambitious generals looking for new opportunities for conquest, plunder, and glory. Therefore, the Roman tide of conquest continued after 133 B.C.E. In the West, an ambitious general named Julius Caesar would push the barbarian threat even further north by conquering the Celts in Gaul. Eventually, the rest of North Africa would fall under Roman rule to round out control of the Western Mediterranean. Meanwhile, in the East, Mithridates of Pontus attacked Rome's provinces in Asia Minor. Rome won both of these Mithridatic wars, and its generals, most notably Pompey, progressively annexed the rest of Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt. Thus by the early Christian era, the entire Mediterranean was firmly under Roman rule.

FC29ARome versus Carthage: The Punic wars (264-201 BCE)



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Covered in multimedia lecture [#4124](#).

The First Punic War(264-241 B.C.E.)

Rome's first overseas wars were against Carthage on the coast of North Africa, the largest, most prosperous, and aggressive of the Phoenician cities. The prize they fought for was the island of Sicily, which for centuries had been a constant battleground between Carthage and various Greek colonies. Neither side had won a decisive victory, and when Rome got involved, the island remained divided between Carthage in the western end of the island and the Greeks in the east. Rome's relations with Carthage down to 264 B.C.E. had been friendly. The two powers had even allied around 500 B.C.E. against the Etruscans. By this treaty Rome recognized the Mediterranean as Carthage's sphere of influence, and Carthage even claimed a Roman could not wash his hands in the sea without its permission. As long as Rome was just a land power preoccupied with conquering Italy, this arrangement was fine. However, in 264 B.C.E., with Italy firmly under control, the Romans first got involved in Sicilian affairs.

There were several reasons for this war. For one thing, both Rome and Carthage saw Sicily as a natural extension of their respective territories. Similarly, the Greeks in Southern Italy felt Sicilian trade and resources were rightfully

theirs to exploit and probably put pressure on Rome to protect their interests there. The immediate cause of this war was a group of Italian mercenaries called the Mamertines ("Sons of Mars") who had seized the strategic port of Messina just across from Italy. The Romans, seeing the port as vital to the security of Italy, helped the Mamertines when Carthage moved to take the city, and this led to war.

The First Punic War (264-241 B.C.E.) resembled the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta, in that each conflict pitted a land power against a sea power where one side would have to attack the other side's strength. In each case, it was the land power that built a navy. Roman experience with a navy up till now had been limited, which seems surprising considering how much coastline Italy had to defend. However, probably with the help of Greek shipwrights in the south, the Romans built a fleet with which to challenge Carthage.

The Romans realized they could not match Carthage's centuries of experience in naval warfare. As a result, they adapted a heavy boarding bridge, known as the *corvus* ("crow"), from the Greeks. Any Carthaginian ship daring to get close enough would find this bridge slamming down on its deck and Roman soldiers pouring over to capture it. In essence, the Romans were turning a sea battle into a land battle. As ridiculous as it seemed, it worked. Time and again, Roman fleets crushed Carthaginian fleets and were steadily sweeping Carthage from the seas. However, Rome had one very powerful enemy that evened things out: Mother Nature. It seemed that for every Carthaginian fleet the Romans destroyed, a storm would rise up to demolish a Roman fleet. Thousands of lives were lost on each side with neither Rome nor Carthage making any headway or willing to quit.

For twenty years the war dragged on, bleeding each side white. Finally, in 241 B.C.E., the Romans mounted one last supreme effort to build a fleet, this time without the heavy *corvus* to weigh down the ships. As luck would have it, they caught the last Carthaginian fleet loaded down with supplies and destroyed or captured most of it. Carthage had had enough and sued for peace. Rome took 3200 talents (211,200 pounds) of silver and three-fourths of Sicily, leaving its ally Syracuse with the other quarter. Sicily became Rome's first province, having little prospect of Roman citizenship since, in Roman eyes, the Sicilians were too different to be able to share in the benefits of Roman rule.

Between the wars

Rome was quite active in the years after the First Punic War. To the north, it conquered the Gauls in Northern Italy, known as Cisalpine Gaul ("Gaul this side of the Alps"), thus extending Roman rule all the way to the Alps. To the east, the Romans crushed the Illyrian pirates operating in the Adriatic Sea. Although this was done mainly to protect the shipping of the Greeks in Southern Italy, the Macedonian king, Philip V, viewed it as an act of aggression by Rome in his home waters. Another power getting concerned about Roman power was Syracuse, which found itself hemmed in by Roman rule in most of Sicily.

Then there was Carthage. In 238 B.C.E., when Carthage was still weakened from the First Punic War, Rome seized Sardinia and Corsica, two islands off the west coast of Italy that it saw as a threat if they remained in Carthaginian hands. However, the Carthaginians were a resilient people who were not about to accept Rome's victory for long. Soon after the war, Carthage's most capable general, Hamilcar Barca, set off for Spain to carve out a new empire for his city. Over the next twenty years, Hamilcar, his son-in-law Hasdrubal, and Hamilcar's own son Hannibal, brought most of Spain, with its plentiful silver and mercenaries, under Carthaginian rule.

As Carthaginian power revived in the West, Rome became increasingly nervous. Finally, war broke out when Hannibal attacked the Spanish city of Saguntum, which was an ally of Rome. The Second Punic War (218-201 B.C.E.) would be an even more desperate struggle than the first war with Carthage.

The Second Punic War (218-201 BCE)

The Carthaginian general, Hannibal, was a brilliant commander who figured the best way to beat Rome was to invade Italy so Rome's subjects would desert to his side. Since the Roman navy was too strong for him to risk an invasion by sea, Hannibal took the only remaining route, over the Alps. This march, which involved taking some 40,000 men and 37 war elephants through hostile Gallic territory and treacherous mountain passes, certainly ranks as one of Hannibal's most remarkable achievements.

Only some 25,000 men and one elephant survived this march, and the Romans immediately moved north to finish off Hannibal's sick and exhausted army. However, it was Hannibal who, over the next two years, dazzled the Romans

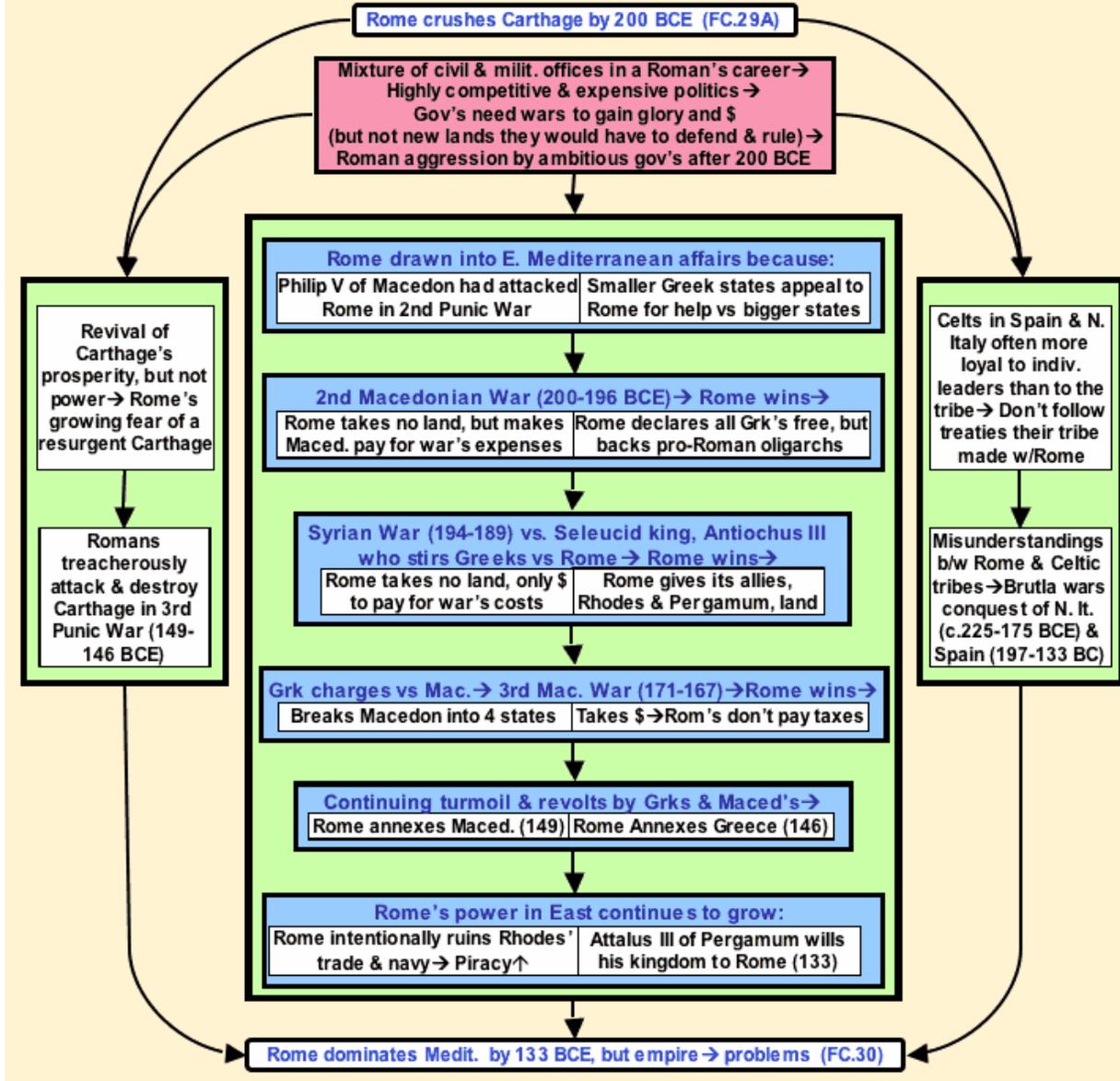
with an array of tricks and strategies that trapped and destroyed one army after another. The most devastating of these battles, Cannae (216 B.C.E.), was a masterpiece of strategy using a collapsing center to draw the Romans in and then envelop their flanks. The ensuing slaughter cost Rome 35,000 men. Cannae unleashed a virtual avalanche of problems on Rome as other states, nervous about Roman power, flocked to Hannibal's standard. Syracuse joined the Carthaginian side. Philip V of Macedon, fearing Roman encroachment in the Adriatic, also allied with Hannibal against Rome. In Italy, both the Gauls in the north and the Greeks in the south defected to Carthage's side. However, Hannibal was disappointed that the overwhelming revolt against Rome never took place. Instead, the central core of Italy stood fast by Rome, producing more armies as Rome pursued new strategies.

In their darkest hour after Cannae, The Romans displayed incredible spirit and determination. They defiantly refused to ransom soldiers who had surrendered at Cannae and forbade any talk of peace or even public mourning that might lower morale. They quickly put Syracuse under siege, found allies in Greece to keep Philip V of Macedon too busy to be able to help Hannibal in Italy, and raised armies to invade Spain and deprive Carthage of its main resource base. In Italy, Roman armies gradually pushed Hannibal into the South, while being careful not to test his wizardry in open battle. Instead, the Romans, using superior manpower and resources, gradually wore Hannibal down while chipping away at his supports elsewhere.

It was a slow exhausting strategy that required remarkable perseverance. But in time it bore fruit. Macedon was neutralized. Syracuse fell after an epic two-year siege. Spain was gradually stripped from Carthage's grasp. And two relief armies sent to Hannibal's aid were destroyed in the north before reaching him. Hannibal managed to hang on tenaciously in southern Italy as he saw even his Italian allies melting away under growing Roman pressure. Finally, the Romans mounted an invasion of Africa that forced Hannibal to return home. At Zama, the brilliant Roman general, Scipio, used Hannibal's tactics against the old master to crush his army and bring Carthage to its knees. Rome deprived Carthage of Spain, most of North Africa, 10,000 talents (660,000 pounds) of silver, all its war elephants and all but ten warships. Its African lands went to Rome's ally Numidia, while Spain remained to be conquered. The quarter of Sicily around Syracuse also fell to Rome. Rome had arrived as the dominant power in the West.

FC29B Further expansion of Roman Power (200-133 BCE)

FC.29B ROME DOMINATES THE MEDITERRANEAN (200-133 BCE)



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Like it or not, (and many Romans did not), Rome was now a Mediterranean power. This involved it in an ever-widening circle of affairs that it found itself less and less able to avoid contact with. As a result, the next seventy years saw Rome's power and influence growing throughout both the Western and Eastern Mediterranean.

Much of Rome's expansion was tied in with the nature of Roman politics, which were both highly competitive and expensive. A Roman's public career consisted of rising through a tight mixture of military and civil offices, with success in war being the most important factor. Military victories brought a Roman glory, status (which heavily affected his success in politics), and money (which helped him pay for his political career). Therefore, after 200 B.C.E., when Romans found themselves outside of Italy and far from the control of the Roman Senate, they were often tempted to attack foreign peoples to gain the money and glory needed to continue their careers back home. Although Romans might be eager to win fame and riches, they were generally reluctant to conquer new lands, since that would involve the trouble and expense of actually ruling those new provinces. Therefore, while Rome's power was clearly dominant in the Mediterranean by 133 B.C.E., a map of the Mediterranean at that time would hardly reflect that power as the Romans during this period often passed up opportunities for conquest.

Despite the harsh treaty imposed in 201 B.C.E., Carthage bounced back to regain its prosperity, although not its power. This still worried some Romans who recalled the trials and tribulations of two previous wars with Carthage. One of these Romans, Cato the Elder, was so fearful of Carthage that no matter what the topic of his speech in the Senate, he always ended it with "Carthage must be destroyed." Finally, in 149 B.C.E., the Romans listened to Cato, and tricked the Carthaginians into disarming before demanding the complete destruction of their city. This was too much, and the Carthaginians somehow managed to rearm and put up a furious defense. The resulting siege of Carthage, known as the Third Punic War, lasted three years (149-146 B.C.E.). In the end, the Romans stormed Carthage's walls and leveled it to the ground. This destroyed Rome's most dangerous enemy, but also put a serious blotch on its record for fair play. However, Rome still left most of North Africa to Numidia rather than taking it for itself, showing it was probably motivated against Carthage more by fear than greed.

Rome's wars with Celtic tribes in Cisalpine Gaul (Northern Italy) and Spain were also brutal. However, it was largely cultural differences, especially over their respective concepts of the state, that triggered disastrous misunderstandings between Rome and the Celts. The Romans saw the state as being the totality of the people in a society, as expressed in their motto "The Senate and the Roman People" (SPQR). Therefore, any treaty signed by legal representatives of the Roman state was considered binding on all Romans. On the other hand, Celtic peoples, especially those in Spain, were much more loosely organized into tribes. And even if a tribe's leaders signed a treaty with Rome, other members of the tribe, especially those with their own war bands personally loyal to them, might not agree with it and continue fighting. In the Romans' eyes, this was a clear violation of the treaty and merited retaliation. Unfortunately, since the Romans could not tell who was guilty or innocent, they often struck against tribesmen who were abiding by the treaty, seeing them all as equally guilty since they were all bound by the same treaty. Naturally, the wrongly accused Celts would strike back, confirming Roman opinions of them and triggering a cycle of hatred and violence that was very hard to break.

Therefore, the Roman conquests of Cisalpine Gaul and Spain were especially brutal, involving ambushes, massacres, and broken treaties by both sides. It took the Romans half a century to pacify Cisalpine Gaul and nearly seventy years to conquer most of Spain. The final conquest of north-western Spain would not be finished until 19 B.C.E.

Roman involvement in the East was more reluctant, especially after two exhausting wars with Carthage. However, Rome had already been involved there in suppressing pirates in Illyria and in the war that Macedon had declared on it during the struggle with Hannibal. To some powers, such as Macedon and the Seleucid kingdom, the rising power of Rome seemed a threat. But to others, such as Rhodes and Pergamum, it seemed like salvation from aggression by Macedon and Seleucid Asia. When they appealed to Rome for help, they portrayed their enemies as a threat to Rome as well, pointing out how Philip V had attacked Rome in the midst of its life and death struggle against Hannibal.

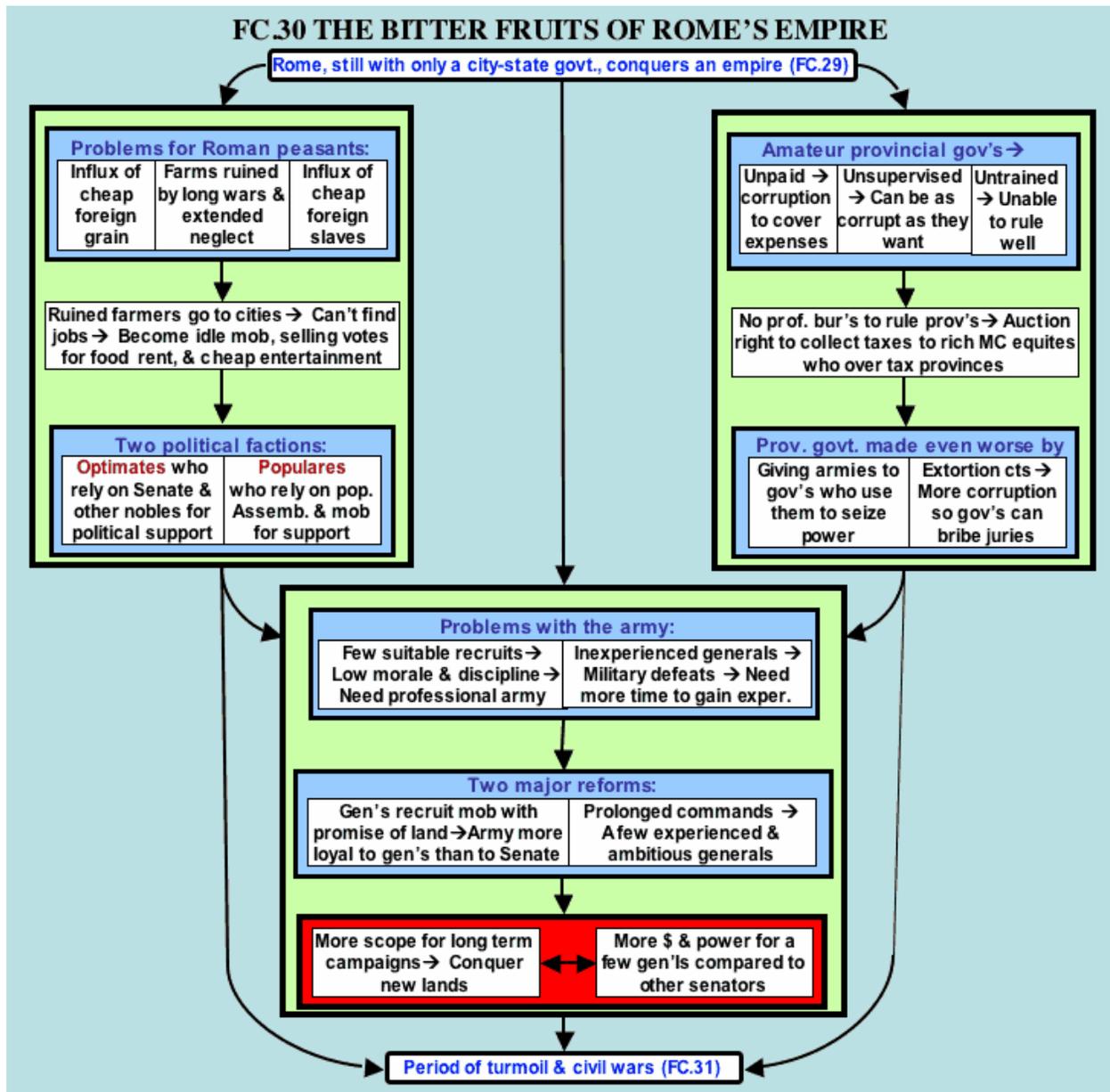
Reluctantly, the Roman people agreed to declare what is known as the Second Macedonian War (201-196 B.C.E.). After a slow start, the Romans finally met the Macedonian phalanx at Cynoscephelae. As in the war against Pyrrhus a century before, the legions' flexibility proved decisively superior to the phalanx's rigidity, and Rome won the war. Rome's settlement shows its reluctance to get involved in the East beyond securing Italy's flanks. Rome took no land and only 1000 talents (66,000 pounds) of silver to cover the costs of the war. Either as a generous move or in order to further weaken Macedon, Rome declared all Greeks free from foreign intervention, and by 194 B.C.E. its own troops were gone from Greek and Macedonian soil.

However, Rome's troubles with Macedon and the Seleucid Empire were far from over. The Greeks, as always, kept squabbling with each other. This opened the way for the Seleucid king, Antiochus III, to invade Greece. Appeals from various Greeks and the advance of Antiochus' army into Greece led to the Syrian War (192-189 B.C.E.). The Romans turned Antiochus' defenses at Thermopylae Pass, drove him from Greece, and tracked him into Asia Minor. For the first time, Roman troops crossed into Asia. After crushing Antiochus' phalanx and army at Magnesia, Rome made peace, claiming no land for itself, but taking 15,000 talents of silver to pay for the war and giving land to its ally, Pergamum.

Of course, Rome's involvement could not end that easily. More squabbling between Macedonians and Greeks led to the Third Macedonian War (171-167 B.C.E.) with the same basic result. Again, the legions tore up the Macedonian phalanx. And again, Rome took no land, but it did break Macedon into four separate and weak states. By now, Roman patience was at an end. A revolt in 149 B.C.E. led to Rome finally annexing Macedon as a province. And more Greek quarreling led to war, the sack of Corinth, and turning Greece into a Roman province in 146 B.C.E.

In 133 B.C.E., the king of Pergamum died and willed his kingdom to Rome, probably thinking annexation was only a matter of time. Two other kingdoms, Bithynia and Egypt, would also be willed to Rome in the next half-century, showing the dominance of Rome in the Mediterranean. Even those areas not directly under Roman rule increasingly felt its presence and would eventually fall. However, as remarkable as the rise of Roman power was, it also brought serious problems that would plunge Rome into bloody civil strife.

FC30 The problems of Empire



[FC30](#) in the [Hyperflow of History](#).
Covered in multimedia lecture [#6669](#).

Success often carries with it the seeds of its own destruction, and that was certainly the case with the Roman republic by the late second century B.C.E. "Superpower" status wrought far-reaching changes affecting all levels of Roman society. Unfortunately, the conservative Romans had great difficulty adapting to such rapid changes. The result was a century of political and social turmoil during which Rome kept trying to patch up these new problems with the same old solutions. Fortunately for Rome, it was still dynamic and energetic enough to survive and even expand during this

period of social decay and political and military turbulence. Rome faced serious problems in three areas: the fate of its peasants, the government of its provinces, and its army.

For Rome's peasants, the fruits of empire were bitter indeed. The Second Punic War against Hannibal had devastated many fields in Italy. The other wars of the third and second centuries B.C.E. had left many fields ruined by years of neglect while the farmers were off campaigning. When the farmers came home, two things came with them. First of all, thousands of prisoners of war flooded Roman slave markets. This influx of cheap slave labor let rich Roman senators set up huge estates that competed with the free peasants already struggling to revive their farms. Added to this was an influx of cheap grain from Sicily (also from estates worked by slaves). Faced with such competition, thousands of peasants lost their farms and migrated to the cities, especially Rome.

Life in the cities was little better. Slaves there had also taken many of the jobs the peasants might have hoped for. Thus the dispossessed peasants became an idle urban mob dependant on various politicians for food and rent in return for political support. This led to untold squalor and the occasional cheap spectacles of gladiatorial fights and chariot racing, the proverbial "bread and circuses" of ancient Rome. Because of this, Roman politics became corrupt, violent, and split into two factions, the *Optimates* who drew their support from the Senate and other nobles, and the *Populares* who relied on the Tribal assembly and mob for support.

Provincial government was no better. The root of the problem was that Rome was trying to rule a large empire with an amateur city-state government. At first, extra praetors (judges), and later pro-consuls (ex-consuls) and pro-praetors (ex-praetors) were created to run the provinces for terms of one year. However, one year was not nearly enough time to learn about a foreign culture and how to govern it. Therefore, such governors were untrained, unsupervised, and unpaid. Being unpaid forced them to cover their expenses through corruption. Being unsupervised let them get away with almost anything they wanted. Being untrained meant they were usually incompetent. Even the creation of permanent extortion courts to try corrupt ex-governors only encouraged more corruption so they could bribe the jurors who were also their senatorial colleagues who hoped for similar leniency in the future when they were tried for corruption.

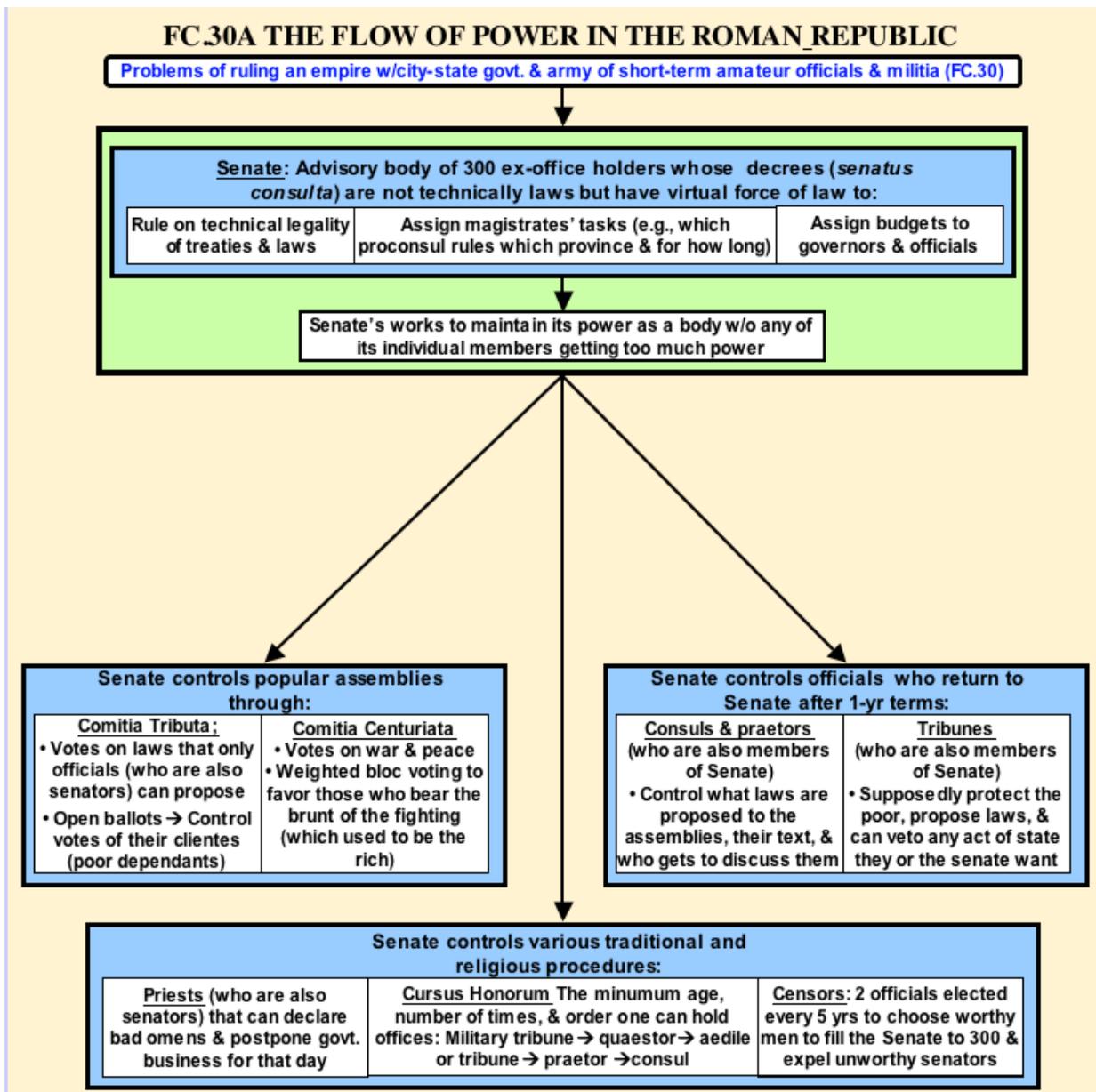
In addition there were no professional Roman bureaucrats to run the daily machinery of provincial government. Instead, governors brought personal friends and slaves. Tax collection was done through tax farming, a system where rich businessmen, known as *equites*, bought the right to collect the taxes of a province, paying the state the agreed sum and then over-taxing the provinces to cover their expenses and more.

