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## [Peter Charanis. Observations on the transformation of the roman world - suite]

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### Présentation de la fiche

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sees in the Church a fundamental factor in the weakening of the state, hence its inability to cope with the crises<sup>18</sup>. "The Church attracted the most creative minds . . . almost all born rulers, rulers of a type which, with the exception of the scholarly emperor Julian, it was hard to find on the imperial throne." "The Church changed the social equilibrium to the advantage of the spiritual and physical conditions of monks and priests, but to the disadvantage of the ancient institutions of the empire." "The best minds were working for the Church, not for the state."

But the question of how one may explain the loss by the empire of the western provinces was given other answers, answers of a quite different type. These answers range from the „*Ausrottung der Besten*“ of OTTO SEECK to the destruction of the *bourgeoisie* by the peasants of the army in alliance with the peasants of the country-side offered by ROSTOVITZEFF, and include such other explanations as these: exhaustion of the soil; changes in climate; the orientalization of the citizen body of Rome; the mixture of races; depopulation; unreasonable and oppressive taxation. It is an open question whether all of these conditions actually obtained<sup>19</sup>, but if they did obtain, they obtained both in the West and in the East, but there was no collapse in the East. It follows, therefore, that either a different set of factors were involved in the collapse of the west, and no such set has been discovered, or there were special conditions in the east which explain its survival. The argument was made a long time ago by NORMAN H. BAYNES<sup>20</sup>.

There has been a tendency in the last half of the century to minimize the role of the Germans in the collapse of the Roman West. But more recently there has been a return to the old view, first suggested in modern times by FLAVIO BRONDO and elaborated in the nineteenth century by German scholars, that the collapse of the Roman West was the work of the Germans. A. H. M. JONES wrote in 1964: "The simple but rather unfashionable view that the barbarians played a considerable part in the decline and fall of the empire may have some truth in it<sup>21</sup>." It may be argued indeed that this view does not only "have some truth in it," but it may be the whole truth. For, however weakened the empire may have become by the social, economic, administrative and demographic conditions which had come to obtain, it was the attacks of the Germans that brought about its collapse. The Germans, of course, were also active in the East; it was there indeed where they first attacked. Yet the East survived. One may ask therefore: how is it that a factor, in this case the German invasions, which obtained both in the East and in the West, did not have the same effect? The answer is simple, indeed "so humiliatingly simple," to use the words of BAYNES, that it must be true. The answer is, of course, Constantinople.

<sup>18</sup> A. MOMIGLIANO, Christianity and the Decline of the Roman Empire, in: The Conflict Between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century, essays edited by ARNOLDO MOMIGLIANO (Oxford, 1963), 1—16.

<sup>19</sup> NORMAN H. BAYNES, Byzantine Studies and Other Essays (London, 1955), 83—96.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>21</sup> JONES, op. cit., 1027.

By its location, fortifications, its hinterland in Asia Minor and the provinces farther east, including Egypt, upon whose resources and manpower it could draw, Constantinople could neither be taken nor bypassed by the barbarians. Constantinople in due course, by diplomacy, by subsidies, by military action would redress the balance and get rid of the German danger just as she would get rid of the danger of other peoples who were to attack in the future. In the West no such fortress, with a hinterland which could not be occupied unless the fortress itself was taken, existed. And so the Germans, by their repeated and diversified attacks, parcelled out among themselves the Roman provinces there and in the process progressively reduced the resources at the disposal of the Roman authorities in the West until finally the whole West was lost.

Constantine the Great is justly regarded as one of the most significant figures in the history of Europe. This is for two reasons: for the role which he played in the triumph of Christianity and for the foundation of Constantinople. Historically which one of these two acts of Constantine was the more significant is a question which may be considered open. Christianity, of course, determined to a very large measure the character of the civilization of Europe, but without Constantinople it may not have had the chance to do this.

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