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Présentation de la fiche

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the commonwealth of Rome would keep its treasures forever, no payment would be made by the prince, no tax required on the holders of land . . . There would be no camps, nowhere should we have to hear the blast of trumpets, nowhere fashion arms. That throng of fighting-men, which now harries the commonwealth with civil wars, would be at the plough, would be busy with study, or learning the arts, or sailing the seas. Add to this, too, that none would be slain in war . . . Now away with those who make ready soldiers for civil strife, who arm the hands of brothers, to slay their brothers, who call on sons to wound their fathers . . ."

There is no reason, I think, to doubt the authenticity of the statement attributed by Eutropius to Probus. Nor is anything incredible in the elaboration given to that statement by the author of the 'Life' of Probus. To be sure, in offering his elaboration he may have been influenced, and the use of the adverb "now" (*nunc*) indicates that this was indeed the case, by the condition which prevailed during his lifetime, but this is something which affects any historian who studies an age other than his. The important point is that he correctly discerned the reasons for the calamities which were inflicted on the Roman world in the third century.

Probus, Claudius and Aurelianus before him, established some degree of order and restored the territorial and political unity of the Roman world. Diocletian, and Constantine after him, drawing upon the experience of the third century and the ideas which grew out of those experiences, gave to the Roman world, by their reorganization of its institutions and the codification of some of the practices which had evolved in the course of the same century, a new political, military and social character. At the same time, the spiritual changes which had been in process for centuries, came to a head. Christianity, now officially integrated into the society of the empire, gave to it a new creative force and, by virtue of that force, a new character to its culture. Thus, by the end of the first quarter of the fourth century the Roman world had been transformed into something quite different from what it was during the days of Aelius Aristides.

Transformed but not fallen. Scholars, very much aware of the fact that Rome and Italy created the Roman empire and primarily interested in the historical evolution of western Europe, tend to consider the disintegration of imperial authority in Rome and Italy and the final loss of both to the Germans to constitute the fall of the empire. This is, of course, not true. What is sometimes referred to as the *partitio imperii* which had been effected in 395 did not contemplate any break in the political unity of the Roman empire. In designating his sons emperors, the one to reside in Constantinople, the other in Italy, Theodosius I was in actual fact acting within the Roman tradition¹³. In the course of the fifth century personal

¹³ On the division of authority in 395 and the development which follows soon after which may have brought about changes in attitude between East and West, see: E. DEMOUGEOT, *De l'unité à la division de l'empire romain, 395—410* (Paris, 1951).

rivalries and the pressure of the barbarians at times seriously strained this political unity, but at no time were the eastern and western regions of the empire, though administered by different emperors, considered to be two different empires. It may be that the Roman aristocracy, attached to the tradition of Rome, cared very little about what was happening in Constantinople¹⁴, but this in no way changes the fundamental fact that the empire was one. The barbarians themselves were very much aware of this. When in 476 Odovacer deposed the reigning emperor residing in Italy, an act which had the effect of eliminating the imperial office in the west, he turned through the Roman senate to Constantinople for the ratification of the scheme he had in mind for the administration of Italy in the future. The act of Odovacer in 476 has been generally taken to mean the fall of the western empire. But as J. B. BURY has pointed out a long time ago, "No empire fell in A. D. 476; there was no 'Western Empire' to fall. There was only one Roman Empire, which sometimes was governed by two or more *Augusti*." The Roman empire, including the practice of having at times two or more *Augusti*, continued on, without a break, for many centuries to come¹⁵.

Nevertheless, there was a fall, not sudden of course, but still a fall: the occupation of all the western provinces, including Africa, by the Germans and the consequent loss by the empire of all effective jurisdiction over them. The question, therefore, still remains: how may one explain this fall? The question was discussed by contemporaries and has intrigued the mind of man since the Renaissance. The various answers given to the question have been summarized by SANTO MAZZARINO¹⁶. In general contemporaries saw in the spread of Christianity and the consequent neglect of the ancient Gods or in the persistence of belief in the ancient Gods and the consequent failure to worship the Christian God, the principal explanation of the decline. This explanation was shared to some extent by men of the Renaissance who reflected on the question and was given classical expression by GIBBON whose brilliant chapters on the origin, growth and triumph of Christianity and the subsequent influence of the Church is underlined by the belief that Christianity was a fundamental factor in the decline of the Roman world. It has been revived recently in a different context. A. H. M. JONES¹⁷ includes among the factors of the decline the vast wealth accumulated by the Church and the considerable amount of manpower which the Church solicited for its services, and A. MOMIGLIANO

¹⁴ See PETER BROWN, *Religion and Society in the Age of Saint Augustine* (London, 1972), 227—234. BROWN here reviews 'Das Ende des Kaisertums im Westen des römischen Reichs' by M. A. WES ('s-Gravenhage, 1967). WES emphasizes the contrast between East and West and considers that the West by 476 had become virtually an independent entity.

¹⁵ J. B. BURY, *History of the Later Roman Empire*, 2nd edition (London, 1931), 1:408.

¹⁶ SANTO MAZZARINO, *The End of the Ancient World*, translated from the Italian by GEORGE HOLMES (London, 1959).

¹⁷ A. H. M. JONES, *The Later Roman Empire, 284—602. A Social, Economic and Administrative Survey* (Oxford, 1964), 2:146.