These problems with dispossessed peasants and corrupt provincial government led to two problems with the army. For one thing, Rome's army of peasant militia had been fine when Rome's wars were close by and campaigns ended in time for harvest. However, long terms of service in overseas wars had ruined many farms through neglect, leaving fewer recruits able and willing to go to war, lowering the army's morale and efficiency. Second, the yearly turnover of governors led to inexperienced generals who suffered frequent military defeats.

This led to two reforms. First, generals created a long-term professional army by recruiting the dispossessed peasants, promising them land after the war as an inducement to enlist. They also had to supply them with their equipment since the Senate still felt only those who could afford to equip themselves should serve in the army. Therefore, the soldiers were more loyal to their generals than to the state (probably seeing little distinction between the two). The second reform was to extend the terms of provincial governors from one year to as many as five. This resulted in a few experienced, ambitious and rival generals.

These reforms triggered a vicious cycle where those few governors with armies had more scope for long-term campaigns and outright conquest of new lands. This upset the balance of power in the Roman Senate, between a small number of rich and powerful men and the majority of senators who had few opportunities for glory and riches. The combination of all these social, economic, administrative, and military problems bred a century of political turmoil, administrative unrest, and civil wars between rival generals.

FC30A The Flow of Power in the Roman Republic



Many of the problems of the late Roman Republic came from how a small number of powerful men were able to manipulate power and turn what looked like a somewhat democratic government into an effective oligarchy. In a broader sense, it serves as a lesson about how power can be manipulated in any supposedly democratic constitution.

At the center of power was the Senate, an advisory body of 300 ex-office holders whose decrees (*senatus consulta*), while not technically laws, carried the virtual force of law. The Senate especially had jurisdiction over officials' budgets, the technical legality of treaties and laws, and assigning tasks to magistrates (e.g., which ex-officials ruled which provinces and for how long). A ruling principle for the senatorial oligarchy as a whole was to maintain its power as a group without letting any individual members gain too much power. In addition, the Senate exercised control over three main areas of Roman government: popular assemblies, ex-officials, and religious and traditional ceremonies and procedures.

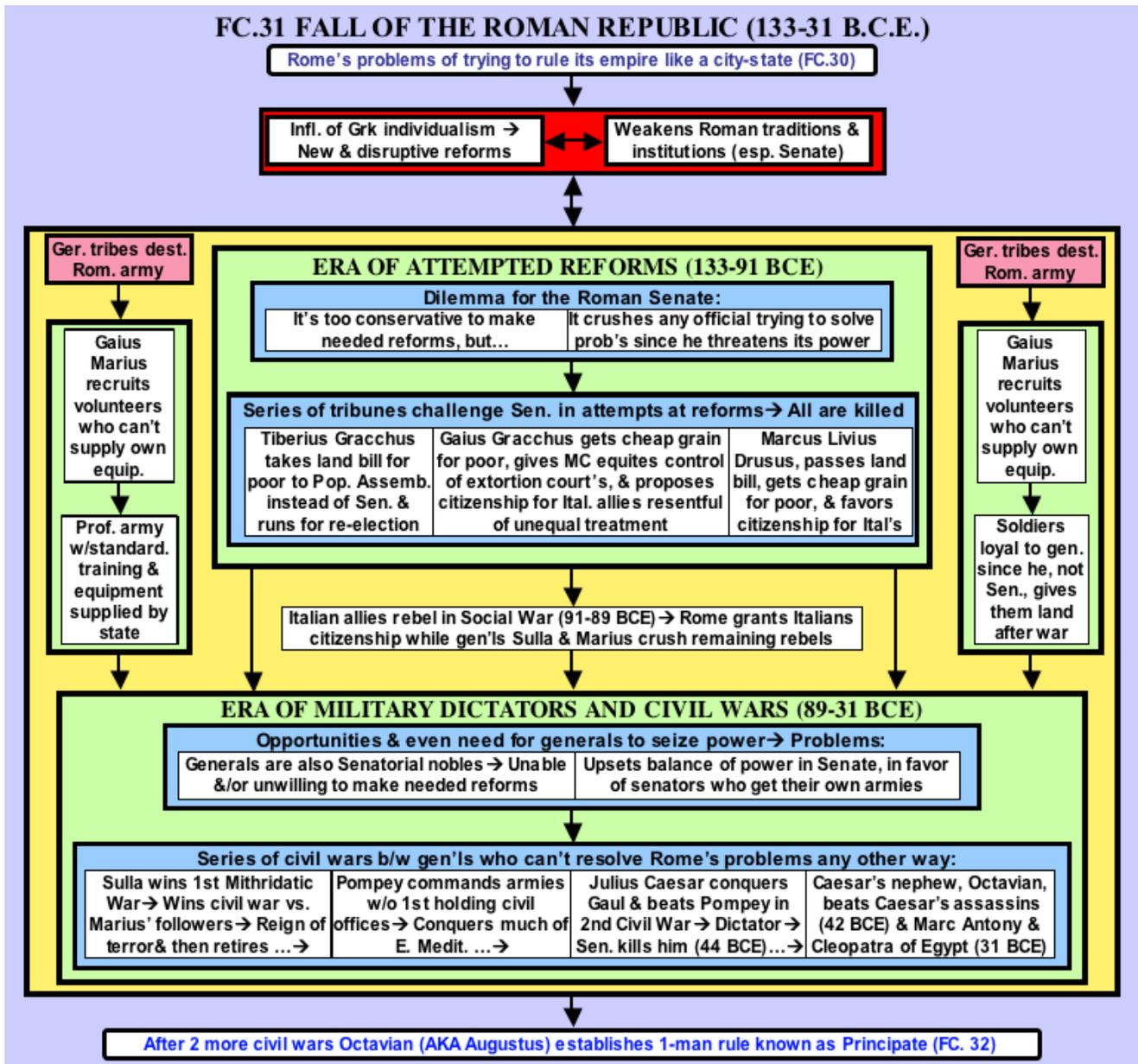
There were two popular assemblies that the Senate needed to maintain control over. The *Comitia Centuriata* was originally a military assembly that elected the top officials in Rome (consuls, praetors, and censors) and voted on war and peace. It was originally organized into 193 bloc votes known as centuries, with the rich making up more centuries and thus given more votes. This was to reflect the heavier burden the rich, who could afford full armor, faced in battle. The tribal assembly (*Comitia Tributa*), which actually passed laws, could only vote on bills proposed by officials, who were also members of the Senate. In both assemblies open ballots where senatorial nobles could keep

tabs on how their dependents (clientes) voted.

The primary means of control the Senate had over officials was the fact that after their one-year terms of office, ex-officials all returned to the Senate. This made it unlikely they would go against the wishes of their fellow senators. Therefore, the Senate controlled what laws were proposed and voted on through the consuls and praetors. Even the ten tribunes, who were supposed to protect the rights of the poor through the right to veto laws, had to go back and face the Senate after their year in office.

The Romans were religious, even superstitious people who place great value on omens and doing things by the exact right procedure to keep the favor of the gods. It just so happened the Senatorial nobles also controlled the priestly offices, and virtually all government procedures involved religious rituals that could block or negate government actions. Reinforcing this was the *cursus honorum* (ladder of honors) that dictated the minimum age, number of times, and order one could hold offices. Every five years, the *Comitia Centuriata* chose two censors, whose job was to expel unworthy senators and fill empty senatorial seats. Naturally, only senatorial nobles served as censors, making sure that the exclusive club of the Senate contained maintained the purity of its membership and control of the state.

FC31 The Fall of the Roman Republic (133-31 BCE)



FC31 in the [Hyperflow of History](#);

Covered in multimedia lecture [#6670](#).

The city's life is for sale, and it would kill itself if it could find a buyer — *Jugurtha of Numidia*

Pattern of decline

Rome's failure to adapt its city-state style government to ruling an empire triggered a century long pattern of events that would eventually lead to fall of the old oligarchy led by the Senate. Either out of genuine concern for reform, desire for personal gain and glory, or a combination of the two, an individual politician or general would introduce new, but also disruptive practices. These would weaken Roman customs, traditions, and institutions, especially the Senate. That would create the need and open the way for new figures to rise up that would introduce even more disruptive practices, and so on. Thus the cycle would keep repeating until the old order was destroyed. There were five main figures this process brought to the forefront of Roman politics and who in turn perpetuated the cycle, allowing the rise of the next figure: Tiberius Gracchus, Gaius Gracchus, Marius, Sulla, and Julius Caesar. Not until Caesar's nephew and heir, Octavian, seized power would the cycle be broken and a new more stable order established in place of senatorial rule.

First attempts at reform: the Gracchi

In 133 B.C.E., Tiberius Gracchus became tribune. He saw that many of Rome's troubles revolved around the decline of the free peasantry who were flocking into the cities. Therefore, he proposed a bill to give land to the idle mob and re-establish them on their own farms. The land he proposed using was public land owned by the state that, unfortunately, was controlled by rich and powerful senators who most likely would be reluctant to give it up.

Seeing that the Senate could well be hostile to his plan, Tiberius did several rather unheard of things. Although not necessarily illegal, his actions certainly flaunted the deep-seated traditions by which Roman government had operated for centuries. For one thing, Tiberius by-passed the Senate and went directly to the Tribal Assembly where his bill had a better chance to pass. When the Senate bribed another tribune to veto the bill, Tiberius took the radical step of impeaching the man. With that done, the land bill passed despite the fury of the Senate. In order to get money to start the peasants on their new farms, Tiberius had the assembly appropriate the treasury of Pergamum, which had just been willed to Rome. Financial and foreign matters were both the realm of the Senate, but Tiberius and the assembly just shoved that aside as well. Tiberius then tried to do away with one more tradition by running for re-election as tribune. This was too much, and in the discussion of its legality, a riot broke out that ended with the death of Tiberius and 300 of his followers. Civil violence was starting to be used to decide an issue in Roman politics.

Despite his good intentions, Tiberius' methods hastened the decline of the Republic more than they helped it. For one thing, he made the Tribal Assembly, which controlled the Urban Assembly, a major factor in Roman politics. Likewise, he weakened the senatorial nobles who had traditionally run Rome. This gave rise to factional politics of the Optimates and Populares, causing Roman politics often to degenerate into little more than bribery contests and street fights to win power. However, Tiberius' reforms also had some positive results as some 75,000 people were put back on farms in the decade after his death. However, there was still a lot of work to be done, and in 123 B.C.E. Gaius Gracchus, Tiberius' younger brother, became tribune.

An ardent reformer like his brother, Gaius passed a law guaranteeing cheap grain for the urban poor. Later politicians would make that grain free at state expense. Another move to weaken the Senate and gain allies was to give the *equites* (rich businessmen) control of the juries in the courts that tried Roman governors for corruption. While this prevented corrupt senatorial governors from relying on their senatorial friends to acquit them in the extortion courts, it hardly solved the corruption problem. Now equites who had bought the right to "farm" a province's taxes could threaten the governor with conviction in the extortion courts if he did not let them take all they wanted from the provincials. This also made the equites a new force in Roman politics, symbolized by special seats at the games and the right to wear distinctive rings. At the same time, it further weakened the Senate.

The Senate was understandably nervous about how far this new Gracchus would go, and tried to outbid him for popular support. Unfortunately, Gaius overstepped himself by proposing citizenship for the Italian allies. This was unpopular with the mob, which jealously guarded their citizenship as the only thing they had left to make them feel special. As a result, a riot broke out (probably with some help from the Senate), and Gaius was killed much as his brother had been.

Marius and the Roman army

The next figure to rise up was Gaius Marius, a man of equestrian rank and opposed to the senatorial nobility. Marius' rise to power started when he was serving in the army in North Africa against the Numidian king Jugurtha. The war in itself was not too important except that it showed the further corruption of Roman politics. Through a series of intrigues against his general, Marius got leave of absence to get elected consul. He then had the Tribal Assembly give him command of the war in place of his former general, Metellus. Marius and an ambitious junior officer named Sulla finished off Jugurtha and Marius got the credit. This set him up for the next big step in his career.

For several years, the migrations of some Germanic tribes known as the Cimbri and Teutones had been wreaking havoc in the north. When they turned on Rome in earnest and mauled a Roman army in Gaul in 105 B.C.E., panic set in and Rome looked for a savior. That man, of course, was Marius, the conqueror of Jugurtha. He was elected to an unheard of six straight consulships in order to prepare the army for the northern menace.

Marius' main legacy was a long overdue reform of the army. Rome's extended campaigns required a long-term professional army to replace the reluctant and inefficient peasant draftees Rome had used till now. Marius took the

final steps of making it just that, with volunteers serving instead of peasants hauled off their farms. Marius' recruits came largely from the unemployed mob lured by the promise of land after their service was over. This had three main effects. For one thing, since these recruits were too poor to supply their own equipment, the state had to supply it, thus making equipment and training more regular and the army more efficient. Along these lines, professional soldiers could devote all their time to training which, combined with the proverbially tough Roman discipline, also made for a very effective army.

The third effect had to do with getting recruits. The main inducement to serve was that after his term of service, a veteran would receive a plot of land on which to start his own farm. However, since each general had to get a separate land bill passed by the Senate for his particular army, the soldier looked to his general for a land settlement. Therefore, the troops' loyalty tended to belong to the individual generals rather than the Senate. This meant that a new element, generals backed by their own armies, had become a factor in Roman politics.

However, Marius' recruiting and tactical reforms created a much more efficient and professional army, which is what Rome needed at this time. In Marius' sixth consulship, the Cimbri and Teutones finally got around to invading Italy after a leisurely rampage through Spain and Gaul. The newly reformed legions cleverly maneuvered the invaders into a bad position and then destroyed them under the hot Italian sun. Marius was the hero of the hour and acclaimed the Third Founder of Rome after the legendary Romulus and Camillus.

Marius may have been a good general, but he was a mediocre politician. When his ally, the tribune Saturninus, tried to seize power, a riot broke out. Marius thus found himself in the difficult spot of having to suppress his own rioting supporters. He did his duty, killed many of his followers, and lost most of his popularity as a result. After all this, he retired from politics, waiting for a new opportunity for military glory.

Sulla and the First Civil War

For some time, one of the hot issues of the day in Rome was citizenship for the Italian allies. While the Romans had previously been fairly liberal in granting different allies full citizenship, lately they had been satisfied to grant only second class, or Latin, citizenship. Unfortunately, the Italian allies were not nearly as satisfied with this and were agitating for full rights. We have already seen how this issue cost Gaius Gracchus his life. When another Roman, Marcus Livius Drusus, proposed full citizenship and was assassinated, Italian frustration boiled over into open rebellion. This revolt, known as the *Social War*, or war of the allies (91-88 B.C.E.), saw Rome faced with a formidable Italian enemy trained in Roman tactics. In fact, it was so formidable that the Senate did the one thing it could to defuse the rebellion: it granted full citizenship to any Italians who remained loyal or immediately laid down their arms. This clever move stripped the rebellion of much of its support. The Senate then called on two of its ablest generals, Marius and Sulla, to finish the job. In the end, the rebellion was put down, but the Italians had gained full citizenship, definitely a step forward for Rome and Italy.

The Social War had brought a poor, but very ambitious senatorial noble to the forefront of Roman politics, Lucius Cornelius Sulla. Always on the lookout for the opportunity for power and glory, he found it right after the Social War in the form of a new war in the East against Mithridates, king of Pontus on the Black Sea. Seeing widespread resentment against Rome for its corruption and mistreatment of the provincials in Asia Minor, Mithridates, stirred up a revolt that supposedly massacred 80,000 Italians in Asia Minor in one day. With Rome still preoccupied with the Social War, Mithridates overran Roman Asia and then crossed into Greece (90 B.C.E.). However, once the Social War was over, Rome was ready to tangle with the king of Pontus.

The problem was: which of Rome's generals, Marius or Sulla, should get command of the war? Sulla, who was the consul at this time, legally had the right and initially got it. But as soon as he set out for the port of Brundisium, Marius' followers seized power and gave Marius the command. Sulla then took the unprecedented step of marching on Rome with Roman troops to drive Marius' followers away in flight. However, once Sulla had left again for the East, Marius returned to Rome and seized power again. He was now a bitter old man who started a reign of terror so bloody that his own followers had to put an end to it. Several days into his seventh consulship, Marius died, but his followers remained in power and sent an army to relieve Sulla in the East.

Meanwhile, Sulla had been driving Mithridates from Greece. After two desperate battles and a long terrible siege of Athens, Mithridates fled to Asia Minor. Luckily, the Roman army and general sent to relieve Sulla concentrated more

on Mithridates and let Sulla track him into Asia. Mithridates sued for peace and Sulla gladly granted it so he could turn on his enemies in Rome.

What followed was the First Roman Civil War (83-82 B.C.E.). Sulla's tremendous energy and drive made short work of his enemies, and he entered Rome in triumph. His first act was to massacre any of his enemies, including some 90 senators and 2600 rich equites. Among those narrowly escaping Sulla's wrath was the defiant young son-in-law of Marius, Julius Caesar. Sulla then became dictator, and reformed the government to put the Senate back in firm control of the state, just like in the good old days. A year later, Sulla abdicated his powers and retired to the luxury of his villa where he died soon afterwards (78 B.C.E.).

Sulla's settlement did little or nothing to solve Rome's real problems. And after his strong hand was removed, political turmoil returned in full force. The first man to take advantage of this situation was Pompey, one of Sulla's young army officers. Pompey's early rise to power was the result of some drive and energy, but also a good deal of luck. He held several military commands before holding public office. That was illegal, but apparently of little account anymore in Rome. Quite a bit of luck accompanied Pompey as he destroyed Marius' supporters holding out in North Africa and Spain. Also, by chance, as he returned to Rome from Spain, he encountered and mopped up the remnants of a great slave revolt led by a gladiator named Spartacus. Another of Sulla's former officers, Crassus "Dives" (the rich), had actually broken the back of this slave revolt that had terrorized Italy for two years. Nevertheless, Pompey claimed partial credit.

Nerves were on edge as the two potentially hostile Roman generals and their armies were poised on the outskirts of Rome. Luckily, Pompey and Crassus made their peace and together became consuls for 70 B.C.E. Pompey's star just kept rising. Soon afterwards he received an extraordinary command to clear the Mediterranean of pirates who had infested its waters for years and were even threatening Rome's grain supply. After sweeping the seas clear of these pirates in an amazingly short time, Pompey received another important command. This time he was sent to fight Mithridates of Pontus who had revived his struggle against Rome. Once again luck was with Pompey, because another general, Lucullus, had already done most of the job. Still, it was Pompey who finally crushed Mithridates (who then committed suicide), and it was Pompey who got the credit and triumphal parade. He then spent the next few years marching through the Near East and reorganizing it along lines more favorable to Rome by creating new Roman provinces in Asia Minor and Syria (where he put a final end to the decrepit Seleucid dynasty) and establishing client kings loyal to himself and Rome elsewhere. In 61 B.C.E., Pompey finally returned to Rome, but this was where his star began to wane.

The rise of Julius Caesar

Pompey, like Marius, may have been a good military man, but he was not much of a politician. Trusting in the power and glory of his name alone, he disbanded his army before he got a land settlement for his veterans from the Senate. When the Senate refused to help him out, Pompey found two allies with whom he formed the *First Triumvirate*, an informal political alliance designed to control Roman politics. One of these was his old colleague, Crassus the Rich. The other was a popular young politician, Julius Caesar. With Pompey's military reputation, Crassus' wealth, and Caesar's popularity with the mob, the Triumvirate should and could rule Rome effectively.

The first order of business was to elect Caesar as consul for 59 B.C.E. He had a wild term of office where he ran roughshod over the Roman constitution. Using a good deal of intimidation, he got Pompey's troops their land and himself a lucrative military command in Gaul (modern France) where he was determined to gain a military reputation equal to Pompey's.

Caesar had little military experience before going to Gaul. However, one would never have known it by looking at the masterful way he brought it under Roman control in a mere ten years. We can hardly imagine the sense of relief to the Romans now that the menace of the northern tribes was further removed from Rome. The Roman conquest of Gaul was also an important step in the process of civilizing Western Europe. Although Gaul was already showing major steps in that direction, the Roman conquest made it heir to the high cultures of the ancient Near East and Greece by way of Rome. It should be noted that, as in the case of Alexander, the glory of Caesar's victories obscured the butchery of countless thousands of innocent people and blurred the distinction of who was civilized and who was barbarian.

During his ten years in Gaul, Caesar also built up a highly efficient and intensely loyal army that could brag of exploits to rival and even surpass those of Pompey's army. Naturally, this caused jealousy and suspicion on Pompey's part.

Crassus, whose influence helped keep the Triumvirate together, was killed fighting the Parthians, nomadic tribesmen who had taken much of the old Persian Empire's Asian lands from the now extinct Seleucid dynasty. The death of Julia, Caesar's daughter and Pompey's wife, removed another bond holding the two men together. Day by day, tensions grew as rival political gangs disrupted the streets of Rome with their clashes and the Senate started to back Pompey in opposition to Caesar. Caesar, fearing for his life after he gave up his army, led his troops into Italy and started another civil war (49-45 B.C.E.).

Pompey was no match for Caesar's quick, decisive, and brilliant generalship, and was crushed at the Battle of Pharsalus in Greece in 47 B.C.E. He fled to Egypt where Ptolemy XII who feared the wrath of Caesar murdered him. Soon afterwards, Caesar showed up in Egypt where he spent the next year supporting Ptolemy's sister, Cleopatra, in a civil war against her brother. He then set out to meet Pompey's other allies and followers. In a whirlwind series of campaigns in Pontus, North Africa, and Spain, Caesar crushed the Pompeian forces. By the end of 45 B.C.E., Caesar was the undisputed master of the Roman world and was appointed dictator for life.

Unfortunately, the problems plaguing Rome were too complex to be solved by mere military victories. Caesar did carry out several reforms. He extended citizenship outside of Italy for the first time. He also changed the old Roman lunar calendar to the more efficient and accurate Egyptian solar calendar, which we still use today with some minor adjustments. However, even Caesar seemed to be at a loss for finding solutions to the deep-seated problems plaguing Roman society and instead planned a major campaign against Parthia. The prospect of Caesar gaining more military glory and becoming even more of a dictator worried a number of senators who formed a plot against his life. On March 15, 44 B.C.E., the eve of his setting out on his campaigns, the conspirators surrounded Caesar in the Senate house and brought him down with twenty-three dagger wounds. Ironically, he fell at the foot of the statue of Pompey.

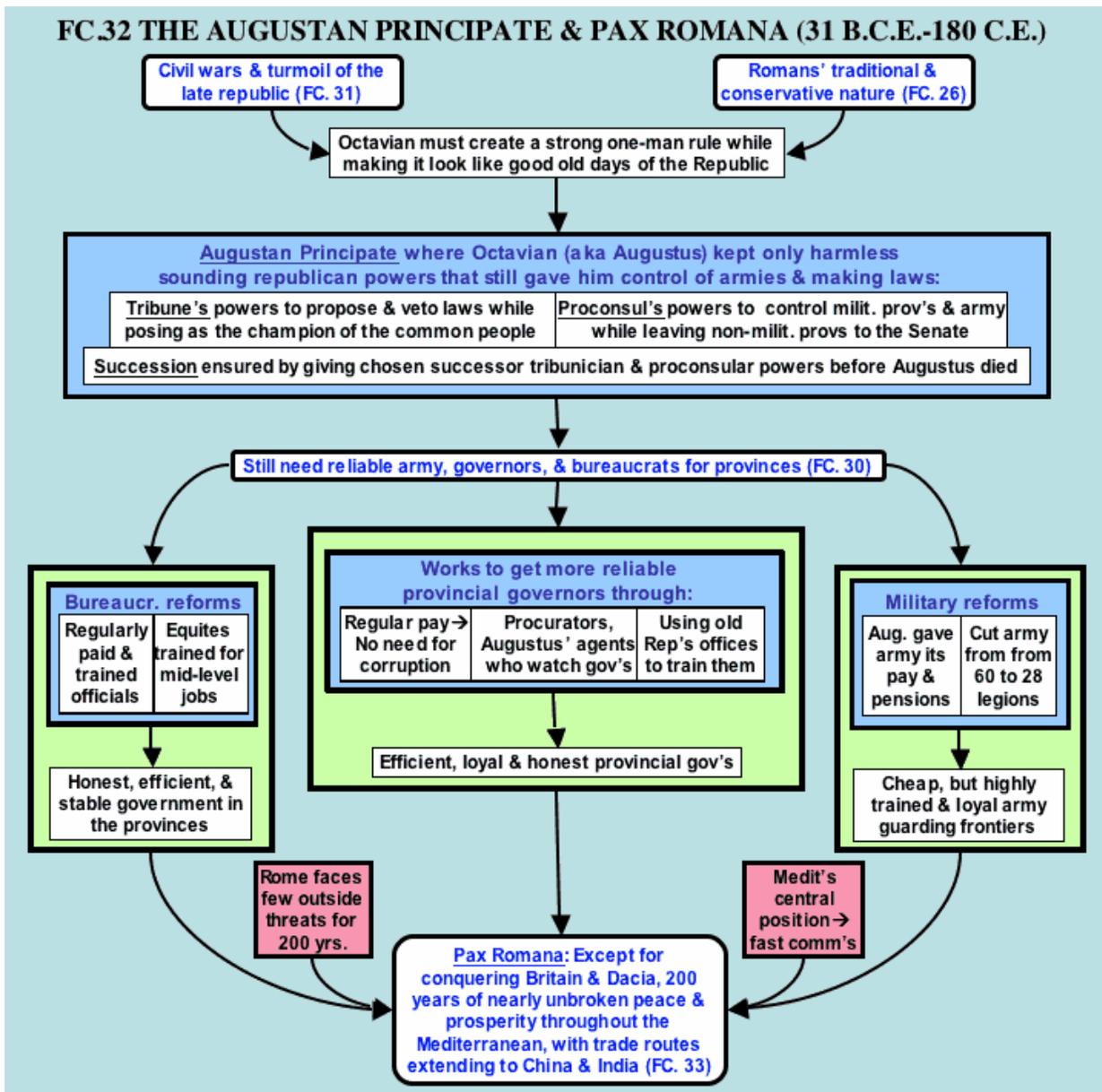
Octavian, Antony, and two more civil wars (44-31 B.C.E.)

Unfortunately, Caesar's murder did nothing to solve Rome's problems as there were always new generals waiting to follow in the footsteps of Marius, Sulla, Pompey, and Caesar. In this case, two men emerged in that capacity: Marc Antony, one of Caesar's most trusted officers, and Octavian, Caesar's 19 year old nephew and chosen heir. Octavian was young, inexperienced in politics and military affairs, and somewhat sickly. No one much gave him a very big chance to survive in the vicious snake pit of Roman politics. Surprisingly, he proved himself quite adept at politics, playing the Senate off against Antony while the Senate thought it was using him in the same way. He then did an about face and allied with Antony and another general, Lepidus, to form the Second Triumvirate.

The first act of the new triumvirate was to clear its enemies out of Rome in a bloody purge. Among the victims was the great Roman statesman, orator, and philosopher, Cicero. We still have many of his speeches and letters that tell us a great bit about life and politics in the crumbling Republic. After this purge, there were still several of Caesar's murderers to contend with in Greece where they were building an army. In the third Roman civil war in less than 50 years, Antony and Octavian tracked down the conspirators, Brutus and Cassius, and destroyed their forces at Philippi (42 B.C.E.).

This put the Second Triumvirate in undisputed control of the Roman world. Lepidus was gradually forced out of the picture, leaving Antony and Octavian to split the spoils. Antony took the wealthier eastern provinces and got involved in his famous romance with Cleopatra of Egypt. Octavian took the less settled West along with the Roman homeland and recruiting grounds of Italy. As one might expect, tensions mounted between the two men and finally erupted into another civil war. At the battle of Actium in 31 B.C.E., Octavian's fleet crushed the combined navies of Antony and Cleopatra. After a desperate defense of Egypt, both Antony and Cleopatra committed suicide, leaving Octavian as sole ruler of the Roman Empire. It seems ironic that a non-military man should emerge as the final victor in these civil wars and bring them to an end. However, as a non-military man, Octavian saw that the solutions to Rome's problems involved much more than marching some armies around. It would be Octavian, known from this point on as Augustus, who would bring order to Rome and inaugurate one of the most long lasting periods of peace and prosperity in human history: the Pax Romana, or Roman Peace.

