

## **Four Additional Causes for the Fall of Rome**

### **Rapid Expansion and Military Spending**

The rapid growth in the lands conquered by the Empire led to the need to defend the borders and territories of Rome. Maintaining an army to defend the border of the Empire from barbarian attacks was a constant drain on the government. Military spending left few resources for other vital activities, such as providing public housing and maintaining quality roads and aqueducts. Frustrated Romans lost their desire to defend the Empire. The empire had to begin hiring soldiers recruited from the unemployed city mobs or worse from foreign countries. Such an army was not only unreliable, but very expensive. The emperors were forced to raise taxes frequently which in turn led again to increased inflation.

### **Overreliance on Slave Labor**

The number of slaves increased dramatically during the first 2 centuries of the Roman Empire. The Roman's dependency on slave labor led not only to the decline in morals, values and ethics but also to the stagnation of any new technology to produce goods more efficiently. Romans could rely on the slave manpower for all their needs but this reliance inhibited technological change and growth. The scientific achievements of the Roman Empire were limited almost entirely to engineering and the organization of public services. They built marvelous roads, bridges, and aqueducts and established the first system of medicine for the benefit of the poor. But since the Romans relied so much on human and animal labor, they failed to invent many new machines or find new technology to produce goods more efficiently. They could not provide enough goods for their growing population. The treatment of slaves led to rebellion and several Servile (Slave) Wars, the most famous being the revolt led by the gladiator slave, Spartacus. In the later centuries of the Empire and the advent of Christianity the attitudes towards slaves changed. With manumission (the act of freeing a slave) the number of slaves declined together with the manpower that Rome was dependent upon.

## **Unemployment of the Working Classes and the Gladiatorial Games**

Cheap slave labor resulted in the unemployment of the Plebs in Rome who became dependent on hand-outs from the state. The Romans attempted a policy of unrestricted trade but this led to the Plebs being unable to compete with foreign trade. The government were therefore forced to subsidize the working class Romans to make up the differences in prices. This resulted in thousands of Romans choosing just to live on the subsidies sacrificing their standard of living with an idle life of ease. The massive divide between the rich Romans and the poor Romans increased still further. If the thousands of unemployed Romans became bored this led to civil unrest and rioting in the streets. The 'Mob' needed to be amused - spectacular gladiatorial games had to be provided. The cost of the gladiatorial games was born by the Emperors, and therefore the state, and corrupt politicians who sponsored the games to curry favor and support with the 'Mob'. The cost of the gladiatorial games eventually came to one third of the total income of the Roman Empire.

## **Christianity and the loss of traditional values**

The decline of Rome dovetailed with the spread of Christianity, and some have argued that the rise of a new faith helped contribute to the empire's fall. The Edict of Milan legalized Christianity in 313, and it later became the state religion in 380. These decrees ended centuries of persecution, but they may have also eroded the traditional Roman values system. Christianity displaced the polytheistic Roman religion, which viewed the emperor as having a divine status, and also shifted focus away from the glory of the state and onto a sole deity. Meanwhile, popes and other church leaders took an increased role in political affairs, further complicating governance. The 18th-century historian Edward Gibbon was the most famous proponent of this theory, but his take has since been widely criticized. While the spread of Christianity may have played a small role in curbing Roman civic virtue, most scholars now argue that its influence paled in comparison to military, economic and administrative factors.