FC32The Augustan Principate (31 BCE-160 CE)



[FC32](#) in the [Hyperflow of History](#).
covered in multimedia lecture [#6681](#).

Octavian's victory over Antony and Cleopatra ended a century of civil turmoil and decay. When he returned to Rome in triumph in 29 B.C.E., everyone anxiously wondered how he would use his victory. The Roman people and Senate heaped all sorts of honors on Octavian: triumphal parades, political offices, and titles, including that of Augustus ("revered one"), by which title he has been known ever since.

Augustus saw that there were two basic needs he had to satisfy in order to avoid the pitfalls of the past century. He saw two basic needs he had to satisfy. For one thing, the civil wars and turmoil of the last century clearly showed the need for a strong one-man rule backed by the army. Second, the traditional and conservative nature of the Romans made it mandatory that he make any reforms at least *appear* to be like the good old days of the Republic with its elections and many political offices. Satisfying these two needs required a politician cleverer than Marius, Sulla, and even Caesar himself. Luckily for Rome, it had such a man in Augustus who founded a new order known as the Principate after his honorary title of *princeps* (first citizen).

Augustus' solution was to take the army and law making powers and disguise them with harmless sounding Republican titles. Out of all the Republican offices he took only two main offices, or more properly powers without the offices:

those of tribune and proconsul (provincial governor). Having special tribunician powers allowed him to propose laws to the Senate and assembly. Being just a tribune, one of the humblest offices in Rome, made Augustus look like a man of the people and their protector. However, his title of princeps gave him the right to speak first before all other officials instead of having to wait his turn like other tribunes.

Proconsular power gave Augustus all the strategically placed provinces with armies, thus giving his tribunician powers the clout to pass any laws he wished with a minimum of resistance. In order not to appear too greedy, Augustus gave the Senate control of the non-military provinces. In fact, one or two of these even had a legion with which the Senatorial governors could play soldier. In such a way Augustus took effective control of the laws and army while leaving the Republic intact, at least on the surface.

Although his own position was secure, Augustus still had to provide for a smooth succession so his system would continue peacefully after he died. He needed to appoint a successor much like a king would, but once again, make it look like the Republic. He solved this with typical Augustan shrewdness by having his chosen successor assume the powers of tribune and proconsul while he was still alive. Therefore, when Augustus died, the new emperor would already hold the important offices to guarantee a smooth transition of power. Over time, and the memories of the Republic faded would fade and it would be taken for granted that the emperor's son or chosen successor should be the next emperor, even if he did not already hold the appropriate powers.

Once he had secured his own position, Augustus still had to provide for three things in order to rule the empire effectively: honest and efficient provincial governors, an honest and efficient bureaucracy to help them, and a loyal and efficient army to defend the frontiers instead of making trouble in Rome. Augustus did two things to ensure honesty and efficiency in his governors. For one thing, he paid officials regular salaries instead of leaving it up to them to make up for their own losses at the expense of the provincials. This at least eliminated the more blatant need for corruption. Augustus also had his own personal agents, called *procurators*, to keep an eye on officials in the provinces. Any corrupt governors would be tried by the Senate. However, it was unlikely that a governor's fellow senators would be so lenient with him as before, because Augustus kept a close eye on these proceedings to ensure justice. Together, these reforms gave Augustus the efficient and honest governors he needed.

Augustus ensured more efficient governors by reviving the old *cursus honorum* (ladder of honors), whereby aspiring senatorial politicians would gain necessary experience and training by serving in the army and then holding a sequence of old Republican offices. At the same time, it maintained the fiction of the Republic still carrying on by making good use of the old Republican offices. Augustus obtained trained middle level officials from the rich business class of the Equites. They had their own *cursus honorum* to go through before being eligible for various lucrative positions such as command of the fleet, Rome's grain supply and fire brigades, the Praetorian Guard (the emperor's own personal regiments), and the governorship of Egypt (kept as Augustus' private domain).

Augustus also needed trained bureaucrats to do the daily work of running the empire. Previously, senatorial governors would take their friends and slaves to fill these positions, which led to all sorts of inefficiency and corruption. Augustus replaced this system with a professional class of tax collectors and record keepers who held their jobs for extended periods. He also ended tax farming, where the government auctioned off the right to collect the taxes. This had been one of the worst sources of abuse under the Republic. These reforms provided the provinces with an honest, efficient, and stable government. There was also the need for trained people to fill many "middle-level" jobs, to oversee such things as the fleet, Rome's grain supply, the emperor's Praetorian Guard, and his new para-military fire brigade that doubled as a police force to keep order in Rome. In this case, Augustus used the rich *equites* class, training them with a *cursus honorum* similar to that of the Senatorial class before they were eligible for these critical positions.

There were two issues to resolve with the army: its loyalty and expense. In terms of loyalty, since Augustus' proconsular powers gave him control of the provinces and the armies within them, there was technically only one commanding general (imperator) of nearly all the Roman armies: himself. Obviously, any emperor, especially a non military man like Augustus, would have to appoint men to lead at least some of the troops spread out along Rome's vast frontiers. However, the troops stayed loyal to Augustus, not their immediate generals, for one good reason. It was Augustus now, not the generals, who paid soldiers their regular pay and pension, generally with coins that bore the emperor's image as a constant reminder of who took care of the troops. The central government, meaning Augustus, once again had control of its armies. Occasionally, the troops would rediscover the fact that they held the key to power and would revolt to put their own generals on the throne. For the most part, they stuck to the business of guarding the frontiers and left governing to the emperors in Rome.

Finally, in order to increase efficiency and cut costs, Augustus reduced the army from 60 legions to 28. He generally placed these along the frontiers most threatened by invasion: the Rhine and Danube Rivers in the north and the Euphrates River in the east. An equal number of auxiliaries (light infantry and cavalry) were also maintained there. The total number of troops Rome had amounted to roughly 250-300,000 men defending an empire of possibly 50,000,000 people. Such a small force for so large an empire had to be efficient. The Roman legions during the Principate comprised the most tightly disciplined and efficient army of antiquity, and everyone knew it. It was their reputation as much as their swords that defended the frontiers and gave the Mediterranean two centuries of peace. Rome was also lucky in two ways at this time. First it faced no major threats on its borders. Second, the Mediterranean, as the central geographic feature of the empire, allowed much faster communications and reaction time during emergencies.

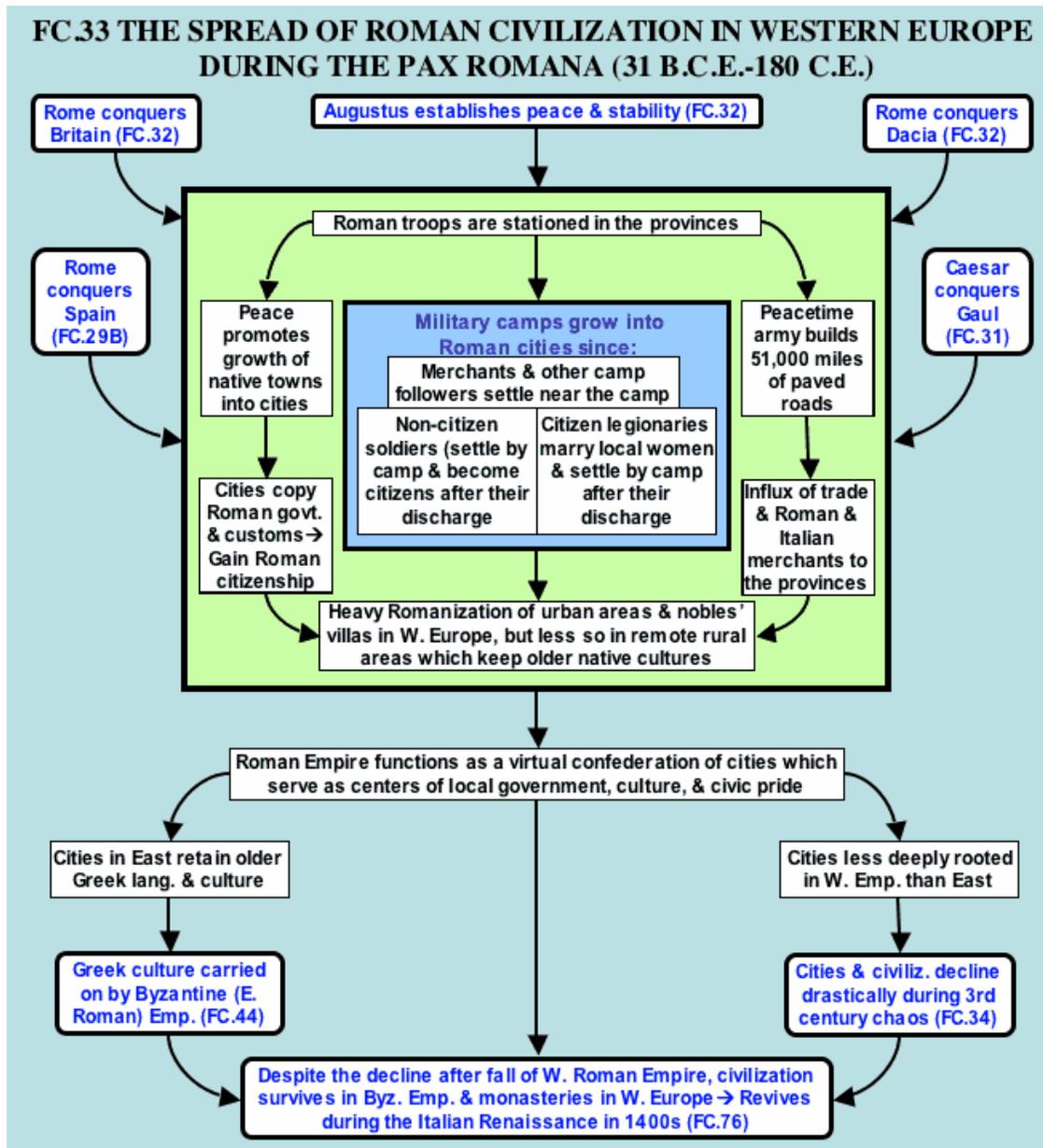
The Empire after Augustus

Augustus died in 14 C.E., but his work lived on long afterwards. For nearly two centuries afterward, the Roman world would experience peace such as it had never known before or since. Its government was well trained, efficient, and honest, while its legions kept the frontiers and interior provinces secure. Roman political history during this time is not very exciting, because relatively little happened besides a few palace scandals in Rome.

The empire expanded very little during this time, just rounding out its control of the Mediterranean and invading Britain. Occasional wars would flare up in the East with the Parthians and in the north with various Germanic tribes, but there were no serious threats to the Empire. The vast majority of people in the empire never experienced war and invasion. Even the troops on the frontiers often saw so little action that they were kept busy and in shape by building the vast network of roads Rome is so famous for. Peace and prosperity brought trade, both within the empire and beyond its borders with such exotic places as India and China far to the east. Merchants traveled the legionary roads and the Mediterranean free from fear. Peasants harvested their crops undisturbed by war. And the legionary camps on the frontiers grew into permanent cities.

This was certainly a golden Age for civilization. However, even times of peace and prosperity can carry within them the seeds of their own decay. That was true of the Roman Empire in the second century C.E., although few if any people recognized the problems within their society. At the same time, pressures were starting to mount against the northern frontiers. Together, these internal problems and external pressures would combine to destroy the Roman Empire and begin the transition from the ancient world to the Middle Ages.

FC33The Pax Romana & spread of Roman civilization



[FC33](#) in the [Hyperflow of History](#).

Covered in multimedia lecture [#6682](#).

One of the greatest legacies of the Pax Romana was the spread of Roman culture to Western Europe. Roman rule in the semi-civilized areas of Western Europe (Gaul, Britain, and Spain) and Augustus' establishment of peace during the Pax Romana meant that there were Roman troops permanently stationed in the provinces. This helped Romanize and civilize the provinces in the West in three ways. First, as the legionary camps became permanent settlements, merchants, families, and other sorts of camp followers settled down around them. In time, these army camp settlements became towns and cities, whose military origins are still reflected in Britain in such place names as Winchester and Lancaster (from the Latin word for camp, *castra*). After they were discharged from the army, legionaries, who were Roman citizens, and auxiliaries (non-citizen soldiers who received Roman citizenship after their terms of service) would often settle in these towns, marry local women, and raise their children as Roman citizens.

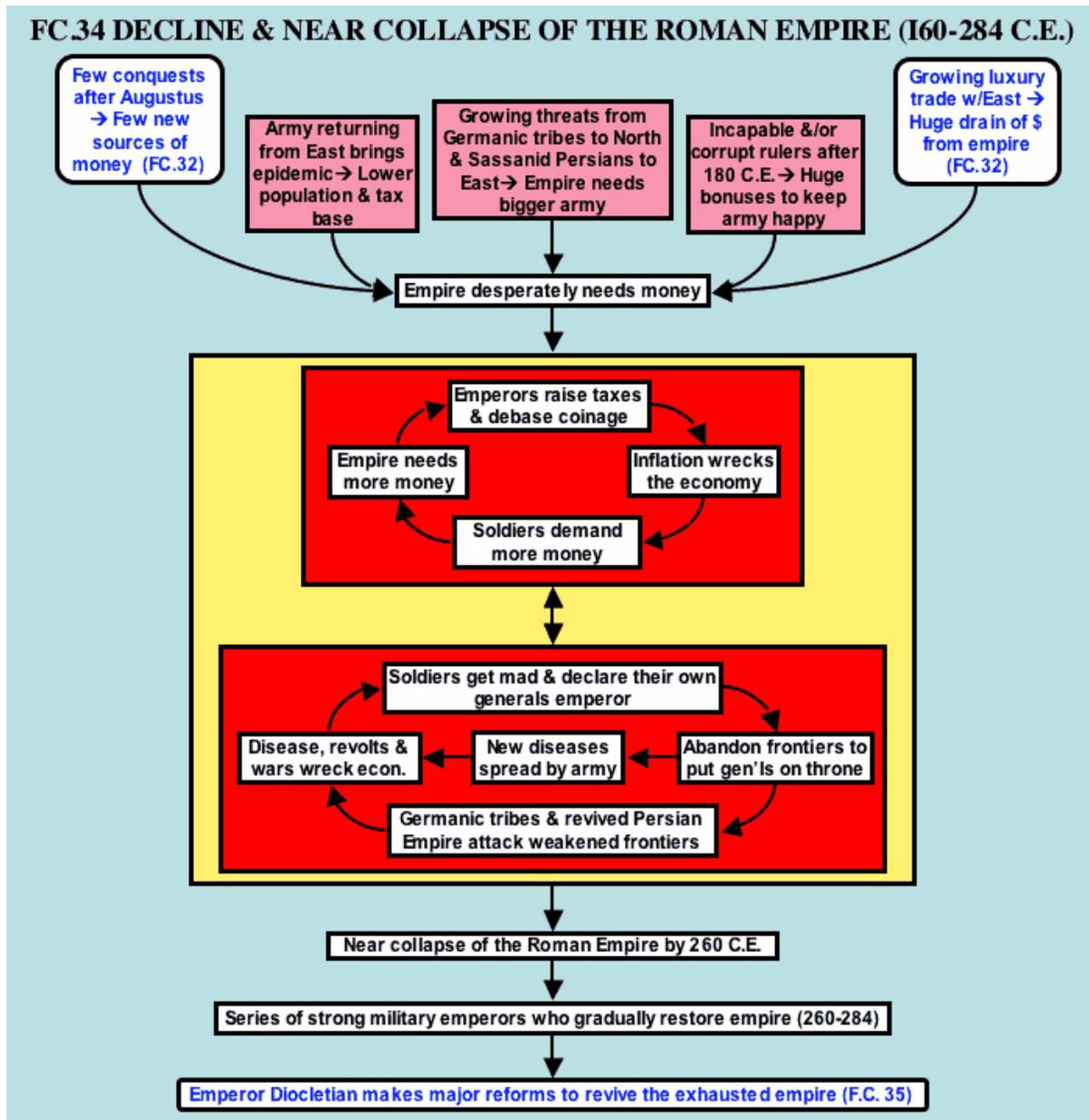
Along these lines, the peaceful conditions brought on by the Pax Romana, promoted the growth of native towns into cities. Those cities whose leading citizens copied Roman styles of dress, language, architecture, and local government would earn Roman citizenship for their towns. The poorer citizens would then follow the leading citizens' leads, thus encouraging the spread of Roman civilization that way. Finally, with extended periods of peace, the Roman army spent much of its time building an excellent system of some 51,000 miles of paved roads stretching across the empire. While

these roads' original purpose was to facilitate the rapid movement of Roman troops to trouble spots, they also promoted trade and the influx of Italian merchants into the towns of the western provinces.

In these three ways, the western provinces saw the heavy Romanization of their towns and also nobles on country estates who felt they had some incentive to copy Roman ways for personal advancement. However, there were limits to Romanization. For one thing, it only happened to any great extent in Gaul, Britain, and Spain where there was no long established civilization in place before the Romans came. By contrast, the Eastern provinces were already heavily influenced by Greek culture in the cities and native cultures in the countryside. In a sense, the Roman Empire was a bi-cultural empire, with Greek language and culture dominant in the East and Roman language (Latin) and culture and dominant in the West. (Coins in the East were even struck with Greek inscriptions.) In both East and West, the influence of these respective cultures was mainly limited to the cities and barely touched the countryside.

However, despite the serious decline of cities in the West during the Middle Ages, Roman culture would survive in the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire and thanks to the efforts of monks in the West who copied many works of Roman literature. As a result, there would be a resurgence of Roman culture during the Italian Renaissance where it would reassert itself as the foundation of Western Civilization.

FC34The near collapse of the Roman Empire (160-284 CE)



[FC34](#) in the [Hyperflow of History](#).

Covered in multimedia lecture #6683.

Enrich the troops...Nothing else matters — *Emperor Septimius Severus, to his sons from his deathbed*

Why a society goes into decline and eventual oblivion is one of the most complex, interesting, and important questions one can ask in history. The decline and fall of the Roman Empire has especially fascinated historians down through the centuries. How could the most powerful empire in antiquity just come apart at the seams and disintegrate? While historians have focused on various causes ranging from barbarian invasions and moral decadence to the influence of Christianity and lead poisoning, the fact is that many factors combined to lead to the downfall of Rome and open the way into the Middle Ages. Furthermore, these different factors fed back on one another to aggravate the situation and also to make the process of decline more complex to trace.

Mounting problems (161-235 C.E.)

The first signs of trouble came in the reign of Marcus Aurelius (161-180 C.E.), the last of the so-called "Good Emperors". When he came to the throne, the Roman Empire still seemed to be experiencing a golden age. The government was efficient, fair, and honest. The army secured the frontiers from invasions. And the economy was

healthy in both the countryside and cities. However, during Marcus' reign things started to fall apart. There were five major problems feeding into Rome's decline.

Two problems were of an especially long-range nature dating back to the time of Augustus. One was that few new provinces were added to the empire during the Pax Romana, thus providing Rome with few new sources of revenue. Another drain on the economy was the growing volume of trade with the East for such luxury goods as silks and spices. Silk came all the way from China through a multitude of middlemen and cost its weight in gold, causing a tremendous amount of gold and silver to leave the empire to pay for these luxuries.

A third problem was a devastating epidemic spread throughout the empire by victorious legions returning from a war with the Parthians in the East. Historians then, having little understanding of such phenomena, concentrated mainly on individual people rather than on larger forces, such as disease, affecting history. Therefore, we have little information on what this plague was (possibly smallpox), what its symptoms were, and how many people were affected. If the plague destroyed a significant part of the population, say 10% or more, then it may have been an important factor in the decline of the Roman Empire. Since this was not a mechanized society, most of its labor and energy came from people. If many of those people were lost, society was in trouble. The greater number of labor saving devices such as waterwheels being used from this time on seem to indicate there was a serious population loss. Disease would be a major candidate for its cause.

The fourth major problem Marcus Aurelius faced was barbarian invasions. Apparently population pressures were building among the various nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes beyond Rome's frontiers. At the same time, extended contact with Rome had taught many of these tribes how to combine into larger more effective confederations for fighting Rome. The result was a massive invasion by a tribe known as the Marcomanni across the Danube frontier, with some of these invaders even making it all the way into Italy. The problems of defense were complicated by the fact that the legions were weakened by sickness. The effort to drive the invaders out was so desperate and recruits were so hard to find that even slaves were enlisted. Eventually, the frontier was restored, broken through again several years later, and restored again. By Marcus Aurelius' death in 180 C.E., the empire's population, army, and economy were exhausted by the tremendous efforts of the past two decades. Although the frontiers were restored, pressure from the tribes on the frontiers continued to grow. This required a larger army to defend the frontiers, more taxes to support that army, more bureaucrats to collect those taxes, and even more taxes to support those bureaucrats.

A fifth problem was that, after Marcus Aurelius' death in 180 C.E., men unworthy of the throne generally ruled Rome. For example, there was Marcus Aurelius' son, Commodus, who spent most of his time racing chariots and fighting gladiators in the arena instead of facing the important problems of ruling. Most of these emperors met violent ends, either through court intrigues or military mutinies. One common and unfortunate pattern these emperors followed in order to keep their thrones was to give ever increasing bonuses to the army to keep it happy, thus heaping another huge burden on the Roman economy. Despite all this, the illusion of eternal Rome persisted in people's minds.

The third century anarchy (235-284 C.E.)

So many drains on the economy left the Roman government short of money. Therefore, it raised taxes and started debasing the coinage (i.e., decreasing its gold and silver content). This led to inflation, causing the soldiers to demand more pay to meet their expenses. The government thus faced more money shortages, leading to more taxes and coinage debasements, and so on. To make matters worse, this process triggered an even more serious cycle that left the empire in chaos for fifty years.

At the center of this new cycle were rebellious troops who would overthrow an emperor and put their own generals on the throne in order to get a raise in pay. While some criticism for the troops' actions is justified, we should keep in mind that coinage debasement and the resulting inflation were destroying the buying power of their salaries. They felt they had to do something to protect their incomes. However, the resulting civil wars stripped the frontiers of troops as they marched to Rome to put their general in power. This in turn invited invasions by the tribes to the north and Persians to the East. The resulting civil wars and invasions would further ruin the economy. This, of course, made it hard to pay the troops who therefore rebelled again, leading to more invasions, more economic problems, and so on. Complicating all this was a new epidemic (possibly measles) that hit the empire around 250 C.E. Meanwhile, all this would feed back into the ongoing cycle of coinage debasement discussed above, which then generated more revolts, civil wars, invasions, etc.

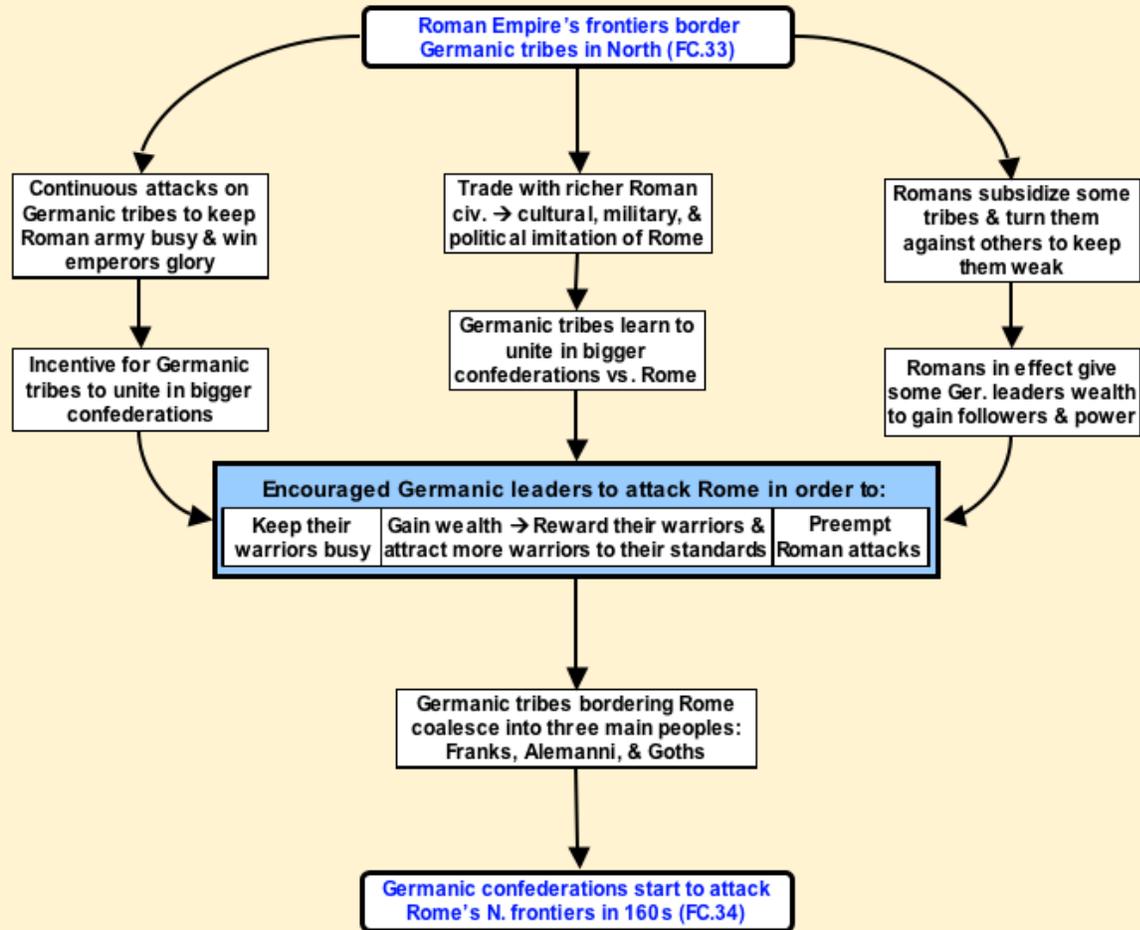
The fifty-year period starting with the reign of Maximinus the Thracian in 235 C.E. was one of the most turbulent and chaotic periods in history, making it extremely difficult to discuss in any detail. At one point, eighteen different men were each claiming they were the emperors of Rome. At the low point of these troubles, the Emperor Gallienus controlled no more than Italy, Greece, Illyria (modern Yugoslavia), and North Africa.

Many of the invaders crashing across the frontiers were new tribes, such as the Goths, whom growing population pressures had forced to migrate toward the Roman Empire. Since these newcomers had little or no prior contact with Rome, they looted and plundered with incredible ferocity, murdering thousands of helpless people whose only crime was being in the path of conquest. Parts of the empire that had seen no wars for centuries were subjected to devastating raids while the army was largely busy making and unmaking emperors. To the East, a new and more aggressive neighbor, Sassanid Persia, had replaced the Parthians. The Persians probably would have overrun the whole eastern half of the Roman Empire, except that the independent oasis city of Palmyra stopped them and then basically ruled the East for itself.

Luckily, a series of remarkably tough and capable emperors emerged from Illyria to restore the Roman world's boundaries. The most important of these emperors, Aurelian (270-275), attacked and destroyed Palmyra and its famous queen, Zenobia. This restored the eastern frontier. Aurelian then reclaimed Gaul, Spain, and Britain to restore the Western frontiers as well and earn himself the title: "Restorer of the World". Despite the remarkable accomplishments of Aurelian and the other Illyrian emperors, they were all murdered by their own troops. Finally, in 284, an even more remarkable emperor, Diocletian, came to the throne and started to put the empire back on its feet. It was this emperor who put an end to the half-century of anarchy that had come close to destroying the Roman Empire.

FC34A The Consolidation of the Germanic Threat (c.100-300C.E.)

FC.34A THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE GERMANIC THREAT (c.100-300 C.E.)

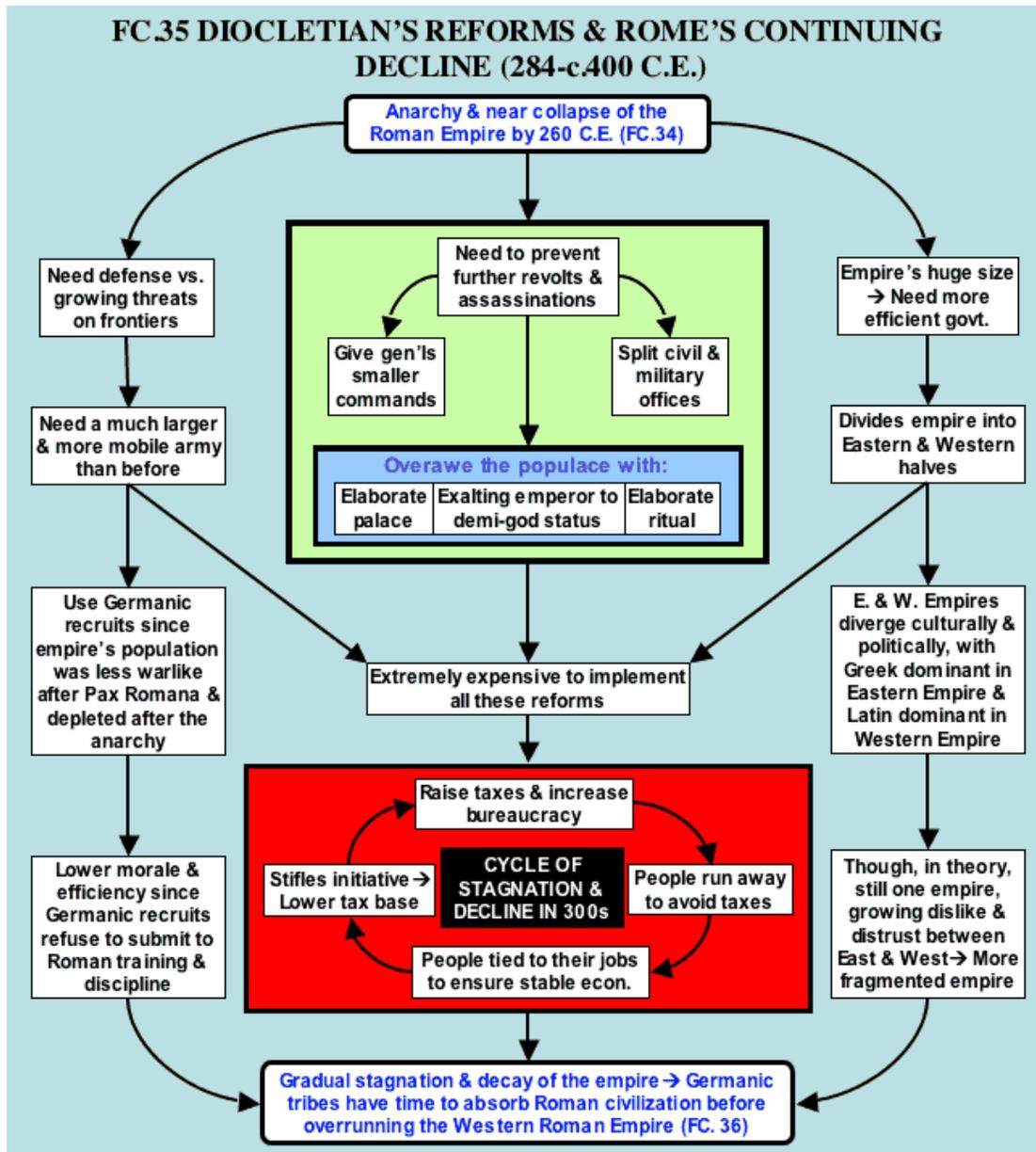


The invasions of the Roman Empire by Germanic tribes starting c.160C.E. seems in hindsight like a sudden eruption of a brand new threat. However, the growth of these tribes spanned two centuries before they were able to successfully challenge Rome. There were three main lines of development in this regard, two of them amounting to aggressive policies on the Romans' part. The most blatant of these was a policy of mounting continuous attacks on the Germanic tribes bordering the empire not just in order to keep them at bay, but also to keep the legions busy and to win glory for the emperors. Naturally, this provided incentive for various Germanic tribes to unite in bigger confederations. The first notable example of such a confederation was that of the Marcomanni who broke through the Danube frontier defenses in the 160s and occupied so much of Marcus Aurelius' reign. Another Roman policy was to subsidize some tribes and turn them against others to keep them all weak and divided. In the long run, this sometimes backfired, because it gave some Germanic leaders the wealth to attract followers and build up their own power. In addition to wars, there were other points of contact between the Germanic tribes and the richer Roman civilization. Trade was the most obvious, but there were men who crossed the frontier to fight in the Roman army, as well as others who were taken as slaves by the Romans and made their way back home. Through these contacts they learned Roman military and diplomatic techniques, which helped them unite in bigger confederations and fight more effectively against the legions.

Eventually, all these factors encouraged Germanic leaders to attack Rome for a variety of reasons. One was to keep their own warriors busy. Another was to win plunder with which they could reward their warriors and attract new ones

to their standards. Finally, such raids into Roman territory would hopefully keep the Romans off balance and preempt Roman attacks on their territories. By the mid second century, we can see various Germanic tribes coalescing into several large confederations and peoples: the Marcomanni, Franks, Goths, and Alemanni. Pressure kept building up between and behind these peoples, unleashing the first of their invasions, that of the Marcomanni, in the 160s. Unfortunately, that was only the beginning of centuries of such conflict.

FC35 Diocletian's reforms & the later Roman Empire (284-395)



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When Diocletian took the throne in 284, he found an empire in shambles from 50 years of civil wars, invasions, and plague. The population was decimated and demoralized. Many of the peasants had become serfs tied to the soil for

local lords in return for protection. Large sections of the empire's agriculture and trade were wrecked. The coinage was debased to the point of being almost worthless. The frontiers were under constant pressure. And the army was in serious need of reforms. Everywhere he looked Diocletian saw serious problems, while the means to solve those problems were horribly damaged. Therefore, he concentrated on three issues: defense, creating a more efficient government, and protecting the emperor against revolts and assassination.

Turning to the army, Diocletian saw two needs that worked against each other: the need for efficient defense against the growing threats on his frontiers, and the need for insurance against revolts. The larger the army he created, the more potential there was for revolt. But too small an army meant invasions, which was even worse. Therefore, he increased the army to twice its size under Augustus. And since there were now simultaneous threats on several frontiers, Diocletian also split this army into two parts: stationary frontier militia who could stop small invasions and slow down big ones, and mobile legions, increasingly made of cavalry, that could rush to any trouble spots that the militia could not handle.

Unfortunately, the Roman populace, unused to military service after the Pax Romana and reduced in numbers by the recent anarchy, could not provide the number and quality of recruits that were needed. As a result, the government resorted more and more to recruiting Germanic tribesmen who were willing to fight for Rome for a price. While these recruits were warlike enough, they were generally unwilling to submit to the level of discipline and training that had made the Roman army so effective through the centuries. As a result, the Roman army, especially in the West where roughly half the recruits were Germanic, decayed to a pathetic shell of its former greatness.

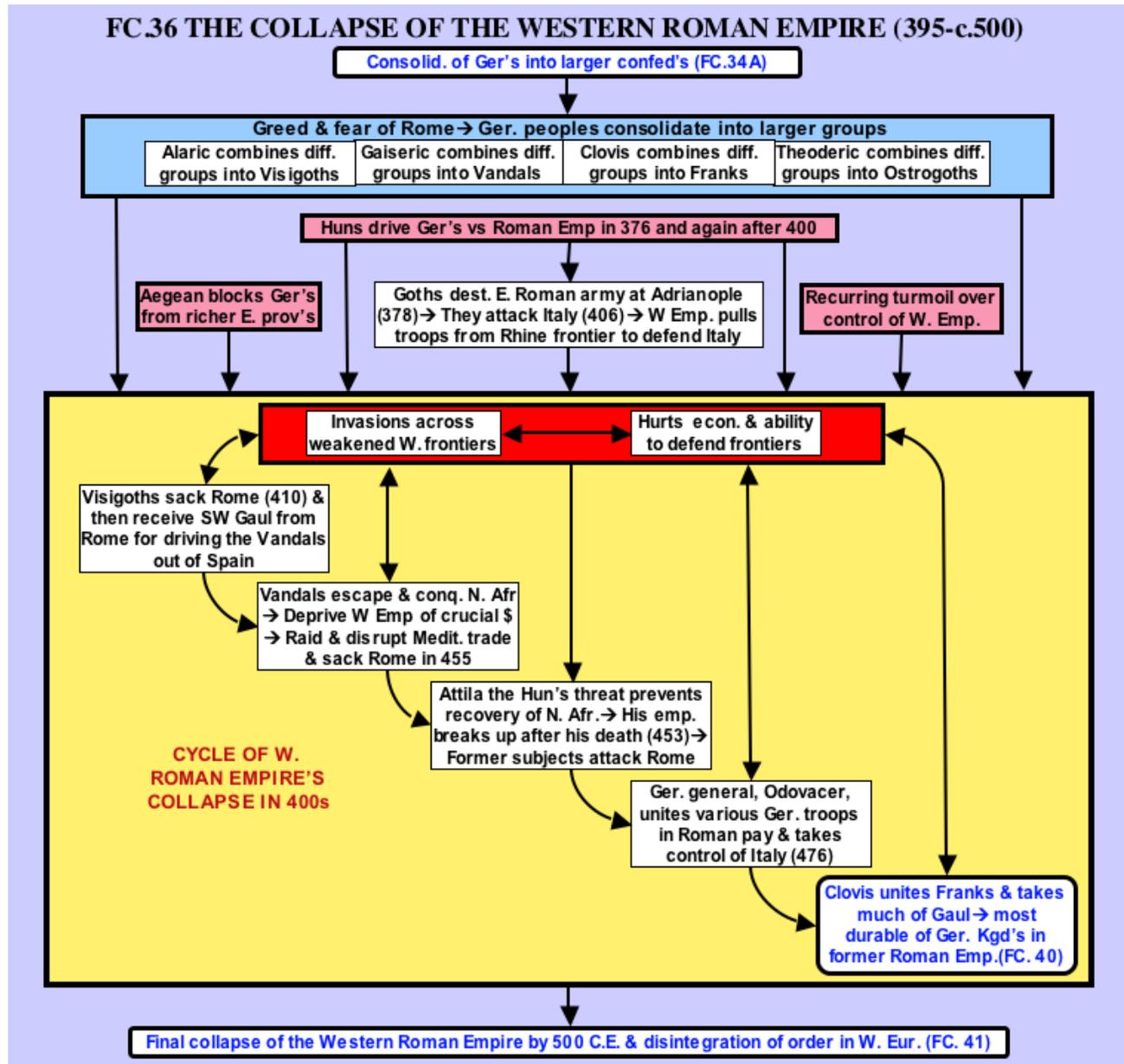
However, this larger army further increased the danger of revolts by powerful generals. Diocletian did three things to protect himself against this. First, he broke the army into smaller commands for each general, while keeping part of the mobile legions under his personal command. Second, he split the control of each province between civil and military authorities. This made it harder for a rebellious general to command such resources as food and money needed for a successful revolt. However, it also meant that civil governors and generals might not cooperate against invasions. Finally, Diocletian isolated himself with elaborate court ritual similar to that of the Persians. Not only did this physically separate him from potential assassins, it also gave him a semi-divine status that made attacking the emperor seem like a sacrilege.

Finally, the empire needed a more efficient government than it had had in the calmer days of the Pax Romana. For one thing, the empire was much too large for one emperor to defend, especially now that several frontiers would come under attack at the same time. Therefore, Diocletian split the empire between the Latin speaking West and the Greek speaking East, with an emperor, known as an Augustus, and separate administration in each half. Technically, there was still one Roman Empire, but more and more it functioned as two independent and, at times, competing empires. Overall, splitting the empire aggravated the natural split between Greek East and Latin West and prevented cooperation when it was most needed.

Unfortunately, a larger army, bureaucracy, and elaborate court required heavy taxes. This merely stifled people's initiative to work hard. In order to ensure a stable tax base, people and their descendants were tied to their stations in life. Not only did a shoemaker, soldier, or farmer have to remain in his profession for life, but his sons had to follow in his footsteps, as did their sons after them and so on. This plus the high taxes reduced people's incentive to work hard and helped create a stagnant economy. The depressed economy meant a lower tax base to draw taxes from, which forced the government to further raise taxes, thus catching Roman society in a vicious feedback cycle similar to the one that triggered the anarchy of the third century.

The Roman Empire under Diocletian presents a depressing picture, with its frontiers under constant pressure, oppressive taxes, and people stuck in their positions in society. However, it was more secure from invasion, which did allow trade and agriculture to revive some. One might doubt whether Roman security was worth the price paid for it. However, Diocletian did accomplish one thing of importance for later civilization. He propped the Roman Empire back up for two more centuries, allowing the new tribes along the northern frontiers to become more accustomed to Roman civilization through trade, raiding its borders, and serving as mercenaries in its army. When the western half of the empire finally fell by 500 C.E., these tribes were more willing to try to preserve Roman civilization and pass its heritage on to the Middle Ages and eventually to our own culture.

FC36 The collapse of the Western Roman Empire (395-c.500)



Why the West?

For the century since Diocletian, generally capable and energetic emperors had ruled the empire. However, the death of Theodosius the Great in 395 C.E. marked a turning point in Roman history as the Western half of the empire steadily slipped into oblivion. There were several reasons why the West fell and the East survived. First of all, the East, with its older civilizations and more established trade routes, was considerably richer than the West, so it could buy off the barbarians until it found the strength to fight them.

The second factor was the barbarization of the Roman army. Depopulation and centuries of peace made it hard to get enough qualified recruits for the army. As a result, the Romans had turned more and more to enlisting Germanic tribesmen in their ranks. In the East, there were still areas where good native recruits could be found to balance out the

number of barbarians. The West, having few good native recruits, relied more heavily on Germanic recruits. By 400 C.E., they made up an estimated half of the Roman army in the West and ruined its effectiveness by refusing to submit to Roman discipline. Not only that, but the high military commands were also often held by men from these tribes who spent much of their time intriguing for political power rather than defending the empire.

A third factor was that the West had two large frontiers, the Rhine and Danube, to guard against the barbarians, while the East had only the Danube. Granted, the Eastern Empire also had to deal with Persia, but it was often preoccupied with threats on its own borders, in particular from the Huns. Finally, the East had fairly capable emperors after 450 C.E., while the West never had a good emperor after Theodosius I's death in 395.

How and why the barbarians took over

Popular imagination tends to see the final collapse of the empire in the West as a cataclysmic wave of Germanic tribes overrunning the Roman world. In fact, it was more a case of barbarians infiltrating a civilized society and destroying it from within. The century between the military disaster at Adrianople and the final collapse of the empire in the West did not see a single major victory of barbarians over a Roman army. Instead, in some cases, the Romans freely let in individuals or even whole tribes, which was the case with the Visigoths in 376. In other cases, tribes just walked in when legions were pulled from a frontier to revolt or meet an invasion or revolt elsewhere. That is how such tribes as the Angles, Saxons, Jutes, Visigoths, and Alans got into the empire.

Once inside the empire, the tribes would loot and pillage, but they were also anxious to gain legal status and Roman titles. In the case of a few exceptions, such as the Saxons who had little previous contact with Roman civilization, the invading tribes wanted to become a legal part of the Roman Empire, not destroy it. Long after the Empire in the West was gone, the legal fiction of its existence persisted, both at the Eastern Empire's court in Constantinople, and among the peoples who settled in the West. In fact, the idea of the Roman Empire was so strong among these people that in 800 C.E., three centuries after its fall, the imperial title was revived in the West. The Holy Roman Empire, as this revival of Roman grandeur was called, lived on at least as an idea for 1000 years. Finally in 1806, Napoleon declared the Holy Roman Empire dead, largely to make room for his own imperial ambitions with Roman style titles and military standards. The idea of Rome did not die easily.

The end of the empire in the West

started with the Visigoths. In 376, they had been let into the Eastern Empire to escape an even more ferocious people, the Huns. When the Roman authorities failed to adequately care for these refugees, they revolted and destroyed an entire Roman army and the emperor Valens at the battle of Adrianople in 378. Theodosius I managed to settle them down in the Balkans until 395 when he died and his weak sons, Arcadius and Honorius, took the thrones of the Eastern and Western empires respectively. The Visigoths' king, Alaric, who wanted Roman titles and lands for himself and his people, took the opportunity to cause trouble again. The Eastern Empire managed to divert the Visigoths into Italy, thus shoving the problem onto the Western Empire, which responded to this threat by pulling troops from the Rhine frontier.

This triggered a pattern of events much like the cycle of anarchy in the third century C.E., only this time, no Aurelian or Diocletian emerged to save the Empire. Once a tribe was in the empire, it would loot and pillage, wrecking the empire's economy and lowering its tax base. The increased military burden and decreased means to meet it would weaken the empire's ability to provide an adequate defense, causing more tribes to break in and repeat the pattern. Thus the Visigoths, Vandals, Saxons, Huns, and Franks in turn would benefit from this cycle and also perpetuate it, allowing the next people to come in, and so on.

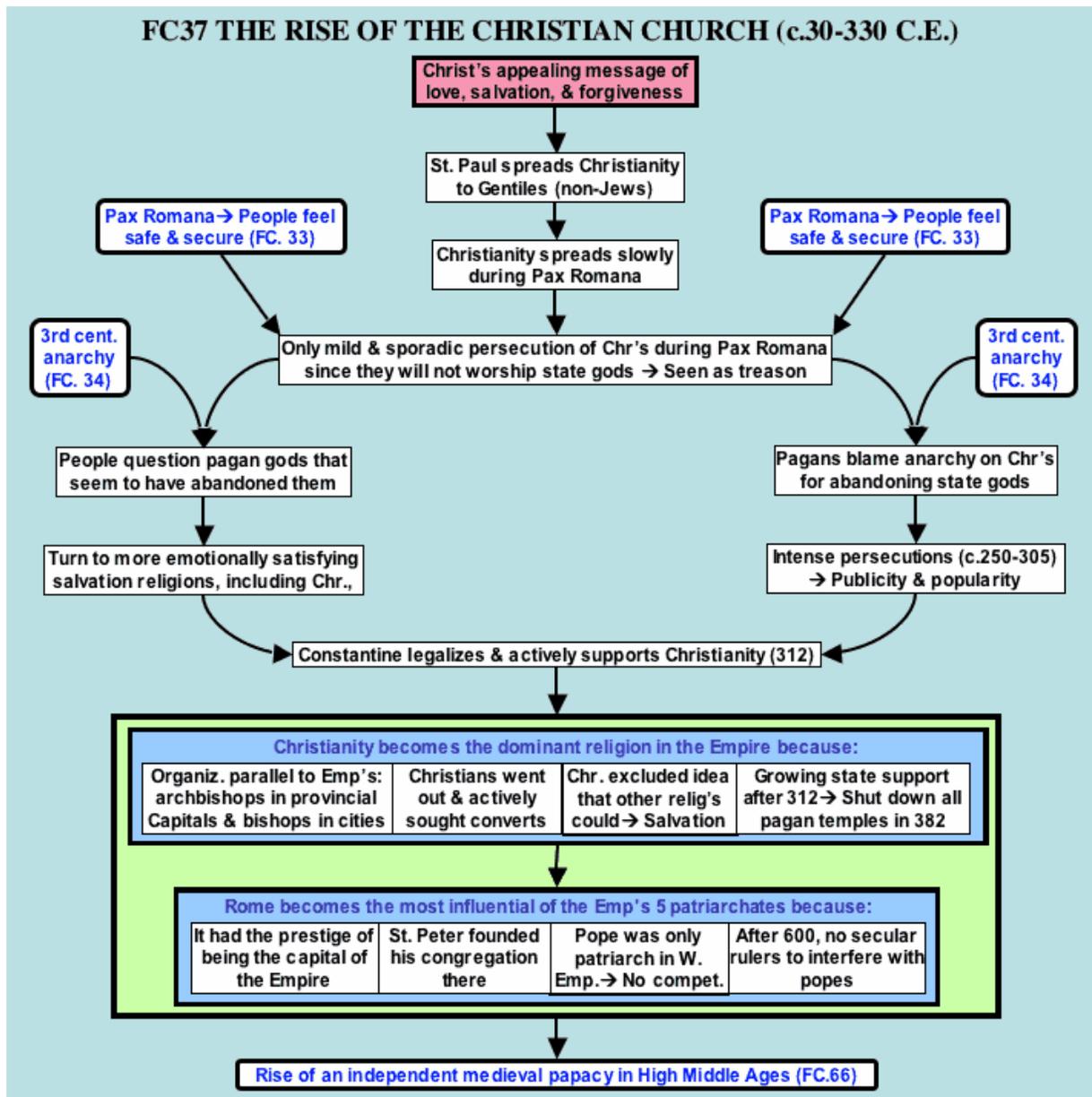
The Visigoths who started this cycle managed to sack Rome in 410. Pulling troops from the Rhine frontier to meet this threat allowed the Vandals and other tribes to invade Gaul, Spain, and eventually North Africa. The loss of North Africa meant the peace and unity of the Mediterranean were disrupted, further stretching Rome's dwindling defenses and resources. In 455, the Vandals sailed to Italy and sacked Rome in much worse fashion than the Visigoths had. Meanwhile, all this turmoil plus an attempt by a rebellious general, Constantine, to seize the throne had stripped Britain of its legions, and the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes started crossing the Channel. At this point, Britain virtually dropped from the sight of recorded history.

By 450, the Western Empire's material resources were so depleted that there was little or nothing that could save it. When Attila the Hun demanded a huge tribute from the Western Empire, Rome did manage one final military victory in alliance with the Visigoths and other tribes against the much more dangerous Huns. Attila's death soon afterward led to the break-up of his empire, which unleashed his subject tribes against Rome. While Germanic generals in Italy intrigued against one another, setting up puppet emperors in rapid succession, the decrepit remains of the Western Empire came crashing down, and various tribes came pouring in to carve out new kingdoms on its ruins. The last and, as it would turn out, most important tribe, the Franks, now started to make its move to carve out its own kingdom in northern Gaul. As it turned out, the Franks would be the tribe to contribute the most to the transition from the ancient world to Western Civilization.

The last legally recognized emperor of the West, Julius Nepos, died in exile in 480. Although the eastern emperors in Constantinople claimed that they now ruled over the whole empire, for all intents and purposes the Roman Empire in the West was gone. The Dark Ages would descend upon the West, while the Eastern Roman, or Byzantine, Empire managed to survive, revive, and attain new heights of its own in the centuries ahead. The heritage of antiquity would live on, but a new era in history was dawning: the Middle Ages.

The Early Middle Ages Unit 5: The Early Middle Ages

FC37 The rise of the Christian Church to c.300 CE



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“Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's and unto God that which is God's”— *The Bible*

If one is to understand Western Civilization, one has to understand Christianity and the history of the Christian Church. No single faith or institution has had a more profound impact on Western Civilization than Christianity. However, many of its influences may not be so readily apparent because they are so deeply rooted in our past and therefore are harder to recognize. One example is the work ethic that traces its roots back to medieval Christian monasteries. Other examples abound, but suffice it to say that the Christian heritage is a significant part of our culture today, whether or not we belong to the Christian faith.

During the Middle Ages, the influence of Christianity was much more obvious. In fact, Christianity played such a dominant role in medieval life and culture that we still refer to the Middle Ages as the Age of Faith. During that time, the art and architecture were primarily religious in nature. The calendar was the Church calendar whose holidays (holy days) were those of the Christian faith. The daily lives of the people, even their diets, were largely controlled by Christian dictates. And politics were tightly interwoven with religion and the Church. Christianity, which traces its beginnings all the way back to the time of the Roman Empire, is still thriving as one of the world's great religions.

Therefore, it is a major bridge linking the ancient world and its civilization to the medieval world and ultimately our own.

In its basic form, Christianity is a simple religion centering around the brief life of a humble Jew, Jesus Christ. According to Christian dogma, Jesus was the Son of God, but miraculously born in human form to a virgin named Mary. For several years he performed various miracles as proof of his divinity and preached a simple but profound doctrine of love and forgiveness, faith in God, and penitence for our sins. At the age of 33, Jesus was brutally executed on a cross because of his teachings. However, on the third day after his execution, he supposedly rose from the dead, seen as further proof of his divinity. Forty days later, after appearing to other disciples and followers, he ascended into Heaven. He said that sometime in the future he would return for a final judgment day whereby the dead would be resurrected and go either to Heaven or Hell according to their faith.

Christianity is a monotheistic religion (i.e.- believing in just one god) that is derived from Judaism. The God of the Jews in the Old Testament is also the God of Christianity. However, there is one aspect of Christian theology that has confused people down through the ages and led to untold controversy and even bloodshed. That is the belief that the god of Christianity is a triune god or Trinity. In other words, there are three aspects to God, but all are parts of one united god. They are: God the Father and creator; Jesus Christ, his son who came to earth as a human in order to save us from our sins by giving up his life on the cross; and the Holy Spirit which inspires us with faith. Through the years, people have disagreed, at times violently, over the exact nature of each of these aspects and how they relate to one another. The various points of view and arguments to support them are too subtle, involved, and oftentimes confusing to relate here, although they would emerge from time to time with tremendous impact.

Early history (c.30-311 C.E.)

Christ's ministry left two things of vital importance to the later success of Christianity. One was an appealing message of love, forgiveness, and eternal salvation for all people. The other was the mission for Christ's apostles and all Christians to spread this new faith. After Christ's departure, his followers started spreading his message in order to win new converts to the faith. At first, preaching this message was confined to Jews, and the ruling Romans saw it as merely a sect or offshoot of the Jewish religion. But a critical turning point in Christianity came with St. Paul of Tarsus, who saw Christianity as a religion for all peoples: Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews). Therefore, he started spreading the word of Christ throughout the Roman world.

Thanks to its message and this preaching, the Christian religion grew in popularity slowly but steadily during its first century and a half (c.30-180). Hollywood and popular imagination have romanticized and exaggerated the persecutions of the Christians during this period. The truth is that Christianity during this time was still a relatively minor religion that drew little attention to itself from the Roman authorities. There were occasional persecutions in these early years, not so much for the Christians' religious beliefs as their refusal to worship the Roman emperor and state gods. Such worship was more like a pledge of allegiance than a religious act to most Romans, and refusal to do it was seen as an act of treason. The Christians could have freely practiced their religion if they would only have paid the empire this worship.

However, unlike most other ancient religions where the religion was intimately tied up with the state and society as a whole, Christianity was a very personal religion that drew a sharp distinction between what one owed to the state on the one hand and to God on the other. Therefore, Christians refused to worship the state gods and that was where they got into trouble. During the Pax Romana, the persecutions were few and intermittent, and most Christians could practice their religion with little or no interference. Times were good and the authorities saw little harm coming from the odd habits of this minor sect. In the third century all that changed.

The great persecutions

The third century was a time of intense anarchy. Civil wars, barbarian invasions, and plague wracked the empire from end to end and threatened its very existence. This seems to have affected Christianity in two very different ways that both worked ultimately toward one end. First of all, the widespread troubles of the time caused many people to question the truth of their old pagan religions whose gods did not seem to be protecting Rome anymore. Consequently, people started turning to new, more emotionally satisfying salvation religions to comfort them in such troubled times.

Christianity was just one such religion that gained converts during this turmoil. Other cults worshipping the Persian Mithra, Asia Minor's earth goddess Cybele, and Egypt's Trinity of Isis, Horus, and Osiris also gained in popularity.

The second effect of the third century anarchy was more intense persecutions of Christians. As long as the Empire was peaceful and prosperous, the refusal of the Christians to pay homage to the emperor and state gods was usually overlooked. However, when things started falling apart, many Romans blamed the Christians for abandoning the old gods who in turn abandoned Rome. The late third and early fourth centuries saw the most intense periods of persecutions, the worst coming under Diocletian and his successors from 303 to 311 C.E. Ironically, the persecutions helped the Christian Church, because they gave the Christians publicity that won them widespread sympathy and many new converts. Consequently, right on the heels of its darkest hours of persecution came the Church's greatest victory: legalization and acceptance as the virtual state religion of the Roman Empire.

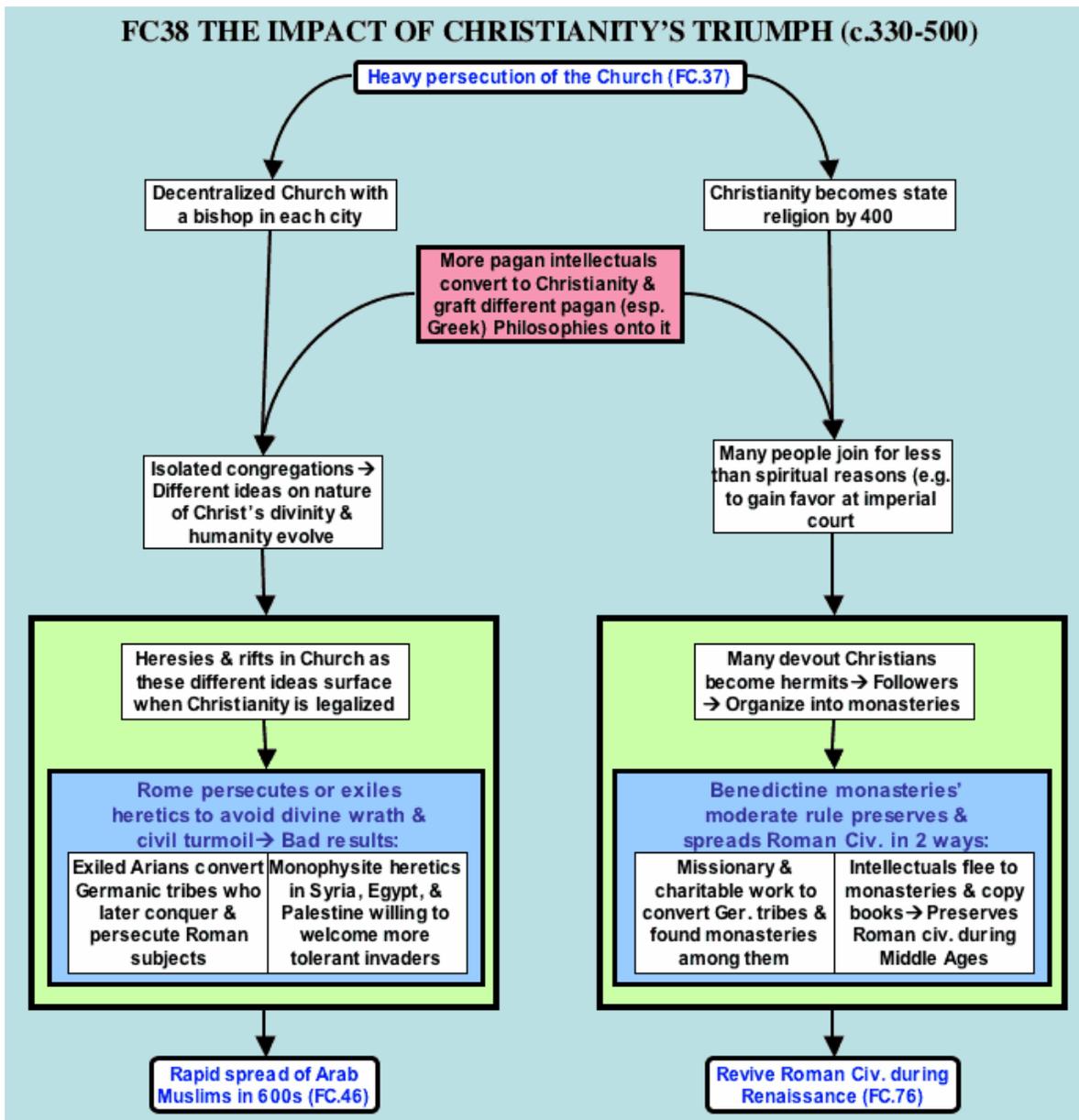
Constantine and triumph of the Church

The man who gave Christianity its big break was the emperor Constantine. Legend has it that on the eve of a major battle against a rival for the throne, Constantine saw a vision of a cross in the sky with the words: "In this sign conquer". Taking this as a message from God, Constantine placed a Christian emblem on his troops' shields and then won the battle. However true this legend may be, the fact is that in 311, Constantine declared toleration for Christianity in the Western half of the Roman Empire. When he took over the eastern half in 323, he also legalized it there. From this point on, the Christian Church quickly became the dominant religion in the Roman Empire, largely from the favor bestowed upon it by Constantine and his successors.

The question arises as to why Christianity triumphed over other competing salvation religions. Besides strong state support, there are five main reasons. For one thing, it was exclusive. Unlike most ancient religions which tolerated other faiths, the Christians said a person could belong to only one faith, Christianity, and be saved. Such a belief naturally scared many people away from other competing faiths. Second, Christianity actively sought converts. Most other religions were there for other people to accept, but did not go out of their way to gain new members. In sharp contrast to this, Christianity did seek new members, which gave it a decisive edge. For another thing, Christianity was secretive and treasonous. As seen above, this led to persecution, which led to publicity and popularity. Fourth, from the reign of Constantine onward (with the brief exception of Julian's reign), the Church received strong state support that put increasing pressure on pagans to convert until Theodosius I shut down all pagan temples in 393. Finally, Christianity was well organized much along the lines of the Roman Empire. As the faith spread across the empire, it especially caught on in cities. Consequently, each city, which was already a center of Roman administration, became a Christian center as well under a bishop. Each province, besides having a governor to rule it, also had an archbishop to rule the affairs of its bishops in the different cities. Diocletian had divided the empire into four large districts called prefectures. The Church, similar to this, had five main centers where Church patriarchs resided. Four of these centers (Constantinople, Jerusalem, Antioch, and Alexandria) were in the East, reflecting where Christianity's main strength was then.

The fifth patriarchal center, Rome, was destined to become the most influential for several reasons. First of all, it was the capital of the empire, giving it a good deal of prestige. Second, Peter, the most important of Christ's disciples, had started Rome's first Christian congregation, which also gave Rome prestige. Finally, after 600 C.E., Rome was free from the control of the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) emperors. This made life more dangerous for Rome's popes (patriarchs), but it also gave them more freedom to expand their influence when more peaceful times came after 1000 C.E.

FC38 The impact of the Church's triumph (c.300-500)



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“The city is full of mechanics and slaves, who are all of them profound theologians and preach in the shops and in the streets. If you desire a man to change a piece of silver, he informs you wherein the Son differs from the Father; if you ask the price of a loaf, you are told by way of reply that the Son is inferior to the Father; if you inquire whether the bath is ready, the answer is that the Son was made out of nothing.”— *Gregory of Nyssa*

The favor Constantine and his successors showed the Christian Church increasingly made it the state religion of the empire until 393, when the emperor Theodosius ordered public worship in the pagan temples to be ended throughout the empire. Christianity had triumphed, but success would also bring its problems.

The root of the Church's problems lay largely in the heavy persecutions of the third century that did two things. For one thing, they created a more decentralized Church by driving into hiding Christians who had lost contact with one another. On the other hand, the persecutions also helped lead to the triumph of Christianity as the virtual state religion by giving it publicity that attracted converts. In addition, as Christianity gained popularity, formerly pagan intellectuals joined the Church in greater numbers and started grafting pagan, especially Greek, philosophies onto Christianity. These factors would contribute to two very different lines of development in the history of the Church: the spread of religious disputes and heresies and the rise of monasteries.

Religious disputes and heresies

One of the more confusing aspects of Christianity was the nature of the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and the relation of the three parts to one another. During the persecutions, communities of Christians isolated from one another had developed different ideas on the Trinity. Christianity's legalization meant these different congregations which persecution had forced underground (literally in some cases) now could come out into the open to find they had very different ideas on this point. Added to this was the growing number of intellectuals joining the Church who, instead of just accepting Christianity as a simple religion, saw various subtle interpretations of the concept of a triune god. Confounding the confusion was the vague wording of the Bible itself, which also led to different points of view.

The most serious of these disputes centered on the relationship of the divine and human natures of Christ. The first of these, the Arian dispute, flared up soon after Constantine had legalized Christianity. The issue was whether Christ, being the begotten son of God the Father, was co-eternal with the Father, and thus fully divine. An Egyptian priest, Arius, said he was not co-eternal with the Father. The Arian view, as it was called, spread widely throughout the Roman world, causing heated arguments and even violence. Therefore, instead of creating a unifying factor for his empire by legalizing and favoring Christianity, Constantine had unleashed a wholly new type of controversy that threatened to tear the empire apart. Given the Church's close relationship now with the Church, Constantine and later emperors felt they could not tolerate religious disputes and heresies.

There was a general and unfortunate pattern to these religious disputes that made a correct solution to them practically impossible to achieve. A new interpretation of Christianity would pop up and gain converts. This would lead to arguments and at times bloodshed. A church council, backed by the emperor, would denounce the new belief as a heresy (wrong belief) and either exile the heretics or persecute them within Rome's borders in order to preserve the public peace. Unfortunately, dealing with heresies in this manner usually backfired much as imperial persecution of Christianity had backfired a century earlier.

Today, many people may wonder why people and governments got so emotionally involved in these disputes. The answer revolves largely around Christianity's exclusiveness. It was seen as the only true religion and path to salvation. Along those same lines, one had to have exactly the right belief in order to be saved. Just the slightest deviation from that belief could mean eternal agony in Hell. The Roman government also believed in supporting the exact right belief in order to ensure God's favor and protection. Tolerating heresies could lead to God's disfavor, and any military defeats or natural disasters were interpreted in that light. Also, since the Roman Empire had tied its fortunes securely to the Christian Church, its religious and political policies were tightly interwoven. Tolerating religious heresies was seen as the same as tolerating treason. Therefore, from the later Roman Empire to the early modern era (c.300-1700), religion and politics went hand in hand, and a decision in one realm generally had serious implications in the other realm as well. The history of two of these heresies, the Arians and Monophysites, especially shows this mentality & its results in action.

In the case of Arius, Constantine called a council of Christian bishops together at Nicaea in Asia Minor in 325. Arius was logically shown to be wrong, his beliefs were declared a heresy, and he himself was exiled. Arius then went to the northern tribes whom he converted to his brand of Christianity. A century later, when these tribes conquered the Western Roman Empire, they did it as Arian Christians. Now it was the Catholic Christians, who made up most of the Roman population, which were often persecuted.

Another heresy, that of the Monophysites, was suppressed in Egypt, Syria, and Palestine, which led to strong undercurrents of resentment and even rebelliousness against the Roman government. When the more tolerant Arab Muslims invaded these provinces in the 600's, instead of meeting stiff Christian resistance, they found the populace oftentimes welcoming them against Roman oppression.

Poverty, chastity, and obedience: the rise of monasteries

The success and favored status of Christianity also brought other problems. When Christianity was an outlawed religion, the motives and sincerity of its members were rarely in doubt since there was nothing to gain and plenty to lose by joining the Church. When Christianity became the favored religion of the Roman Empire, all that changed. There was an influx of new members joining for reasons of social, political, or material advancement. Also, the influx

of intellectuals who grafted pagan philosophies upon the Christian faith was complicating the religion almost beyond recognition. The purity of the Church's membership was becoming seriously diluted.

This upset many of the more devout members of the Church, and they wanted to purge it of such worldliness. Since they could not drive the new members from the Church, they retreated into the desert to live pure Christian lives away from worldly temptations. In order to cleanse themselves of their sins, some of these men performed incredible feats of endurance nearly to the point of self-destruction. One such feat was to sit on the top of a pillar for years at a time. Another was abstinence from food almost to the point of starvation. As word of these "super-hermits" spread, other devout Christians moved out to the desert to be near them and share in their holiness. Soon the desert was so crowded with these people that they had to be organized into communities called monasteries. In the East, St. Basil was the man who established the first monastic rule.

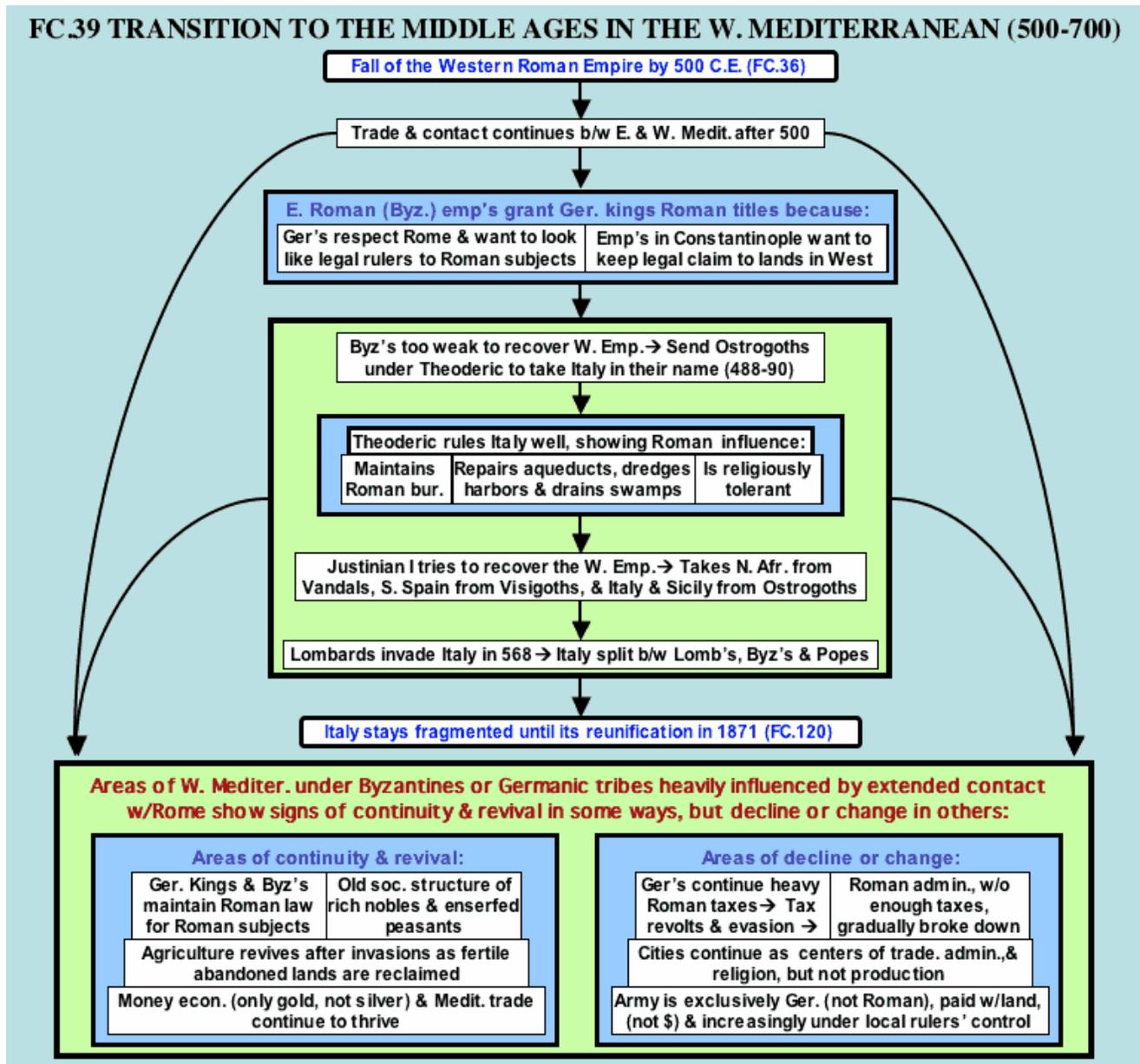
In the West, it was St. Benedict. After a fairly sinful and dissolute youth, this man launched a career of violently trying to purge himself of his sins. At last, he arrived at a more moderate concept of Christianity and formed a monastic order known as the Benedictine Rule. The Benedictine Rule reflected its founder's more moderate views, though it was still strict by modern standards. A new monk took three vows: poverty (no material possessions), chastity (clean living), and obedience (to God and the superiors in the monastery). The day was divided into roughly equal parts of prayer, work, and rest. Incredible acts of self-torture or self-denial were not expected. Instead the monk worked around the monastery and in the fields, the belief being that idle hands are the devil's playground. Our own modern work ethic is directly descended from this idea.

The moderate expectations of the Benedictine Rule led to the spread of their monasteries all over Western Europe. As the orderliness of the Roman Empire gave way to the anarchy of barbarian rule, monasteries and monks would provide the one shining light of civilization in the West. These quiet and vigilant men bravely spread the word of their religion beyond the frontiers of the old Roman Empire, thus spreading civilization to new areas as well as preserving it in old ones. Monasteries were also the main centers for any kind of social and economic relief in the Dark Ages. The poor and destitute looked to them for food, shelter, and protection. The sick looked to them for hospital care. And travelers looked to them for safe havens on their journeys.

Another important and somewhat ironic aspect of monasteries was that many of the pagan intellectuals whom the hermits had originally tried to avoid were now showing up in the monasteries in an effort to flee the growing anarchy as the Roman Empire fell. These men, who had received a pagan classical training brought their love of that pagan culture with them and devoted much of their time to copying pagan works of literature. Thus ironically, monasteries, which started as a somewhat anti-intellectual movement, were the primary agents for preserving ancient pagan culture during the Middle Ages by carrying on this tradition of book copying.

Throughout the Middle Ages, the contributions and monasteries and of the Church overall were immensely important to our culture. The early Church was very much a part of Roman Civilization and absorbed a good deal of it into its own theology and ritual as shown by keeping the mass in Latin until very recently. As the Roman Empire faded from history, the Christian Church survived to carry on the Roman heritage along with its own unique contributions to Western Civilization.

FC39The Mediterranean's transition to the Middle Ages



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Introduction: the “Dark Ages”

The disintegration of the Roman Empire in the West left in its wake a patchwork of Germanic kingdoms founded on its ruins. The Germanic general, Odovacer, ruled Italy. The Visigoths held Spain and southern Gaul. North Africa was the realm of the Vandals. Britain was divided between the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes, known to us simply as the Anglo Saxons. And the rest of Gaul was starting to fall under the sway of what would eventually become the most successful of these tribes, the Franks. In addition, there were various minor tribes scattered throughout the West trying to carry on an independent existence: Burgundians, Lombards, Heruls, Gepids, Alans, Sueves, and so on.

Traditionally historians have described the centuries following Rome's fall as a barbaric and chaotic period known as the Dark Ages. However, recent historical research shows a much more gradual transition to the Middle Ages, especially in the Western Mediterranean where Roman influence was more deeply rooted and contact continued with the Eastern Roman (AKA Byzantine) Empire.

Converging interests

To a large extent the fall of the Western Empire saw the interests of the Germanic rulers in the West and Byzantine emperors in Constantinople largely converging. This was largely because of the attitudes that the Germanic tribes and emperors in the Eastern Roman Empire had toward the situation and each other.

From many of the barbarians' point of view, rather than coming to destroy the empire, they had been looking for new lands within the empire and Roman titles to go along with those lands. For example, the Visigoths originally entered the empire as allies of Rome. Throughout their wanderings, they continued to see themselves as such allies, and occasionally acted accordingly. They settled in Gaul and Spain as part of a deal with Rome where they would clear other tribes out of those provinces for the empire. They also fought at Rome's side against a much more deadly common enemy, the Huns. When dividing their new lands between themselves and their Roman subjects, the invaders even tried to follow an old Roman custom known as *hospitalitas*, where the conquerors would take one-third of any conquered lands and leave the other two-thirds for the natives.

Therefore, the Germanic kings wanted Roman titles for two basic reasons. First of all, they had sincere respect for the accomplishments of Rome with its vast empire, network of roads and incredible system of aqueducts. Even if they had contempt for the unwarlike inhabitants, they still stood in awe of the Roman achievement and wanted to carry it on, although ultimately they failed. Secondly, holding Roman titles made the Germanic rulers look more like legitimate rulers to the Roman natives under them. This was especially important since most of these tribes were Arian Christians facing the hostility of their Roman Catholic subjects.

On the other hand, the emperors in Constantinople still felt the lands in the West were rightfully theirs and wanted to keep their legal claim to those lands alive until they were strong enough to take them back. Therefore, they granted Roman titles to the Germanic rulers in the West to maintain the legal fiction that the Empire was still alive in the West and owed allegiance to the one emperor in Constantinople. This way, they could bide their time until the Eastern Empire was strong enough to reclaim the West in reality as well. Until that time came they would have to follow other strategies.

One such strategy was to play different tribes off against one another. This was especially tempting in the case of the Ostrogoths (cousins of the Visigoths) who were troubling the Eastern Empire. The Byzantines decided to kill two birds with one stone by diverting the Ostrogoths into Italy, giving them the legal right to settle there. This way, they would be rid of the Ostrogoths while weakening them and Odovacer in the fight for Italy, hopefully, opening the way for eventual reconquest by the Byzantines. Therefore, in 487, the Ostrogothic king, Theoderic, led his people into Italy, which they soon conquered.

Theoderic's rule in Italy is a perfect example of how well some of the Germanic tribes had absorbed Roman culture during the last 200 years. While the army consisted solely of Ostrogothic warriors, Theoderic was smart enough to keep the Roman civil servants in charge of day-to-day government operations. Although the Ostrogoths were Arian Christians, Theoderic showed tolerance for his Roman Catholic subjects who formed the majority of the population. He also had swamps drained, harbors dredged, and aqueducts repaired. As a result of this enlightened rule, Italy, which had been a parasite on the rest of the empire for centuries, was self-sufficient for the first time in 500 years. However, trouble was looming on the horizon.

Justinian and the reconquest of Italy

In 527, Justinian I became emperor in Constantinople. He has been called the last of the Roman emperors, since he spoke Latin and was clean-shaven. After him, the emperors spoke Greek, wore beards, and are generally called Byzantines rather than Romans. Justinian also saw things from a Roman point of view and worked to restore the old boundaries of the empire. Therefore, he turned the Eastern Roman Empire's resources toward reconquering the West.

His first campaign against the Vandals in North Africa was a quick and resounding success. Easy living had sapped the Vandals' vitality, and the Catholic population hated these Arian Christian rulers. From North Africa, the Byzantine forces moved north against the Ostrogoths. Sicily and Southern Italy fell almost without a fight, and it seemed Justinian's dream of a reunited Roman Empire might come true. Then trouble hit as the Ostrogoths regrouped and counterattacked. What ensued were twenty years of warfare raging up and down Italy. Rome was besieged three times and, for a while, became a virtual ghost town.

In the end, Justinian conquered Italy, but it was a costly victory for both the Eastern Empire and Italy. The cost of his wars in the West, tribute to keep the Persians to the east quiet, and a devastating epidemic (probably Bubonic Plague) left the Eastern Empire exhausted. This opened it up to 200 years of invasions from all directions, which nearly destroyed it.

As far as Italy was concerned, three years after Justinian's death in 565, the Lombards invaded from the north and conquered about half of the peninsula. When Rome was threatened, pope Gregory I had to lead its defense since the Byzantines were unable to defend it any longer. Rome had passed from the city of the Caesars to the city of the Popes. Italy would remain fragmented into a number of warring states for 1300 years until its final reunification in 1871.

A gradual transition

As stated above, historians have revised their traditional view of a sudden collapse of civilization in Western Europe during the early Middle Ages, seeing instead a gradual transition to medieval civilization. This was especially true for the areas surrounding the Mediterranean that were reclaimed by the Byzantines or were ruled by tribes strongly influenced by extended contact with Rome before taking over. However, this period was a mixed bag, showing signs of continuity with the Roman Empire in some ways, but decline or change in others.

There were several areas of continuity and even revival. For one thing, both the Byzantines and Germanic rulers maintained Roman law codes for their Roman subjects. Justinian's codification of Roman law reinforced this trend in areas of Byzantine rule (N. Africa, Italy, and S. Spain). The Church, which maintained its own courts, also used Roman law, spreading its influence among the Frankish, Lombard, Visigothic and Celtic realms.

The social structure of the old Roman lands largely continued as before. Although the old Roman nobility had been expelled by the Vandals and Lombards in North Africa and parts of Italy, they remained influential in Spain, Southern Gaul, and Central Italy, having fled to their country estates to avoid religious persecution and tax collectors in the cities. Over time, many of these nobles would intermarry with the ruling Germanic nobles, blending into a new ruling class that by 700 had even replaced their tripartite Roman names (e.g., Gaius Julius Caesar) with Germanic forms. By the same token, the late imperial trend continued where peasants sought protection from nobles protection in return for their freedom.

After the turmoil of the invasions subsided, agriculture revived somewhat as peasants abandoned marginally productive lands in favor of more fertile ones. This involved dispersal of the population from the safety of the estates to more rural areas where some peasants could maintain or reclaim their freedom from nobles. An abundance of coin hoards indicate trade also continued to thrive across the Mediterranean as Byzantine silks, Egyptian papyrus & natron (for making glass), and Chinese and Indian spices were traded in return for Western products such as grain, pitch, pottery, and slaves. Likewise, Germanic kings and a large number of local mints issued gold, but not silver or bronze, coins according to Byzantine standards. However, the huge purchasing power of gold made trade on a small scale difficult, leading to a gradual deterioration of the gold coinage to conform to real trade conditions. It remains a mystery why the Germanic rulers failed to issue silver and bronze coins.

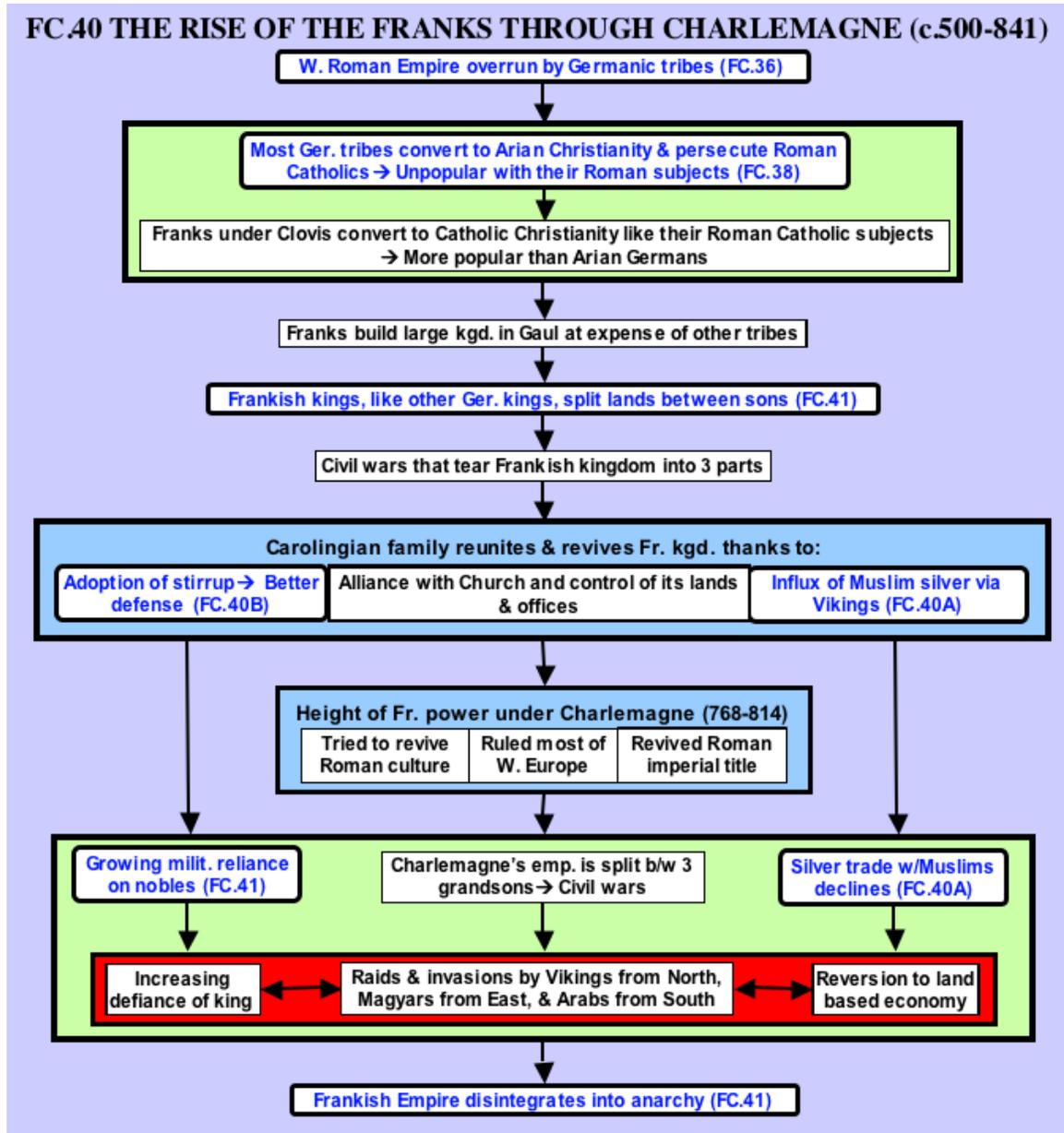
However, there were areas of decline and change existing alongside those of continuity and revival. One unfortunate policy of continuity at first was the oppressive tax system of the late empire and the self-perpetuating bureaucracy needed to run it. However, as rulers tried to squeeze as much as they could from the economy, their subjects often revolted or fled the tax collectors, letting themselves become nobles' serfs in return for protection from the government. As a result, tax revenues diminished, causing gradual break down of the old Roman administration.

Cities overall in the Western Mediterranean went into decline, ceasing to function either as centers of production and consumption or centralized administration (as Roman central government broke down). Wars seriously damaged some cities, such as Milan, Trier, and Arles. Rome especially suffered, with its population declining from an estimated 800,000 in the 300s to 25,000 after the turmoil of the Byzantine re-conquest. However, other cities, such as Pavia and Ravenna in Italy, Toulouse and Paris in France, and Toledo and Barcelona in Spain, revived as centers of local government, trade, or church administration. Such cities were always walled and, if the seat of royal government, mimicked Roman imperial cities with palaces, palace staff, and royal retinues. More often were centers of trade and local administration with a count (from the late imperial *comes*) and/or a bishop over-seeing local administration, justice, and commerce. Bishops were an especially new factor, since they ran their own courts, hospitals, and hostels

for travelers. As agriculture (and church revenues from its lands) revived, bishops became the primary patrons of new buildings. Thus the landscape of early medieval cities saw Roman secular monuments give way to more religious buildings such as churches and bell towers.

The armies of these new states differed greatly from the professional Roman armies of old. For one thing, Germanic rulers usually used only their own people for military service, excluding the Roman population. Also, as government funds declined, soldiers were typically paid with land instead of money. In partial compensation, kings, nobles, and even bishops typically kept their own private armies of retainers, known then as *bucellarii* (Latin for “biscuit eaters”). Thus we see the beginnings of the more private feudal armies of a later age.

FC40 The rise of the Franks (c.500-841)



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Much of Europe's destiny would be tied in with a new Germanic power, the Franks. This tribe had played a minor role in the breakup of the Roman Empire. In fact they had occasionally served as loyal allies, defending Rome's Rhine

frontier against the invasions of the Vandals in 406 and the Huns in 451. However, after 451 when the Western Empire was coming totally unraveled, the Franks made their move and started taking northern Gaul. It was at this time that the first of their great kings, Clovis, emerged.

Clovis was only fifteen when he came to the throne in 481. Despite his youth, he was an ambitious and capable ruler, who made a shrewd and far-reaching move of converting to Catholic Christianity. The story goes that in a desperate move to influence the course of a battle against another tribe, the Alemanni, he prayed to the god of the Christians to give him victory in return for his conversion. For whatever reason, the Franks prevailed, and Clovis kept his promise and became a *Catholic* Christian like his Roman subjects. While the other Germanic tribes were Arian Christians often persecuting and alienating their Roman Catholic subjects, the Franks could count on more loyal support from their Catholic subjects. As a result, the Franks under Clovis and his immediate successors expanded rapidly at the expense of the Arian Christian kingdoms around them. By 600 C.E., this factor of Frankish rulers and Roman subjects united by the Catholic faith made the Frankish kingdom the largest and most powerful of the Germanic states to succeed the Roman Empire in the West

Unfortunately, the Frankish kings shared the other Germanic tribes' concept of the state as the king's property and, as a result, split the kingdom between their sons. Because of this, civil wars and turmoil plagued the Frankish kingdom from the death of Clovis to the early 700's. As a result, the Franks were split into three kingdoms: Austrasia, Neustria, and Burgundy. All were ruled by weak "do nothing kings" that let their kingdoms degenerate into further turmoil.

Luckily, new officials, called mayors of the palace, emerged to rebuild the Frankish state. One of these mayors of the palace, Pepin of Heristal, reunited the Frankish kingdom and laid the foundations for one of the greatest dynasties of the Middle Ages, the Carolingians. Several factors helped in the resurgence of the Franks under the Carolingians. One factor was the decline of the neighboring Germanic kingdoms because of the anarchy and decay generated by their poor understanding of the Roman state they had inherited.

Another factor was the Frankish adoption of the stirrup for warfare. While the Frankish kingdom had been wrecking itself in civil wars and palace intrigues, a dynamic new power had been rising in the East: the Muslim Arabs. United and inspired by their new religion, Islam, the Arabs had swept both to the east and west with incredible speed. A century after the death of the prophet, Mohammed, Muslim armies had conquered North Africa and Spain and were raiding into southern Gaul. In 733, the Frankish mayor of the palace, Charles Martel, turned back an invading Muslim force at the Battle of Tours.

Historians have argued whether this was the defeat of a major invasion or just a large raid. Either way, it apparently saw the dramatic introduction of the use of the stirrup in battle and the rise of mounted knights as shock cavalry that would rule the battlefields of Western Europe for centuries. Since the Franks were the first to adapt the stirrup for this purpose, they gained a decisive military edge over their enemies and a reputation as the fiercest fighters in Western Europe. Writers of the period would typically refer to any warriors from that region as Franks because of that reputation.

The third factor helping the Franks was the natural alliance of kings with the Church which often needed each other's help. This especially held true for the Franks and the pope. Charles Martel and his son, Pepin the Short, continued to rebuild the Frankish state to its previous status as a great power. However, they did this as mayors of the palace, while the "do nothing" Merovingian kings they served did nothing useful except ride around in a cart from estate to estate. Pepin wanted the crown as well as the power and authority, and in 752 he got it. Meanwhile, the Lombards who had invaded Italy soon after Justinian's reconquest were hard pressing the popes. Pepin helped the pope against these enemies in return for his blessing to take the Frankish crown for himself. Soon afterwards, Pepin shaved the king's long hair (the symbol of royalty), packed him off to a monastery, and had himself declared the new king, thus officially establishing the Carolingian dynasty as the ruling family of the Franks.

Archaeological evidence points to a fourth factor helping the Franks: money. Although the Germanic kingdoms were not producing much silver coinage at the time, the Arab Muslim caliphs to the east were. Much of this money was making its way through Russia and the Baltic Sea to the Franks in return for such things as furs and slaves. This increased silver supply gave the Franks the means to expand and consolidate their power and helped pave the way for the greatest ruler of early medieval Europe: Charlemagne.

Charlemagne (768-814)

Possibly the most legendary figure in the medieval period was Pepin the Short's son, Charles, known to us as Charles the Great or Charlemagne. As is true of any legend, there was some factual basis for certain stories surrounding this remarkable man, but there was also a good deal of fantasy. Physically he was a big man, which in the simple world of the eighth century helped him assert his authority among those around him. He was also a strong willed man, which was necessary for holding together an empire under such primitive conditions as existed then. There were three aspects of Charlemagne's reign that were especially important: his conquests, his attempts to revive Roman culture in what is known as the Carolingian Renaissance, and the revival of the Roman imperial title.

Charlemagne was an extremely energetic king who spent a large part of his reign campaigning on his empire's ever widening frontiers: in Italy against the Lombards, in Spain against the Muslims, in the east against the Avars, and in Germany against the Saxons whom he forcibly converted to Christianity at the point of the sword. By the end of his reign, Charlemagne's empire contained most of Western Europe: France, Germany, Austria, half of Italy, the Low Countries, and Denmark. The size of his empire was the primary basis for his later legend.

Charlemagne did his best to rule his empire efficiently, but there were too few trained officials with which to rule and too many lands for them to administer effectively. As a result, he also had to delegate a good deal of power to local nobles who ruled in his name. The king's officials would travel around and periodically check up on the nobles. And Charles himself was a strong enough king to inspire most men to keep in line. However, he failed to set up a lasting government that could function under less exceptional kings. As a result, when he was gone, his empire fell apart.

People have argued over whether Charles was a barbarizing or civilizing influence on Europe. On the one hand, he did spend a lot of his reign fighting, and occasionally used some brutal methods, especially in converting the Saxons to Christianity. On the other hand, he patronized culture and the arts in what came to be called the Carolingian Renaissance. This was a self-conscious revival of Roman culture, which people then looked back upon as a golden age and the pinnacle of civilization. There was very little that was original in this revival, but it did manage to copy a large number of Roman books. As a result, 90% of the oldest versions of Roman texts we have come from the Carolingian Renaissance.

The most celebrated event of Charles' reign was his being crowned Roman emperor by the pope on Christmas day, 800 AD. There has been endless debate about the motives of Charles and the pope and just exactly what this revived title meant three centuries after the end of the Roman Empire in the West. The revival of such a title does show how much of a grip the memory of the golden age of Rome had on the medieval imagination. The real importance of this revived title would fade somewhat after Charlemagne's death and not regain its luster until 961 when the ruler of Germany, Otto I, was crowned emperor by the pope. For some 850 years, Germany will be known as the Empire, or the Holy Roman Empire. Despite the glory it invoked, this title would ultimately be a source of tremendous problems for Germany. In later years, it was said that it was neither holy, nor Roman, nor empire, but we can see that it represented a powerful idea.

Succeeding generations would look upon Charlemagne's reign as a golden age. It did encompass most of Western Europe in a larger and relatively peaceful empire. It did try to revive the grandeur of Rome's empire and culture. And a powerful energetic king did rule over it. Although his empire collapsed soon after his death, Charles' reign did have lasting and profound effects. Frankish political institutions, in particular feudalism, and military tactics (the mounted knight) would dominate Western Europe for centuries. In fact, the predominance of Frankish culture and customs was so overwhelming in Western Europe that the Byzantines and Muslims typically referred to anyone from Western Europe as a Frank.

Possibly the most significant sign that Charlemagne's reign was a turning point in history was the fact that for the first time scholars referred to a unified culture and realm known as Europe. After Charlemagne, Western European culture would no longer be a cheap imitation of Roman culture. Rather, from now on, it would define its own institutions and culture in its own terms. Western Civilization was being born.

The disintegration of the Carolingian order (814-c.1000)

Charlemagne's death seemed to be the signal for every thing to go wrong at once. Indeed, a number of factors did combine to send Western Europe into some of its darkest centuries ever. First of all, the money coming from the Arab Muslims that helped make possible the palace and cathedral that Charles had built in his capital at Aachen dried up as the caliphs in Baghdad lavishly spent themselves into bankruptcy. This led to a decline of trade that caused a reversion to a land-based economy and a weaker government. This in turn hurt the Vikings in the north and Arabs in the south who had relied on Arab silver and trade. As a result, they turned to raiding and piracy, which further weakened the Frankish economy and state, causing more raids, and so on.

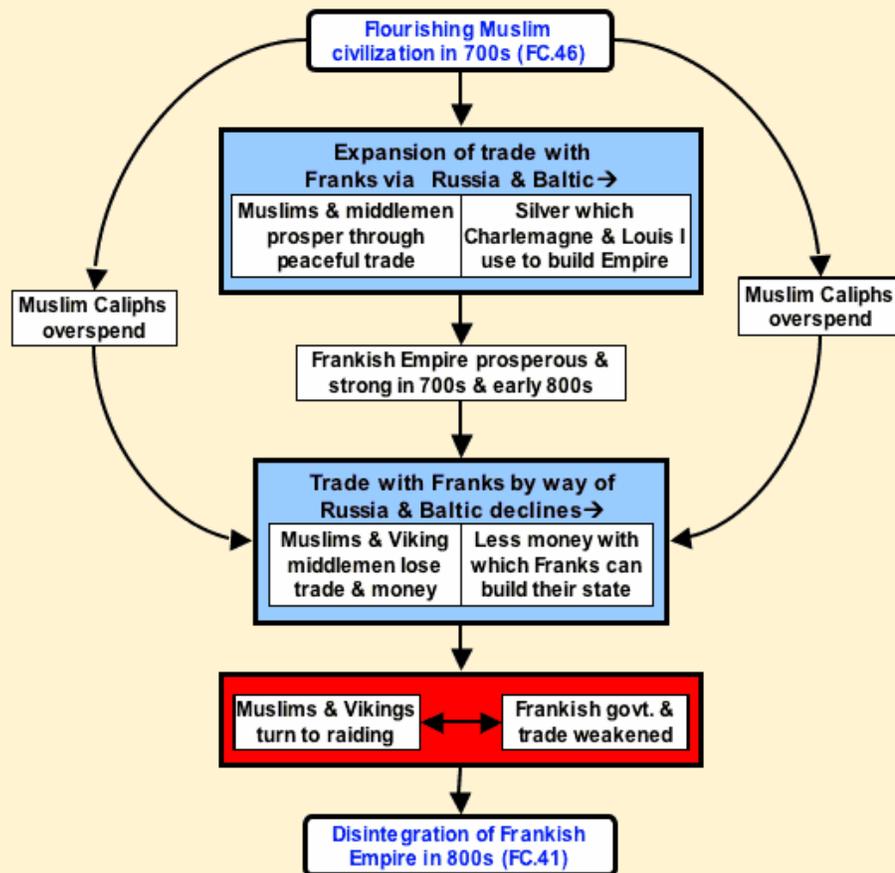
Along these same lines, the growing dependence on mounted knights for defense also meant a growing dependence on nobles to provide those knights. Since there was no money to pay these nobles, the king had to give them land. As we have seen, land regenerated wealth in the form of crops and made the nobles independent of the king's authority and therefore more rebellious. These rebellions also invited invasions, which encouraged more revolts, etc.

Finally, there were problems within the ruling family. Charlemagne's successor, Louis the Pious, was a weak king who let matters get out of control. He also followed the old Germanic custom of dividing the state among his three sons as if it were personal property rather than a responsibility. This division led to civil wars that ended with splitting the Frankish realm into three states: West Frankland (modern France), East Frankland (modern Germany), and Lotharingia, (modern Lorraine) in the middle. Because of its position between France and Germany, Lorraine remained a source of conflict between its neighbors into the twentieth century. Civil wars also forced the kings to give away more and more royal lands for military support. Soon those lands were parts of virtually independent states. And, as with the independent nobles and weakened economy, turmoil at court also invited invasions.

These invasions came from three directions. From the south came the Muslims who devastated parts of Italy and southern France with their raids. From the east came the Magyars, nomadic horsemen related to the Huns. Eventually they would be defeated and would settle down to found the kingdom of Hungary. Worst of all, from the north came the Vikings whose raids and invasions tore a good part of the Frankish state to pieces and nearly overwhelmed England. In 911 C.E., the Viking chief Rollo gained recognition from the French king to rule what came to be called Normandy in return for military service to the crown. Of course, the Vikings, or Normans, were their own men and lived under the king's rule in name only. By 1000 C.E., France was a hopeless patchwork of some 55 virtually independent principalities. The king was the nominal ruler of all this, but in reality just the head of one of these many states. As a result, a new political order would emerge: Feudalism.

FC40A Muslim Trade Links and the Rise and Fall of the Carolingian Empire

FC. 40A MUSLIM TRADE LINKS AND THE RISE & FALL OF THE CAROLINGIAN EMPIRE (C.800-1000)



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The Pirenne Thesis

In the 1920s, a Belgian historian, Henri Pirenne, challenged the commonly accepted notion that the end of the Western Roman Empire around 500 C.E. signaled a catastrophic collapse of Roman civilization itself. The Pirenne Thesis claimed that Roman civilization continued until the Muslim Arabs broke up the unity of the Mediterranean in the seventh century. Elements of the Pirenne thesis have come under attack since then, although historians have learned to take a more balanced look at the fall of Rome and the start of the Middle Ages thanks to Pirenne.

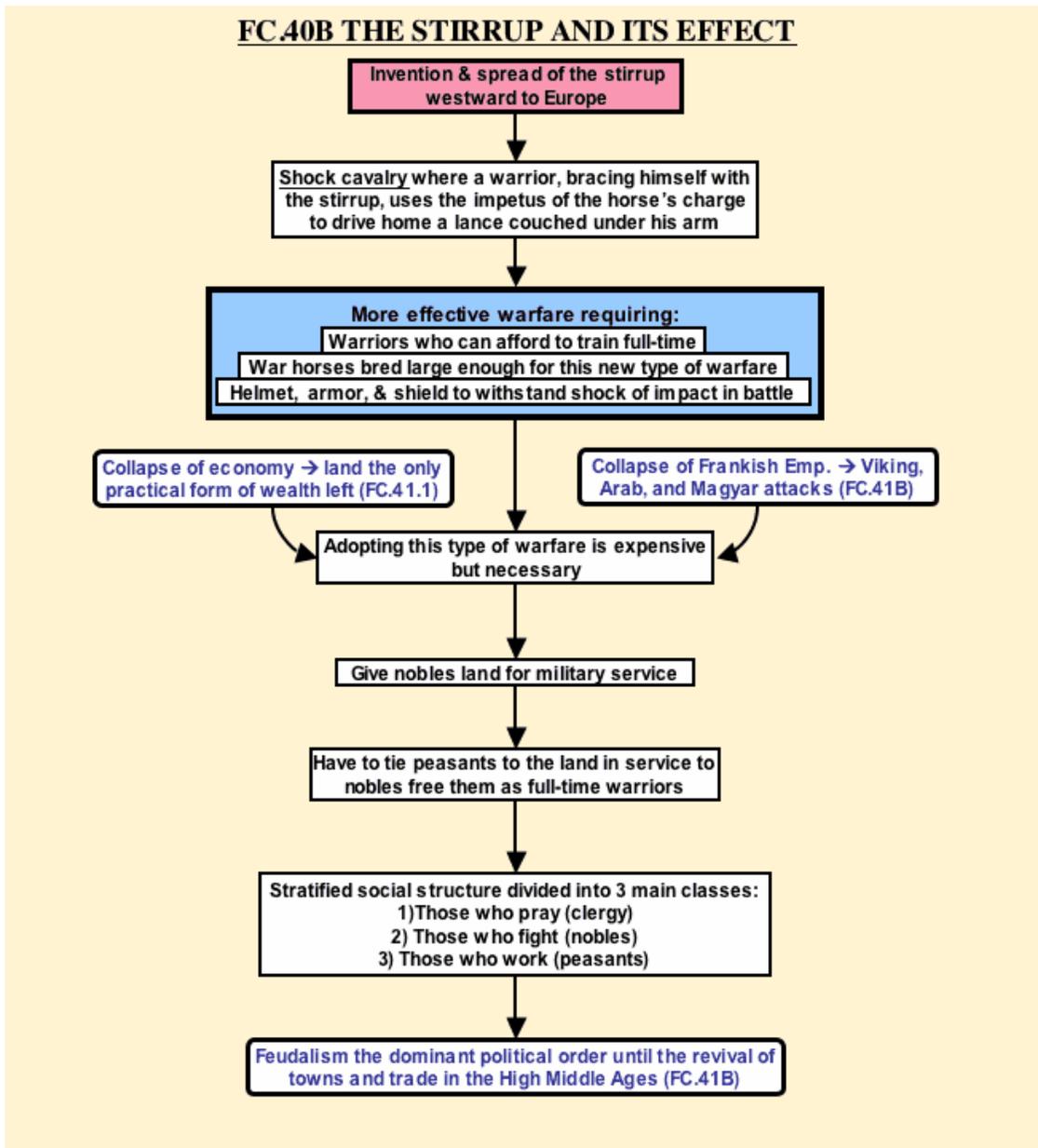
Archaeological evidence has provided an interesting twist to the link between the Arab Muslims and the Frankish dynasty of the Carolingians, but in the eighth and ninth centuries rather than the seventh. It starts at the height of the Arabs' power when they were carrying on trade as far away as India, Central Asia, North Africa, Spain, and also present day Russia, where they would exchange silver for furs and amber. Viking merchants from Russia would then sail by way of the Baltic Sea to the Franks' realm and trade Muslim silver for Frankish goods. Archaeologists have found evidence of a good deal of this silver in the Frankish realm, which would go a long way toward explaining the

sudden resurgence of the Franks in the 700s, and early 800s, and in particular their cultural activities: trying to revive learning, copying ancient Roman manuscripts, and building projects such as Charlemagne's cathedral at Aachen.

Unfortunately, just as Muslim silver from Baghdad helped make Frankish power and prosperity possible, the lack of it helped bring down Charlemagne's successors. The reason was apparently too much spending by the caliphs on building projects. When, for whatever reasons, their money ran out, and so did trade up into Russia, thus cutting off the Franks' source of silver and much of their power. Then everything started going wrong.

When Arab traders in the Mediterranean and Vikings in the Baltic and North Seas saw their trade drying up, they turned to raiding to supplement their incomes. This, of course, was destructive to the overall economy, thus weakening the Franks' ability to trade and marshal the resources necessary, thus allowing more Arab and Viking raids, and so on. By 900, the Frankish empire had disintegrated into various pieces, leaving the way for new powers and institutions to take over.

FC40B The Stirrup and its Effects

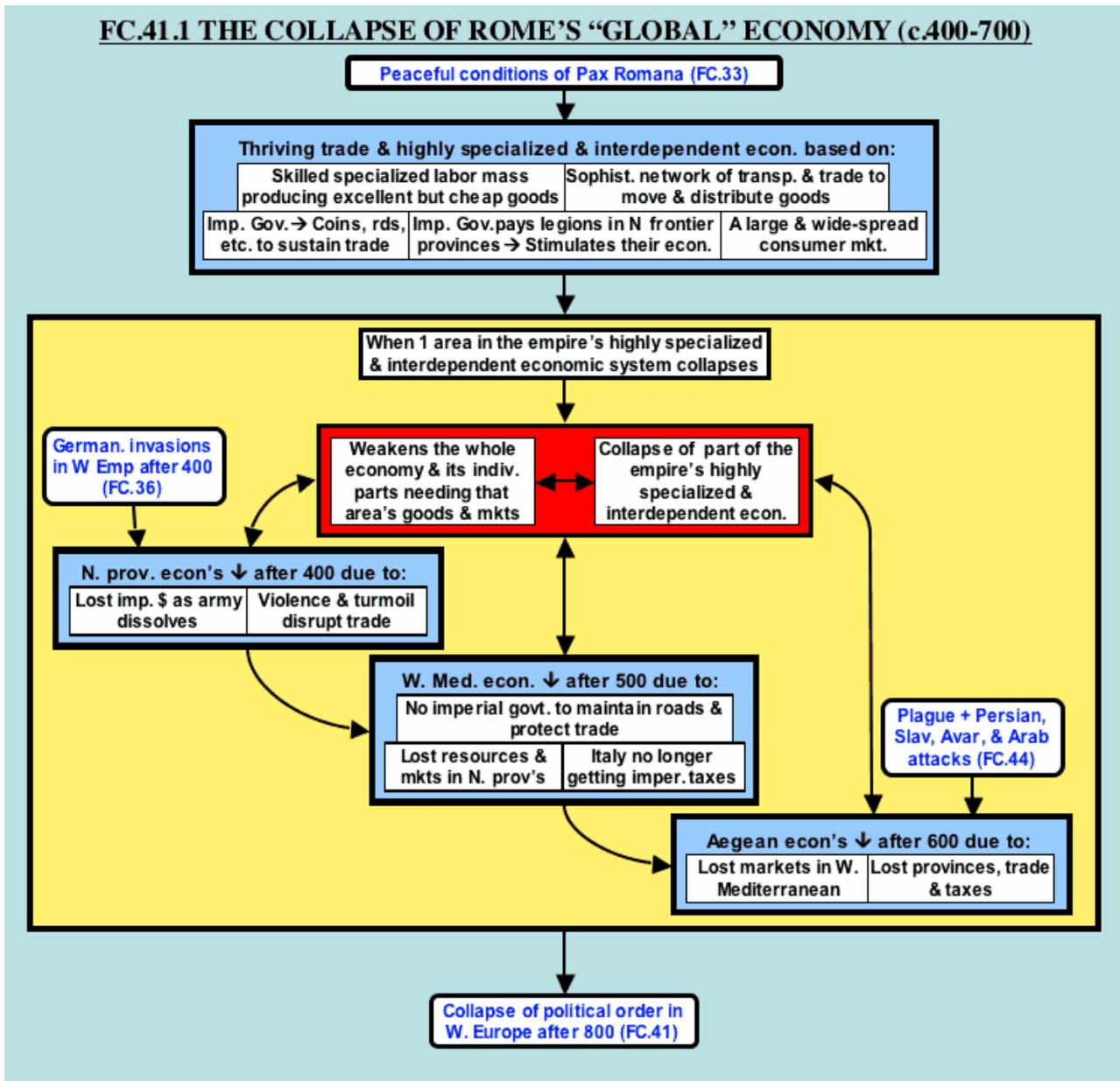


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FC41.1 Economic Collapse After the Fall of Rome (c.500 -700 CE)

FC.41.1 THE COLLAPSE OF ROME'S "GLOBAL" ECONOMY (c.400-700)



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The physical evidence

While most types of evidence from this period have disappeared by now, there are a few that have survived, most notably pottery, coins, and roof tiles. Evidence from the Pax Romana shows a large quantity and wide variety of high quality pottery made on pottery wheels. Just as significant is the wide geographic distribution of different regions' pottery, suggesting a highly sophisticated and specialized system of production, transportation and distribution. Apparently, people from one province could get and afford specialized goods from the far-flung provinces of the empire. Similarly, coinage was plentiful in gold, silver, and bronze. The large numbers of bronze coins suggests money was widely used even by the poor. Especially telling is the fact that a significant number of these coins were found lying around in a casual manner, the sign of prosperous times, as opposed to all of them being hidden in hoards, which was typical of hard times and economic decline. The plentiful remains of ceramic roof tiles produced elsewhere, even in the ruins of peasant houses, is another sign of the high standard of living and sophisticated economy of the Pax Romana. This changed radically starting in the fifth century. Pottery remains and coins, especially bronze ones used by

the poor become scarce. There are virtually no surviving ceramic roof tiles from this period, suggesting the use of thatch, which can leak and harbor insects. The question is: how did this happen?

Conditions of prosperity

First, we need to understand the sorts of conditions that made the highly specialized and interdependent economy of the Pax Romana possible. Overall, it relied on a combination of five factors:

1. A skilled specialized labor force able to mass-produce excellent but cheap goods;
2. A sophisticated network of transportation and trade to move and distribute goods;
3. An imperial government that minted enough coins and maintained the roads to sustain the economy;
4. An influx of money from the central government to pay the thousands of soldiers and bureaucrats in the less developed frontier provinces, thus tying them into the larger empire-wide economy; and
5. A large and wide-spread consumer market.

Process of decay

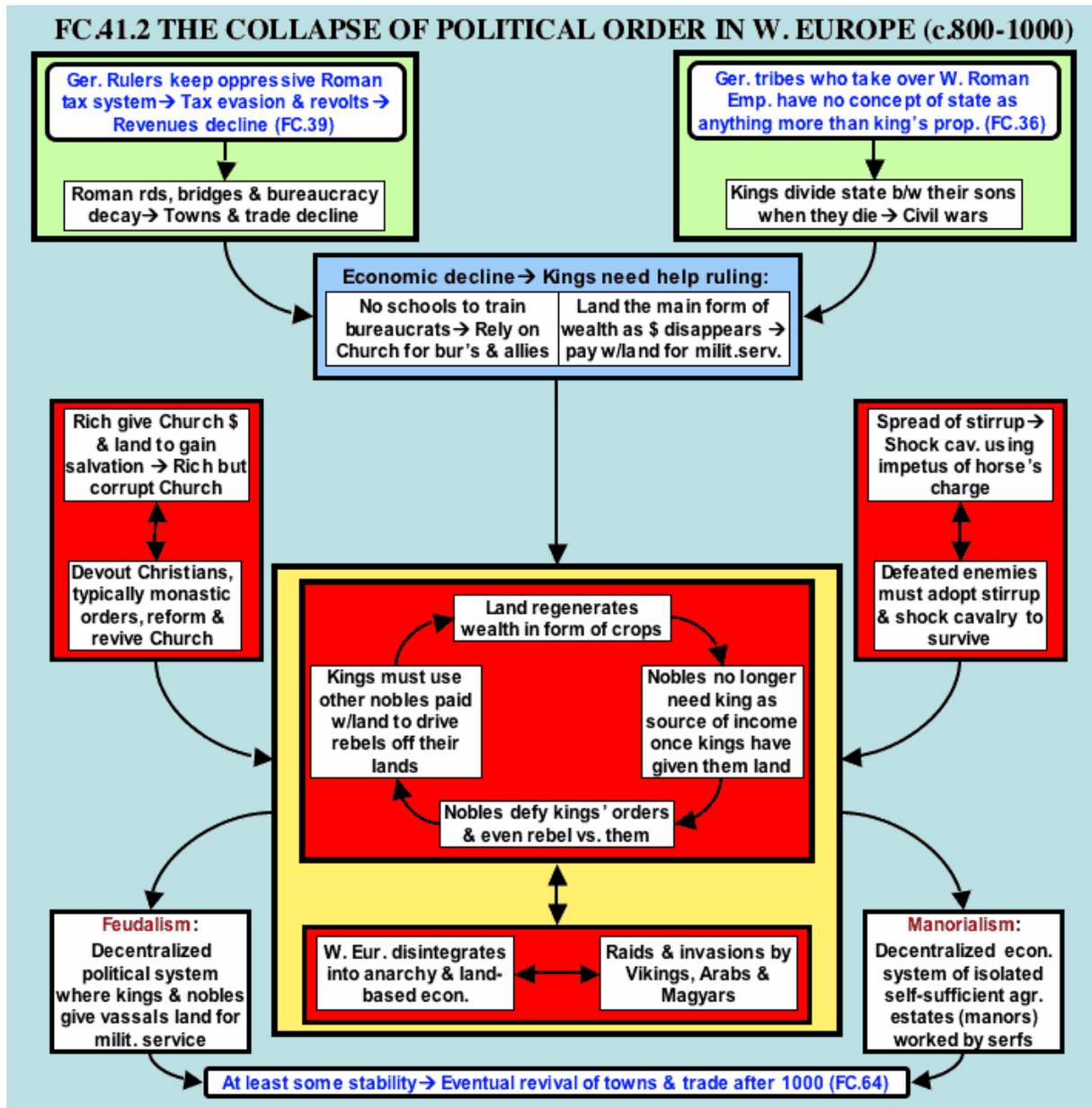
Rome's highly interdependent economy and trade was similar to today's global economy, although on a much smaller scale. Despite that difference, its decay and collapse hold a cautionary lesson for us today. In each case, the high degree of inter-dependence of all the regional economies of the empire on the other regional economies carried the danger that, if one regional economy collapsed, that weakened the whole economy and its individual parts needing that area's goods and markets. That, in turn, would lead to the collapse of one or more other regional economies, weakening the rest of the economy, and so on. Therefore, rather than collapsing all at once, the Mediterranean and Northwestern European economy went in stages, the northern frontier provinces going first by 500, the western Mediterranean economy next in the 500s, and finally the Aegean area after 600. The first region to go was the northern frontier, especially Britain, in the 400s. This part of the empire was the most recently civilized region of the empire, with less deeply rooted cities than other regions around the Mediterranean. Two major factors wrecked its economy. First of all, being on the frontier, it bore the brunt of the violence and destruction wrought by the Germanic invasions. Secondly, its economy was especially dependent on the imperial government for money to pay the legions. Therefore, as the empire declined, the government was increasingly unable to pay its soldiers, thus undercutting the whole regional economy as well its ability to defend the empire, further wrecking the economy, and so on. After the final demise of the Western Empire (c.500 C.E.), the Western Mediterranean went into a steady decline. Three main factors brought this about. For one thing, there was no longer an imperial government to maintain roads and protect trade. Also, the markets and resources the Mediterranean economy had depended on were gone. So were any imperial revenues that helped fuel the economy. As personal accounts from the time indicate, trade continued during this time, but became increasingly difficult. Most pottery found from this period was primitive compared to the wheel thrown pots of the Pax Romana. The small number of high quality pots suggests they were made exclusively for the rich. Similarly, bronze and silver coinage, the mark of a broadly based consumer economy, disappeared, while the gold coinage was crudely made compared to its predecessors. Clearly, money based trade had taken a nosedive. Starting in the late 500s, invasions by Slavs and Avars in the Balkans, Persians, and then the Arab Muslims in the Eastern provinces, and the first outbreaks of bubonic plague combined to send the economy of the Aegean into precipitous decline. Aggravating this were two other factors: the loss of trade and markets in the Western Mediterranean as its economy collapsed, and the loss of taxes and revenue from Syria, Palestine, and Egypt when they fell to the Arabs. Cities in the Balkans and Asia Minor either disappeared or shrank dramatically in size, not being able to recover for 200 years or more.

Aftermath of the collapse

The economic collapse of most of the Roman Empire had several results. For the Eastern Roman, or Byzantine, Empire difficulties continued as it bore the brunt of successive waves of nomadic invaders to the north and constant pressure from the Arabs to the south. However, by 750, the Byzantines had weathered the worst of these troubles and would begin a prolonged period of recovery and expansion. By contrast, the economy of Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Persia prospered, since those areas fell rapidly to the Arabs with minimal material damage and

disruption and seem to have suffered less from the Plague than the rest of the Mediterranean. Therefore, this area entered upon a cultural golden age that also expanded across North Africa and into Spain. Italy and the frontier regions of the Roman Empire (Britain, Gaul, and Germany) would experience a brief revival under the Carolingian Franks, thanks largely to an influx of silver and trade from the Muslims via Russia and the Baltic. However, overspending by the Caliphs in Baghdad would bring an end to this prosperity soon after 800, triggering new rounds of raids and invasions by the Arabs in the Mediterranean and Vikings in the North. Political order in Western Europe would then collapse, to be replaced by feudal anarchy for two centuries.

FC41.2 The Collapse of Political Order in Western Europe (c.800-1000 CE)



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As we have seen, most of the Germanic tribes that took over the lands of the Western Roman Empire had absorbed at least some respect for Roman civilization and a desire to maintain it. However, in the end, most of those Germanic kingdoms failed to establish strong long lasting states despite their efforts to carry on Roman traditions. The root of this failure lay in the fact that, despite their best intentions, the Germanic tribes still had a poor understanding of the Roman heritage they had taken over. This created problems in two ways.

First of all, no matter how much they may have admired Roman government and technology, the Germanic rulers had, at best, an imperfect understanding of how such things worked. Occasionally a ruler, such as Theoderic the Ostrogoth, would be smart enough to use Roman technicians and bureaucrats to run his state along Roman lines with some success. But that was the exception to the rule. More often, the barbarian kingdoms were loosely knit states with local nobles ruling their lands and sometimes following their kings in war. The few trained Roman bureaucrats that were left became scarcer with each generation. Bit by bit, orderly Roman rule gave way to a more casual kind of order, veering more and more toward anarchy. Taxes went uncollected; roads, bridges, and aqueducts went unrepaired; and public order broke down, sending towns and trade into decline.

The second problem, which tied in with the first, was the Germanic concept of the state, or lack of it. The Romans saw the state as an abstract concept that encompassed all the people. The Germanic concept of the state was that the crown and the loyalty of the subjects were the personal property of the king. A warrior had no loyalty to a state, only to his chieftain or king, and that was a very personal matter. It also led to serious problems. Since the kingdom was the personal property of the king, he divided it between his sons after he died much as we today will split our estates among our various children. These sons were naturally jealous of their brothers' shares, and civil wars often resulted.

Together, these civil wars and the breakdown of the old Roman economic and political order bred even more economic decline and the passing of money from circulation. This had two serious results. First of all, schools closed down without money to run them, and the trained Roman bureaucracy gradually died off without anyone to replace them. Second, with money disappearing from circulation, land was becoming the main source of wealth. These two factors forced the kings to rely more and more on local nobles to administer their kingdoms. And since money had virtually disappeared from circulation, kings had to pay their noble supporters with land. This was where their troubles really started to mount.

The problem with land as the main source of wealth was that it regenerated wealth in the form of crops. Giving nobles land that kept producing crops meant the nobles no longer needed the king. Therefore, they became more independent and started defying royal authority. For the king to bring these rebels under control, he would need an army. Unfortunately, he needed to pay his armies, and the only thing he had to pay them with was land, which started the whole vicious cycle over again. In such a way, kings in early medieval Europe saw their power continually disintegrating.

Two other factors led into this feedback process. One was the cycle of Church corruption and reform where people would donate land to the Church in hopes of saving their souls. This would make the Church rich and corrupt, which would trigger a new round of reforms by devout church members. The reformed Church would thus attract more donations of land, and the cycle would start over.

As a result, the Church had large amounts of land, making it a major source of wealth and power in the early medieval state. This created the problem of local nobles fighting and scheming to control Church lands. Typically, they would give their younger sons the offices of bishop or abbot (head of a monastery) while passing the family lands on to the older sons. However, putting a bishop's robes on a young noble did not usually change his wild and warlike ways, and we find bishops and abbots engaged in drinking bouts and fighting in the front ranks of battle along with the most unruly of the other nobles. The problem of these ambitious nobles trying to gain control of Church lands also fed into the vicious cycle of land regenerating wealth, making nobles more independent, and so on.

Naturally, this situation did little for the piety of the Church. Also, as a result, the lower clergy were largely unsupervised, illiterate, and ignorant of the religion they were supposedly in charge of, while carrying on fairly lax lifestyles themselves. This is not to say there were not any good pious Christians at the time. One of the remarkable things about the history of the medieval Church is the fact that pious individuals did exist and occasionally prevailed against the corruption that constantly plagued the Church. Still, the view we get of the early medieval Church is not a very pretty one.

The Church naturally wanted to maintain its independence and often looked to kings for protection from the nobles. The kings in turn looked to the Church for land (or at least support from the land), spiritual support to make them popular, and monks to provide what few educated officials there were. One striking example of this mutual support was when the German monarch, Otto I, went into Italy in 961, roughly 75% of his troops were supplied from Church lands. This made it critical for early medieval monarchs to control the elections of bishops and abbots, which would give them control of the Church's extensive lands and wealth. If they could do this, they were in a good position for ruling their states. In later centuries, when both kings and popes became powerful independently of one another, there would be trouble between church and state. However, in the chaos of the early medieval world, church and state often relied heavily upon one another out of necessity.

The other factor contributing to the decline of the early medieval state was the spread of a simple invention that would revolutionize medieval warfare and, to a large extent, medieval society: the stirrup. The main function of the stirrup was to hold the rider more securely in the saddle. This allowed him to use the impetus of his charging horse to drive a lance through an opponent without himself being thrown from the saddle. The success of this new shock cavalry forced defeated enemies to adopt the stirrup if they were to survive. This led to the further spread of shock cavalry until it had become the dominant form of warfare in Western Europe.

Such shock tactics, as they are called, required a large warhorse, lance, heavier armor, and professional troops trained in riding a horse and using a lance. However, such an army was expensive, especially by medieval standards. The Frankish leader Charles Martel's confiscation of large amounts of church lands in 732, the year before the battle of Tours, suggests he was building up an army of this new type of cavalry, paying them land in order to support them while they trained and fought.

Because of this cycle, Western Europe disintegrated into anarchy as local nobles rebelled against their kings and fought each other in their own private wars. This in turn would encourage raids and invasions by such peoples as Vikings from the north, Arabs from the south, and nomadic Magyars from the east. Such raids and invasions would only encourage more turmoil, which would bring in more invasions and so on. To aggravate matters even further, this cycle of anarchy and invasions would also feed back into the original cycle involving land as a source of wealth. And so it would go, as these mutually reinforcing cycles of decline, anarchy, and invasions would continue to feed into one another, dragging Western Europe down into further chaos. Not until money came back into circulation could the nobles' stranglehold be broken. This was because money did not regenerate itself, thus keeping nobles and officials constantly dependent on the king.

Feudalism

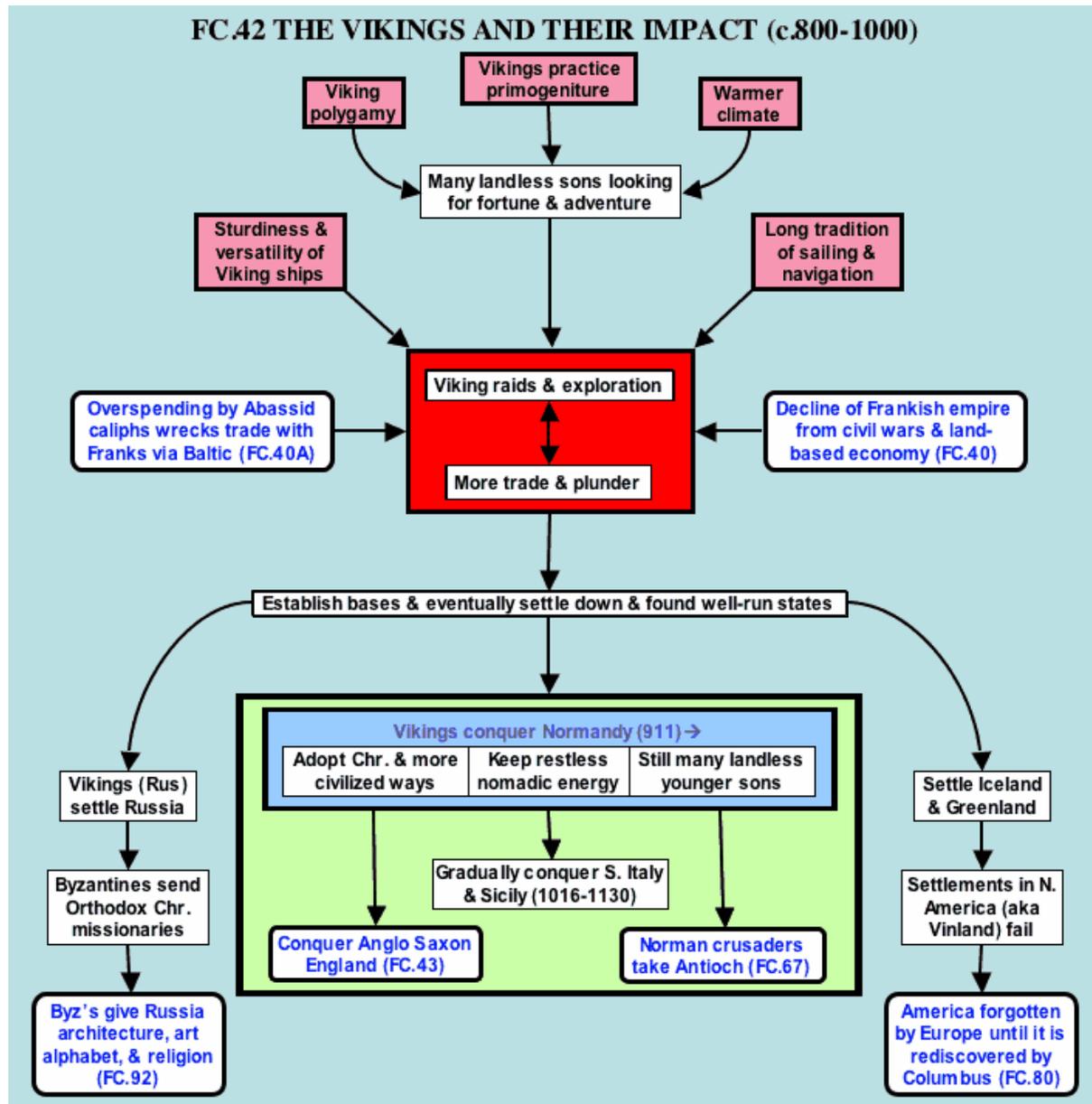
Out of this chaos there emerged a new political order, known as feudalism. This was a decentralized political order where a king or lord would give his nobles land worked by serfs (peasants bound to the soil) in return for military and other forms of service. Each of those dukes and counts wanted his own army. Therefore, they subinfeudated (subdivided) their lands, giving them to lower nobles in return for service from them. Those nobles in turn might subinfeudate to get their own armies from loyal followers. And so it would go until the whole kingdom was split up into dozens of little states. A petty noble who owed service to his overlord, and probably was owed service by vassals beneath him ran each of these. Theoretically, every noble owed allegiance to the king, but in reality he dealt mainly with his immediate overlords and vassals. What resulted were innumerable little wars that usually amounted to little more than border raids that burned some crops, inflicted few if any casualties, and added greatly to the confusion already plaguing Western Europe.

Manorialism was the economic counterpart to feudalism. As the name implies, Western Europe's economy centered on isolated agricultural manors worked by the local lords' serfs. Because of its isolation, the manor had to be virtually self-sufficient. It had agricultural land divided into two or three fields (one always fallow), wasteland which was the lord's private preserve for hunting, a peasant village, a church, a mill, and the lord's manor house or castle (generally made of wood until the 1100's).

The feudal order was an extremely localized and decentralized arrangement. States were so small and poor, and terms of service were so short (in France, usually only 40 days a year) that no one was able to build up much power. However, in the absence of a strong central government, feudalism did provide some degree of defense against the constant raids and invasions then besetting Europe. By 1000 C.E., things would settle down and a certain amount of stability had been established as the Viking, Muslim, and Magyar raids died down. This stability set the stage for a

revival of civilization in Western Europe known as the High Middle Ages. Out of that civilization would evolve our own modern Western Civilization.

FC42 The Vikings and their impact (c.800-1000 CE)



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For nearly two centuries there was hardly a church in northern Europe that did not echo with the prayer: "Deliver us O Lord from the wrath of the Northmen". While other peoples, notably the Arabs from the south and the nomadic Magyars (Hungarians) from the east, also raided and plundered Europe, it was the Vikings who wreaked the most havoc in the short run, but probably had the most positive long term effects on Europe.

Various forces launched the Vikings in their raids and voyages of exploration. Two of these factors we have already seen: the decline of the Frankish Empire after Charlemagne's death which invited raids, and the overspending by the

Arab caliphs which wrecked trade in the Baltic Sea and forced the Vikings to seek their fortunes through more violent means. Another factor was a growing population of landless younger sons looking for fortune and adventure caused by a good climate (allowing more children to survive), and the Viking customs of polygamy (having more than one wife) and primogeniture (leaving the entire inheritance to the oldest son).

Two other remarkable factors were the Vikings' ships and their navigation techniques. There were various classes of Viking ships ranging from the typical longship and the larger dragonships (*drakkar*) to the stouter oceangoing *hafskips* (half ships). However, they shared certain common characteristics that made them quite versatile. They could hold up to 200 men in some cases, yet be sailed by as few as 15 sailors. They were strong enough to handle rough seas, but were also light enough to sail up inland rivers and even be carried around river defenses. Likewise, Viking navigation techniques, which were basically the product of a centuries' long oral tradition of sailors' lore, got them safely across open waters that other peoples of the time would never dream of sailing. In our eyes, the Vikings were remarkable and fearless sailors. In the eyes of many of their contemporaries, they were downright mad for making the voyages they did, which only added to their mystique.

Starting around 800 A.D., wave after wave of Vikings set out from Scandinavia either to raid their neighbors or explore new and more distant lands for the purpose of trading and settling there. Viking raids created a feedback cycle by weakening their victims while also winning plunder and status, which encouraged more and larger raids, and so on. As raiding parties increased in size, the Vikings would grow bolder and strike further inland by sailing up inland rivers or even seizing local horses to carry them and their plunder. As repeated successes further increased the size of the raiding parties, the Vikings would establish winter bases rather than return home to Scandinavia for the winter. Eventually these winter bases might become permanent settlements and the basis for the eventual conquest of the region.

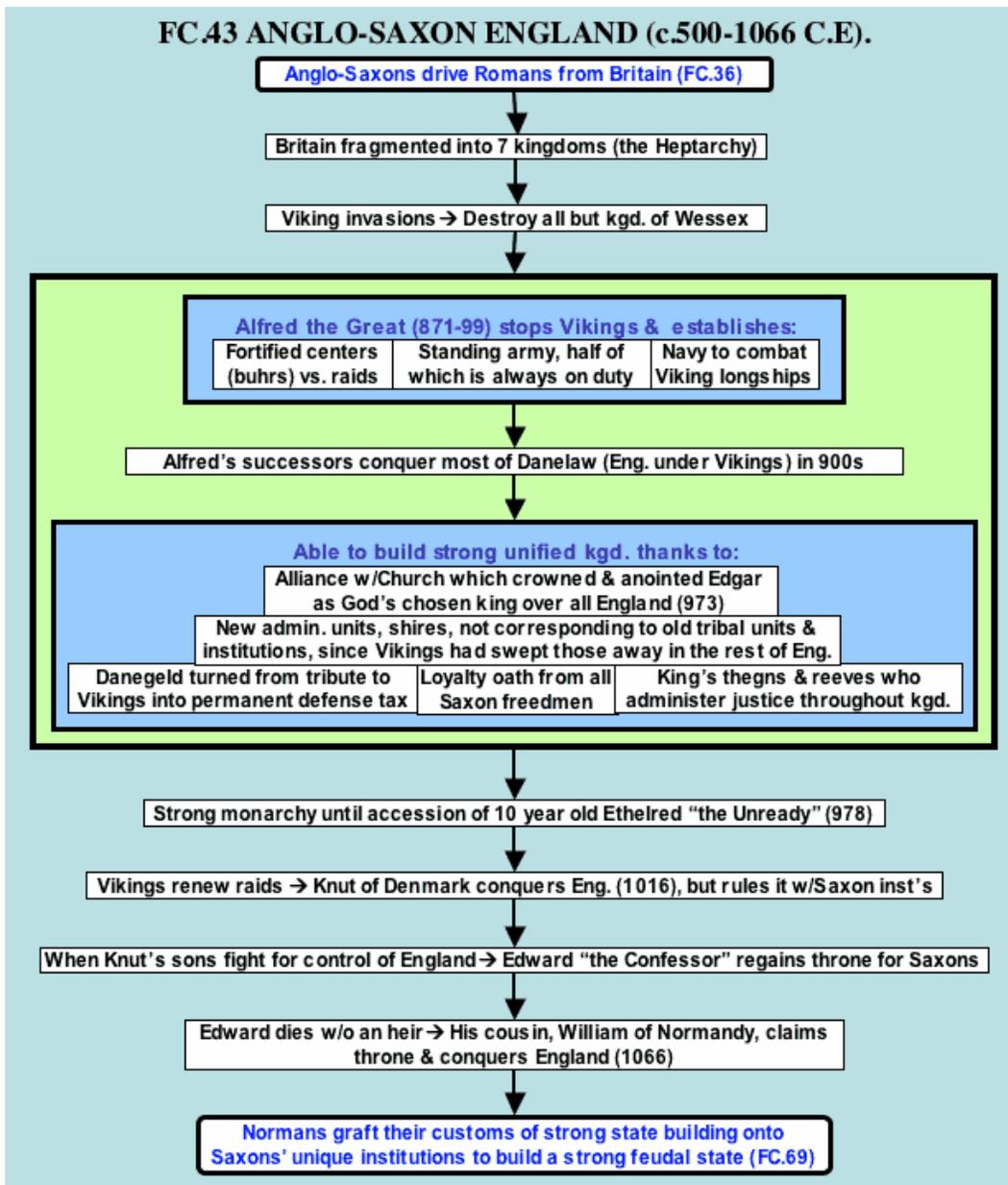
Viking raids and conquests were accompanied by a good number of atrocities that reflected the Vikings' rough character, but were also designed to intimidate their victims. The Vikings showed no special respect for Christian churches and monasteries. In fact, those were generally their first targets, since the Church owned so much of the wealth in Western Europe at the time. However, the Vikings were also great traders, not seeing trade and plunder as mutually exclusive, and combining these activities according to what the situation dictated or allowed. As a result, they opened up trade routes, which helped start a revival of Europe's economy.

Ironically, considering all the chaos and destruction the Vikings brought with them, they founded some of the best-organized and most dynamic states in Western Europe. In 911 A.D. they founded Normandy as a virtually independent state in western France. Having established a well-run government there, they spread out to conquer England in 1066, laying the foundations for that modern nation. They also gradually conquered Southern Italy and Sicily in the eleventh and twelfth centuries and set up strong state there just as they had in Normandy and England. Some of these Normans later joined the First Crusade and conquered Antioch in Syria, holding it for nearly two centuries.

Other Vikings (known as the Rus) struck eastward and founded the first Russian state centered around Kiev. From there, they raided the Byzantine Empire. Later, Byzantine missionaries followed them back to Russia, bringing with them Christianity, Byzantine architecture and the Cyrillic alphabet, all of which became vital elements of Russian culture.

The Vikings were also fearless explorers. To the west, they founded a state in Iceland, continued across the Atlantic and discovered Greenland and North America. However, Greenland's climate proved to be too harsh to support even the Vikings, while attacks by Native Americans called "*Skraelings*" (screechers) made settlements there also short-lived. However, the rest of Europe was not ready to absorb these new discoveries, and they were forgotten for nearly 500 years.

FC43Anglo-Saxon England (c.500-1066)



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England followed a somewhat different course of development from the countries on the continent. Being separated from the rest of Europe by the English Channel certainly made it harder to keep in touch with the continent, especially during the Dark Ages. By the same token, the Channel generally has also made it harder to invade England, although that did not seem to be the case against Viking raids and invasions.

After the departure of the Roman legions in the early 400's, the Romano-British population probably carried out resistance against the invading Angles, Saxons, and Jutes (known collectively as the Anglo-Saxons). This resistance is very likely reflected in the legend of King Arthur. However, the Anglo Saxons eventually conquered Britain in the 400's and split it into 7 competing kingdoms known as the Heptarchy. For a brief time, one kingdom or the other might have the upper hand in trying to unite Britain, but the other kingdoms would gang up on that kingdom and restore the balance of power. By 700, the Anglo-Saxons had been converted to Catholic Christianity, and English scholars, led by such men as the Venerable Bede, were in the forefront of European scholarship. However, the advent of Viking raids in the ninth century would radically alter all that.

England especially suffered from the Vikings. Being divided into seven independent kingdoms made it an irresistible target, and Viking raids on England were merciless. Six of the seven Anglo-Saxon kingdoms were overrun, with only Wessex in the south, led by Alfred the Great (871-99), holding on grimly against the Northmen. Alfred did three things to defend his realm against the Vikings. First of all, he kept a standing army, with half of its soldiers on guard at any given time while the other half could tend their crops. Second, he kept a navy to head off Viking invasions and raids before they could even reach English shores. Finally, Alfred established fortified centers, known as *burhs*, to protect his people and their property from the Vikings.

These measures saved Wessex from Viking conquest, and Alfred and his successors were gradually able to take the offensive and reclaim a good part of England. In a sense, the Viking raids were good for Anglo-Saxon England in two ways. For one thing, they forced the Anglo-Saxons to build a strong state in self-defense. For another thing, the Vikings eliminated the six Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms Wessex had been competing with before. As a result, as Wessex retook one part of Britain after another, a single strong united kingdom replaced seven separate ones. Also, it could more easily impose its own laws and customs on other Saxons, since the Vikings had eliminated the other Saxon kingdoms' laws and customs. Probably reinforcing that trend was the Saxons' fear of the Vikings returning, thus making them more likely to submit to the rule of a strong king. Therefore, the Saxon kings of Wessex could establish a much stronger state than would previously have been possible.

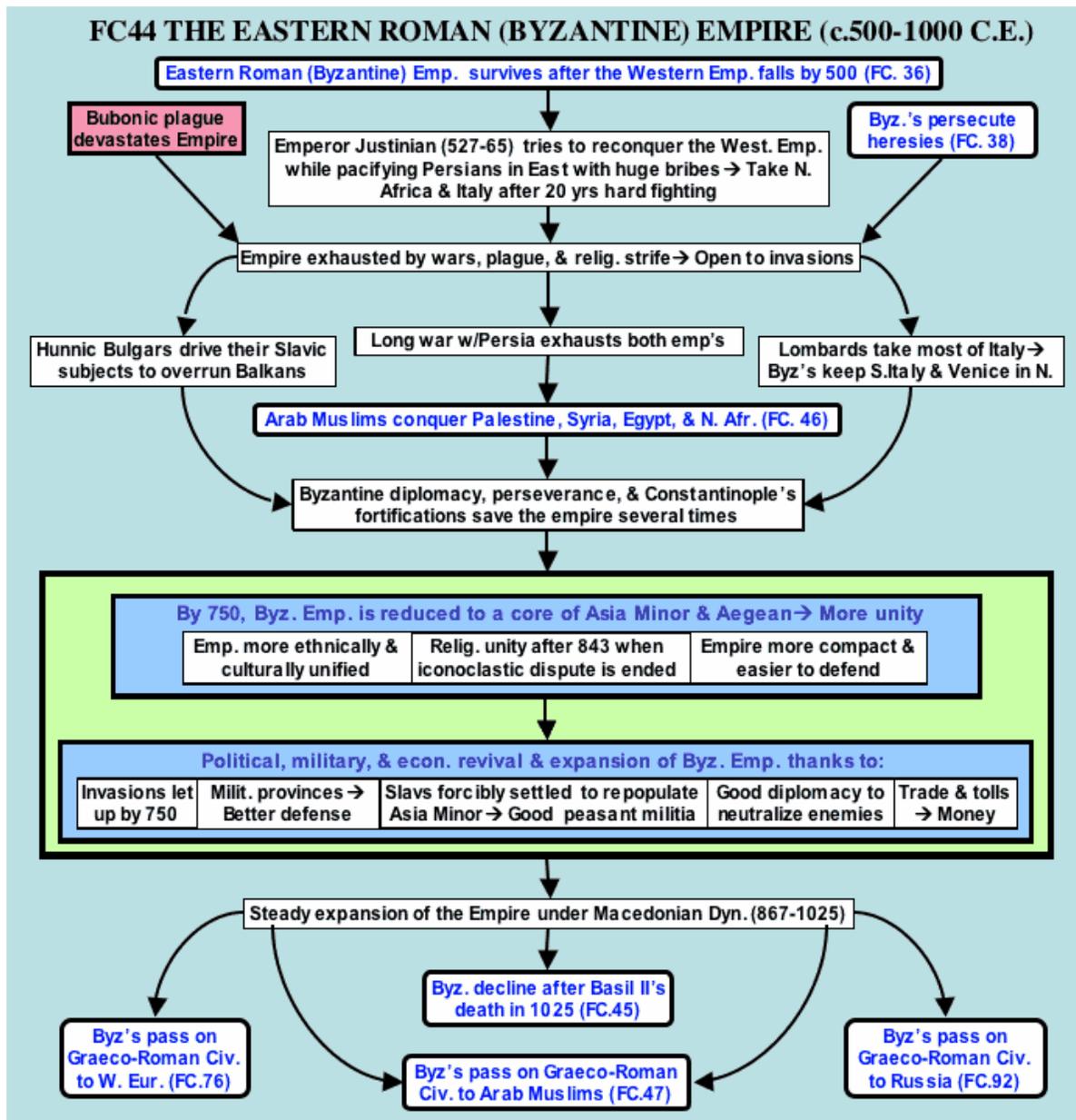
Besides their defense measures, Alfred and his successors did three other things to build a strong English state. First of all, they set up royal officials, known as *thegns* and *reeves*, to administer the king's justice throughout his realm. The second thing was to extract a loyalty oath from all Saxon freedmen under their rule. In an age when oaths were taken especially seriously, this was important, since it made loyalty to the king more important than loyalty to any other lord or official. Finally, the Saxon kings collected a permanent tax known as Danegeld. This was originally tribute paid to the Vikings to keep them from raiding. Later, it was used as a defense tax to support the army and navy, thus keeping England safe from attack.

In 973 C.E., a century after Alfred came to the throne, the Church anointed his descendant, Edgar, with oil as God's chosen king of all England. Although the Vikings still controlled much of England under what was known as the Danelaw, this act showed the progress Wessex had made and the ambitions it had toward uniting all of England. Also, by anointing the king as God's chosen, it marked the king as someone special in society and laid the foundations for the later doctrine of Divine Right of Kings.

These measures kept the Saxon state strong until Ethelred "the Unready" (literally "No plan") came to the throne at the age of ten. This triggered renewed Viking raids until the Danish king, Knut, conquered all of England. As luck would have it, when Knut died, his sons fought for the throne, which allowed the Saxons to regain their independence and give the crown to another Saxon king, Edward the Confessor.

However, England was never far from some sort of Viking intervention. In this case, it was the Norman duke, William, who, as a cousin of the childless Edward the Confessor, claimed the English throne when the Saxon king died. When the Saxons chose another Saxon, Harold of Wessex, to succeed Edward, William gathered an army, crossed the channel, and crushed Harold's forces at the Battle of Hastings in 1066 in what would prove to be the last successful invasion of Britain. Despite this, the Anglo-Saxon heritage would continue as the Normans would adopt many of the policies and institutions the Saxons had used to build their state in times of crisis.

FC44The Byzantine Empire (c.500-1025)



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Introduction: the "Second Rome"

When we study the Middle Ages, we tend to focus on Western Europe since it is the homeland of Western Civilization. However, this gives us a distorted view of medieval history, for Western Europe was little more than a backwoods frontier compared to the real centers of civilization further east. It is here that we are concerned with one of those eastern cultures, Byzantium, and its contributions to civilization. Cities provide the central focus of civilization, and no civilization seemed to center on a city more than Byzantine civilization did on Byzantium, or Constantinople as it was known after its refounding by Constantine in 330 C.E.

Constantinople's location at the narrow juncture between the Aegean and Black Seas was ideal for controlling trade between those two bodies of water as well as the trade routes that converged there to link Asia and Europe. The city itself was blessed by nature, with water bordering two of its three sides. This provided it with easy defense and an

excellent harbor known as the Golden Horn. The natural advantages of the city were further enhanced by human ingenuity. The harbor was protected from invasion by a massive chain stretched across its entrance. The landward side had a huge triple set of walls to protect it. Down through the centuries, when all else failed, that chain and set of walls kept Constantinople safe from invasions. Many times all that seemed to remain of the empire was Constantinople itself. But as long as the city survived, the empire also survived to bounce back and recover its old territories.

Inside its walls, Constantinople contained some of the most marvelous sights in the civilized world. Many of these reflected the Roman heritage that the Byzantines were carrying on: aqueducts, sewers, public baths, and street planning. Other sights, in particular some 100 churches, reminded one that Constantinople was a very Christian city. Still other sights reflected oriental influences: the bustling markets offering goods from all over the civilized world, the palace complex of the Boucoleon with its reception halls, mechanically levitating thrones, imperial gardens, and silk factories. Much of the Byzantines' success in dealing with their less sophisticated neighbors was due to their ability to dazzle visitors with such wonders.

Turmoil, crisis, and the transition from Roman to Byzantine Empire (527-717 C.E.)

While we refer to the Byzantine Empire, people in the Middle Ages never lost sight of the fact that this was the eastern half of the Roman Empire that had survived the barbarian invasions of the fifth century C.E. As a result, they called them "Romans". Both the terms Byzantine and Roman have some truth to them. They were the direct heirs of the Roman Empire and did carry on the remains of that empire for some 1000 years after the fall of the western half of the Empire. However, for all intents and purposes, it became a predominantly Greek empire and culture as the Middle Ages progressed. Its subjects spoke Greek, worshipped in what came to be the Greek Orthodox Church, and wore beards in the Greek fashion. They even argued and fought over religion in much the same way the ancient Greeks had argued and fought over politics.

The turning point in this transition from Roman to Byzantine civilization came in the reign of Justinian I (527-565). We have seen how this "last of the Roman emperors" tried to reclaim the Western empire. In the process, he virtually wrecked the eastern empire with the high cost in money and manpower for his wars and tribute to keep the Persians quiet in the east. Two other factors merely added to the damage: persecution of Monophysite heretics in Syria, Palestine and Egypt which alienated much of the population against the central government and bad luck in the form of a devastating plague which decimated the population. When Justinian died, the empire may have looked strong on the map, but in reality it was exhausted and in desperate need of a rest. Unfortunately, rest was the last thing the empire would get.

The next two centuries would see the Byzantines constantly beset by waves of invaders coming from the north, the east, and the west. The very fact that the Empire survived at all seems a miracle considering the troubles it endured. In the West, the first wave of invaders, the Lombards poured into Italy in 568, only three years after Justinian's death, and set off centuries of fighting between themselves, Byzantines, Franks, and even Arabs. The Byzantines did manage to hold onto Ravenna and Venice in the north and southern Italy and Sicily to the south. However, except for those outposts, the Roman Empire in the West was gone.

A more serious threat to the empire's existence came from the east. Around 600 C.E., the chronic hostility between Byzantines and Persians erupted into a titanic life and death struggle that would last a quarter of a century. The Persians overran Syria, Palestine, and Egypt while the nomadic Avars in the north were rampaging through Greece and the rest of the Balkan Peninsula. At the low point of the war, Constantinople was virtually all that remained of the empire in the east, and it had to withstand a siege by the combined Persian and Avar armies. Fortunately, the stout walls of Constantinople held fast against the enemy assaults, and a new hero, the emperor Heraclius, emerged to save the empire. Leaving Constantinople to defend itself, he struck deep into Persia to draw its armies away from his capital. In a series of resounding victories, the Persians were crushed and the Byzantine Empire saved. However, in the process, both empires had been thoroughly exhausted.

Unfortunately, right on the tail of this war a much more serious threat suddenly appeared. The Arabs, united and inspired by their new religion, Islam, swept in like a desert storm, toppling Persian and Byzantine resistance like a house of cards. The Persian Empire was subjugated in its entirety. Meanwhile, the Byzantines watched as Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and North Africa all fell to the Arabs. Not content with these conquests, the Arabs pressed on

through Asia Minor toward the coveted prize of Constantinople itself. Once again, the city's fortifications held out, and after a four-year siege, the invaders were driven back. One reason for this victory was the use of a new secret weapon, Greek Fire, which sent the Arab ships into wild uncontrollable flames. This chemical would be a mainstay of the Byzantine defense and a highly guarded state secret for centuries to come. We still do not know exactly what was in it, although it was probably some sort of petroleum compound.

In 717 C.E., a new emperor, Leo III, from Isauria in southern Asia Minor, came to the throne. The empire's situation at the time was not very hopeful, for another huge Arab army was descending on Constantinople. As in times past, Byzantine fortifications and Greek Fire took their toll. By the following spring, the Arabs were in full retreat. This was the last time the Arabs would besiege Constantinople, and the end of this siege symbolized the beginning of a period of stabilization for the empire's frontiers and internal development. Fighting would continue with the Arabs, but mainly in the form of sporadic border raids rather than massive invasions.

The Byzantines also faced serious threats in the north from both Asiatic nomads and their Slavic subjects whom they drove in front of them. Two of these nomadic tribes, first the Avars, and later the Bulgars, waged relentless warfare on the Byzantines, mercilessly devastating the Balkan Peninsula in their raids. The Balkans virtually dropped out of Byzantine control and the light of history for nearly two centuries as they were inundated with Slavic invaders. To the north, a powerful Bulgar kingdom proved to be nearly as serious a threat as the Arabs for the next 350 years. Eventually, the Bulgars would settle down, adopt Christianity, and even briefly be conquered by the Byzantines. But for now, they were one more major problem to be overcome.

By 750 C.E., thanks to some astute diplomacy that turned their enemies against one another, perseverance in the face of disaster, and the fortifications of Constantinople, the Byzantines had survived, often against incredible odds, both foreign invasions and internal religious strife. However, they had been stripped of all their lands except for Asia Minor, part of Thrace around Constantinople, Sicily, and parts of Italy. And they were still surrounded by very aggressive neighbors. No longer was it a Roman Empire in anything but name and a few Italian holdings. From this point on, it was truly a Byzantine Empire.

Unfortunately, just as outside pressures from the Arabs were starting to ease, a cloud of religious controversy descended upon the empire. The new issue, *Iconoclasm*, concerned the icons (religious images) the Church used to depict Christ and the saints. The iconoclasts thought that the use and veneration of these images was idolatry. The iconodules said icons were needed to instruct the illiterate masses in the teachings of Christianity. Leo III and several of his successors were iconoclasts and moved to abolish this form of idolatry by seizing the icons and destroying them.

As one might expect in an era when religion was such a vital issue to both the individual and the state, Iconoclasm touched off some violent reactions from people attached to the icons. Riots swept through the cities of the empire. Relations were strained with the Church in Western Europe, which also defended the icons. Palace intrigues and murders centered largely on the icon issue. When an iconodule empress, Irene came to the throne (blinding her own son in order to seize power), she disbanded several of the best regiments of the army since their troops were mainly iconoclasts. This, of course, damaged the empire's ability to defend itself and invited raids from its neighbors. After over a century of this turmoil (726-843), the images were restored and the empire could pursue a more stable course undisturbed by major religious controversies.

The imperial centuries (c.750-1025)

The disturbances of the seventh and eighth centuries left a very different empire from the one that Justinian had ruled. The most noticeable difference was that the empire was much smaller, having been stripped of Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and North Africa. While this deprived the Byzantine government of valuable revenues, it also made the empire much more compact and easier to defend since it was now confined mainly to Asia Minor and the Balkan Peninsula.

The recent turmoil also made the Byzantine Empire a more ethnically, culturally, and religiously united realm. The largely Aramaic speaking peoples and Monophysite "heretics" of Syria, Palestine, and Egypt were now under Muslim control. This left a predominantly Greek speaking populace more or less united by the same religious views once the Iconoclasm struggle had settled down. The empire may have been smaller, but it was also more cohesive.

The upheavals caused by two centuries of foreign invasions forced the Byzantines to adapt their society, government, and defenses to what seemed to be a continuous state of crisis. There were five main factors that helped the empire

revive. First of all, after 750 C.E., the pressure from invasions let up somewhat, although it was still an ever-present menace. Second, the Byzantines pursued an active policy of repopulating Asia Minor that had been devastated by the wars of the previous centuries. The main policy they followed to this end was to take hundreds of thousands of the Slavic people who had overrun the Balkans and resettle them on the empty lands in Asia Minor. These people were hard working industrious folk who became loyal subjects and excellent soldiers for the Byzantine state. No single policy probably did more to revive the fortunes of the Byzantine Empire than this resettlement policy.

A third factor aiding Byzantine revival had to do with the administration and defense of the empire, which needed serious overhauling. Back in the third century, Diocletian had created separate civil and military officials in his provinces to cut down on the possibility of revolt. However, the constant threat of invasions faced by the Byzantines forced them to abandon Diocletian's system and create military provinces called *themes* run by military governors (*strategoi*). The emperors did cut down on the possibility of revolt somewhat by having the tax collectors answer directly to them. This still left the governors enough power and freedom to defend their provinces. The governors needed professional help in running the provinces, which was provided by an excellent civil service, possibly the best of any medieval state.

Given the high priority that defense should be given, it should come as no surprise that the Byzantine army also carried on the ancient Roman tradition of excellence. However, the nature of the warfare the Byzantines faced, (usually quick hit and run border raids), differed considerably from the Roman style of warfare. As a result, the army's core consisted of highly mobile and versatile regiments of cavalry known as *cataphracts*. The cataphract was heavily armed and could rely on shock tactics similar to those of western knights to drive back the enemy. But he was also armed with a bow and could function as a horse archer when necessary. The Byzantines also fielded light cavalry plus heavy and light infantry who were useful in different types of terrain, especially hills and mountains. Recruitment was done according to village, each village being responsible for supplying a quota of peasants armed and ready for service. This system was superior to that of Western Europe where the more troublesome and ambitious nobles were responsible for and in control of defense.

Another important aspect of Byzantine defense was the navy, since the empire contained so much coastline. At its height, the Byzantine navy consisted of some 200 ships of the line called *dromons*. These were galleys armed with rams as well as catapults or siphons for launching the deadly Greek Fire. Unfortunately, the high expense of maintaining a fleet and the rebellious nature of the sailors caused the Byzantine government to neglect the navy from time to time. Such periods of a weak navy allowed the resurgence of piracy and enemy navies, in particular those of the Arabs.

The fourth factor helping the Byzantines was their diplomacy and the fact that they were the only people of the Middle Ages who made a systematic study of their enemies and how they fought. They produced several military manuals detailing precisely what formations, maneuvers, and tactics to use against the heavy knights of Western Europe as opposed to the mobile light cavalry used by their enemies to the north and east. The Byzantines had to be more scientific about these matters because they were usually outnumbered by their enemies and had to rely on every trick or stratagem possible.

The first goal they generally pursued was to avoid a war if at all possible. As a result, the Byzantines were very skillful in diplomacy, especially against the less sophisticated cultures to the west and north. The first principle of Byzantine diplomacy was to turn two neighbors against each other and let them fight for Byzantine interests even though they might not realize they were doing just that. Naturally the neighbors who were duped into this kind of behavior would be somewhat bitter about it. Byzantium's neighbors, especially those in Western Europe, denounced the Byzantines as cowards for their strategies. Even today the word "byzantine" is used to denote vicious intrigue. However, looking at the Byzantines' situation, we can understand why their behavior and concepts of war and heroism differed so much from those of Western Europe. When they had to fight, they did so very well. But they were masters of conserving their meager human resources and relying on other methods to attain their goals.

Finally, such a well-run empire with a highly trained civil service, army, and navy, required a healthy economy to support it. The invasions of the seventh and eighth centuries severely damaged the Byzantine economy. Most of its cities were reduced to little more than fortified strongholds to protect the surrounding peasants. In spite of this, Byzantine wealth was legendary, especially to the relatively simple peoples surrounding the empire. Such contemporary writers as Liutprand of Cremona tell of being thoroughly dazzled by the wealth and splendor of Constantinople. The capital city was the crossroads of much of the trade of the civilized world at that time.

A ten per cent toll on all imported goods from this trade raised sizable revenues. The government also kept monopolies on such goods as silk, grain, and weapons. Furthermore, it kept tight control on all the craft guilds, strictly regulating their quality of workmanship, wages, prices, and competition. As stifling to their economy as these measures may seem, they did protect the somewhat fragile industries and trade in the unstable period of the early Middle Ages. As a result of this protection, Byzantine industries flourished and its goods were among the most highly prized and sought after in the Mediterranean. Later, when trade and industry revived elsewhere, strict Byzantine controls would work against its people in more competitive markets.

The firm foundations of administration, defense, and economy laid by the Isaurian and Amorian dynasties (717-867) bore fruit under the Macedonian dynasty, which took the Byzantine Empire to the height of its power. The century and a half from 867 to 1025 saw a succession of generally excellent emperors who maintained the stability of the empire internally while expanding its borders. In 863, a major Arab invasion was annihilated at Poson, which set the stage for the steady advance of Byzantine armies against the Muslims. Even Antioch, one of the five original patriarchates of the Church lost to the Muslims in the 600's, was recovered. The Byzantines even had their eyes set on retaking the Holy Land and Jerusalem. In the north, the emperor Basil II waged relentless warfare against the Bulgarians, eliminating their kingdom entirely, and earning the title "Bulgar slayer". By Basil's death in 1025, the Byzantine Empire's borders extended all the way to the Danube River in the north and the borders of Palestine in the south. The Byzantines were definitely the super power of the Near East, but after Basil II's death everything started going wrong.

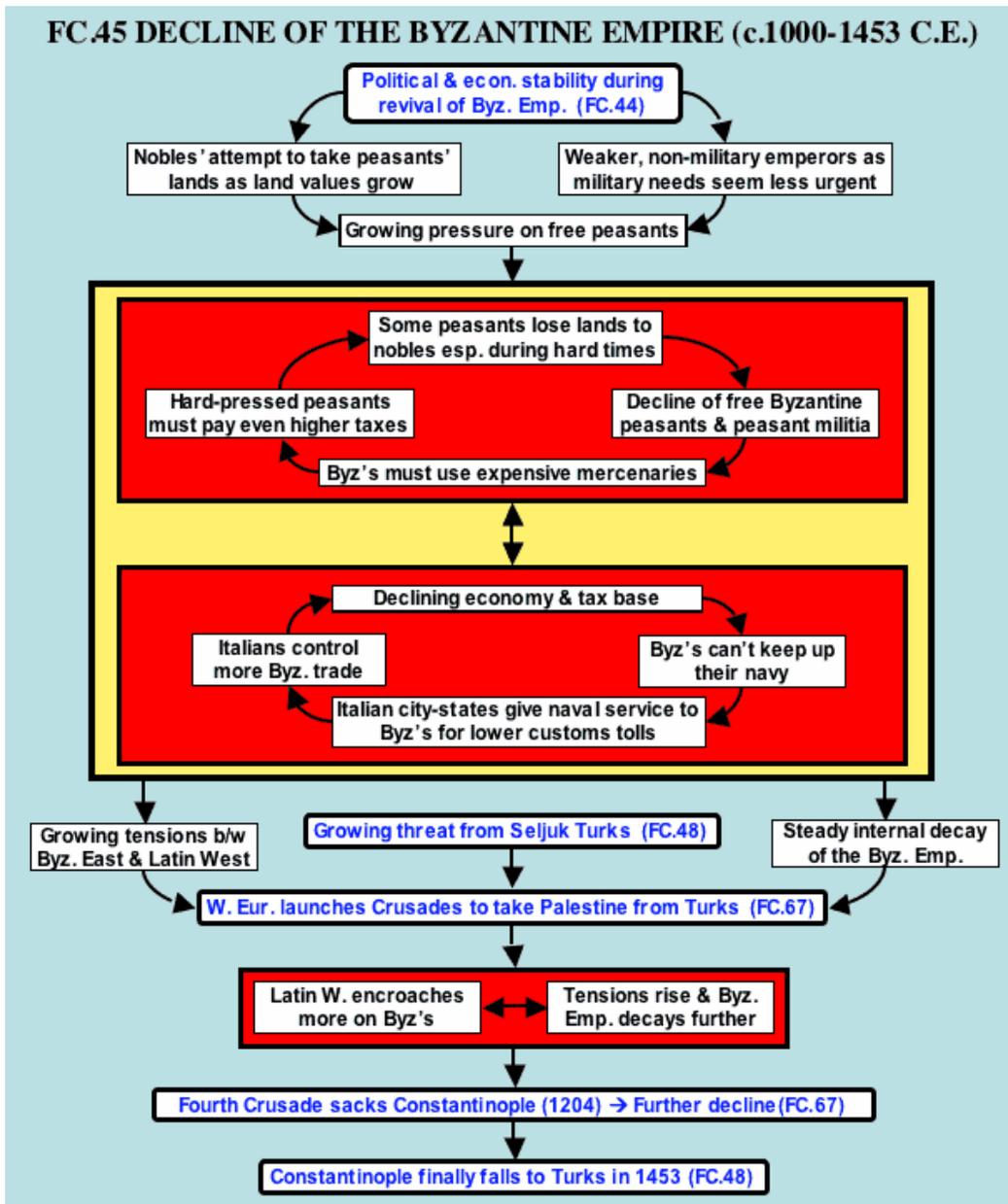
Our debt to the Byzantines

Byzantine civilization created little that was new or unique, being largely absorbed in religious matters or copying the literary forms of ancient Greece. However, in such an age of violence and confusion, the Byzantines did make invaluable contributions to civilization. First of all, Byzantine missionaries spread Greek Orthodox Christianity and civilization northward. Eastern Europe, especially Russia, was heavily influenced by Byzantine architecture, religion, and the Cyrillic alphabet. For example, the "onion domes" atop many Russian Churches testify to Byzantine influence. Orthodox Christianity has also had a profound and lasting impact on the Russian people down through the centuries to the present day, even surviving and outlasting official discouragement from the communist regime that held sway for nearly 75 years.

Second, the Byzantines passed Greek civilization, in particular its math and science, on to the Muslim Arabs. They in turn took the Greek heritage, added their own ingenious touches (such as the invention of algebra), and passed it on to Western Europe by way of Muslim Spain. This helped lay the foundations of our own scientific tradition.

Finally, the Byzantines directly passed much of ancient Greek culture to Western Europe during the Renaissance. Also, the Byzantines, just by holding back so many nomadic invaders from the East through the centuries, allowed Western Europe's culture survive and develop in relative peace. Many writers from the West, hostile to the Byzantines for historical reasons discussed above, have downplayed and criticized the role the Byzantines have played in the history of our civilization. This is unfortunate, since, during the Early Middle Ages in particular, the Byzantines did more than their share in the preservation and advance of civilization

FC45The decline and fall of the Byzantine Empire (1025-1453)



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The Byzantine Empire, much like the Roman Empire, faced a formidable array of external enemies. However, it was largely internal decay which destroyed both empires. The political and economic stability of the empire by 1000 A.D. led to two lines of development which combined to trigger a pair of interlocking feedback cycles that, in turn, eventually wrecked the empire. First of all, there was the free peasantry upon which the government depended for taxes and recruits. When the empire had been under constant attack, land had been a poor investment. But once stability started to return in the eighth century, many nobles looked greedily upon the farmlands controlled by the free peasantry. There was a constant battle as the nobles tried to get these lands and enserf the peasants. The government, seeing the free peasantry as the backbone of its economy and defence, did what it could to defend them. Basil II in particular fought long and hard to defend the peasants, but even he was unable to break the power of the nobles.

Secondly, and unfortunately for the peasants, not all emperors were strong or even concerned enough to defend the peasants. This was especially true after Basil II's death in 1025 when the empire was at its height and a strong military

seemed less necessary. Therefore, a series of weak rulers with little military experience succeeded Basil. During hard times, such as famine, nobles would take the chance to dispossess the peasants. This would lead to the decline of the free peasantry and army, which in turn forced the state to rely more and more on expensive foreign mercenaries. This further increased the tax burden on the peasants, which caused more of them to lose their lands, leading to more reliance on mercenaries and so on.

This vicious cycle weakened the economy and tax base to the point where the Byzantines could not even afford to maintain their navy. Therefore, they asked such rising Italian city-states as Venice and Genoa to fight their naval battles for them. The price they paid was to lower and eventually eliminate the 10% import toll the Venetians and Genoese would normally pay. This allowed them to undersell Byzantine goods, which lowered government revenues from trade as well as ruining the tightly run guilds of Byzantine artisans and craftsmen. The even lower revenues forced the Byzantines to rely even more on the Italians, who then got an even tighter stranglehold on the Byzantine economy, thus repeating the cycle.

This also fed back into the first feedback cycle as the loss of money from lower tolls forced the government to raise taxes further and create an even greater burden for the peasants. The combined effects of these cycles led to growing internal decay within the empire and growing tensions with the Italian city-states who were taking over more of the empire's trade.

Along with these processes, events elsewhere were closing in on the Byzantines in the tenth and eleventh centuries. By 1070, a new and more aggressive enemy, the Seljuk Turks, had replaced the Arabs as the main Muslim threat to the Byzantines. In 1071, at the battle of Manzikert, the Byzantines found out that, besides being expensive, mercenaries can also be unreliable. The result was a disastrous defeat when their Norman and Turkish mercenaries abandoned them without even fighting, leading to the loss of part of the Balkans and most of Asia Minor, the very heart of the empire. This, along with the declining economy described above, generated steady internal decay for the empire.

Desperate for help, the new emperor, Alexius I, made a plea to Western Europe for mercenaries. What he got instead was the First Crusade, a religious war with the goal of taking Palestine and Jerusalem from the Seljuk Turks. Alexius skilfully handled this wave of half civilized Westerners as they passed through his empire on the way to Palestine. He even managed to use them to recover part of Asia Minor. Alexius and his successors, John I and Manuel I did manage to stabilize the empire's frontiers and recover some ground. Unfortunately, in 1176, Manuel and his army were ambushed and severely defeated by the Turks at the battle of Myriocephalum. The lands regained over the last century were lost once again, showing how hollow the Byzantine recovery actually was.

Meanwhile, in addition to the Italian stranglehold on the Byzantine economy, growing cultural and religious differences led to rising tensions between the Byzantine East and Latin West. These tensions and the West's growing involvement in Byzantine affairs also helped lead to the First Crusade.

All the while, contact with the West kept growing, and with it friction between the two cultures. As the Italian city-states' stranglehold on the Byzantine Empire's trade grew, so did hostility against Italian merchants, who numbered some 60,000 in Constantinople alone. Cultural differences, such as how the two cultures carried on war and diplomacy, and a religious schism which split the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox Churches permanently in 1054, just added to the mutual animosity. In the late 1100's riots broke out in various Byzantine cities, causing the massacre of numerous Italian merchants.

A major backlash came from Western Europe in 1204 when Venice directed the soldiers of the Fourth Crusade to Constantinople, which they stormed and brutally sacked. A short lived Crusader state was set up but the Byzantines recaptured Constantinople in 1261. However, irreparable damage had been done. The Venetians still held strategic Aegean islands, and the Crusaders still controlled parts of Greece. Furthermore, much of the wealth and splendor of Constantinople had been hauled off to Venice and Western Europe.

The energy and resources the Byzantines used in recovering from this blow would have been better spent in meeting a potent new threat from the East: the Ottoman Turks. From 1300 onwards, the Ottomans steadily encroached on Byzantine lands in Asia Minor. In 1345 they crossed into Europe never to leave. The Byzantine state crumbled piece by piece into a pathetic remnant of itself. Finally in 1453, Constantinople, the last remnant of the old Roman Empire, fell to the Turks after a desperate and heroic siege. With that siege went the last remnants of the Roman Empire.