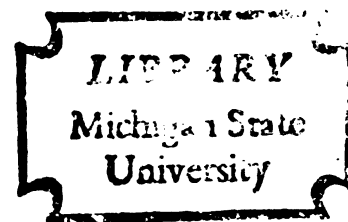


PROBLEMS IN MEDIEVAL  
HISTORIOGRAPHY: A  
SELECTIVE STUDY

WAYNE MITCHELL BLEDSE



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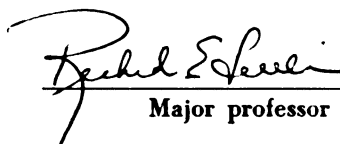
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## ABSTRACT

### PROBLEMS IN MEDIEVAL HISTORIOGRAPHY: A SELECTIVE STUDY

By

Wayne M. Bledsoe

Up to the nineteenth century there prevailed a certain point of view that colored every word written or spoken about the early Middle Ages. Essentially, this period was viewed by the pre-nineteenth century writers as being a "dark age" stigmatized by the triumph of Christianity and barbarism. These writers saw coming with the fall of Rome in 476 a dark shadow that was cast over Western Europe leaving humanity to wander in ignorance and superstition until the veil of darkness was finally rent by the Renaissance and Reformation of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

This concept of the early Middle Ages as a "dark age" received its original impetus from the writers of the Renaissance, Reformation, and Enlightenment periods. The spokesmen of these movements condemned the Middle Ages on the grounds that during this era men lost the ability to understand the Greek and Latin classics, corrupted the language, and sacrificed rational thinking for faith in the supernatural. These writers were content to label the Middle Ages as a "dark age" and to remove it from the pages of history as being unworthy of consideration by future generations.

In reaction to these concepts which had been forced upon the Middle Ages, there arose in the nineteenth century a

group of scholars who attempted to present the medieval period in a greater qualitative light. The leaders of the Romanticist and Nationalist movements saw the Middle Ages not as a period engulfed by darkness, but as an age possessing a particular brilliance of its own. For the romanticists the Middle Ages represented a period when men expressed themselves as they wanted. During this time the passions of men were allowed to run free. This particular school of thought could see a series of traits in medieval society that were never felt by the pre-nineteenth century writers. The nationalist historians likewise viewed the Middle Ages as a period of great importance. Being concerned primarily with the development of the national state, this school of writers found buried in the Middle Ages the roots of their homeland. They could see in this period primitive achievements which were later to evolve into full-fledged statehood. Thus, these scholars saw existing in the Middle Ages a series of traits and values which led not to a condemnation of the period, but praise. This was an age when the future states of Europe were being formulated and when man expressed himself in a carefree manner.

This conflict of opinion which has been briefly sketched here concerning the nature and importance of the Middle Ages is essentially the basic problem with which this present work will deal. This problem will be approached by offering a comparative study of those sources which have been influential in shaping medieval thought over the past six centuries. In essence, this work is not intended to present a new or unique thesis concerning the Middle Ages, but its value and usefulness

lie within the fact that it brings together and offers a synthesis of those theses which have been essential in the development of Medieval history.

While the nineteenth century was responsible for beginning the task of rediscovering the Middle Ages, which the previous centuries had dismissed as useless, the greatest achievements in lighting this "dark age" have been made in recent decades. With the increase in number and ability of specialized scholars studying the various aspects of classical and medieval civilization, it is no longer possible to support many of the views tenaciously accepted by pre-nineteenth century scholars. For example, it is no longer plausible to accept the belief that the beginning of the Middle Ages was a "catastrophic" event heralded by the triumph of Christianity and barbarism. Along with the study of classical and medieval institutions, which resulted in the disproof of the catastrophic theses, went the invalidation of those beliefs which held the Middle Ages to be a dark age containing little of value for the modern world. It is now generally accepted, from the work of modern medievalists, that this was a vital period best characterized as a period of incubation. It was out of the chaos following the fall of Rome that there emerged in the Western portion of the Roman Empire a distinctively different way of life from which the greater and more enlightened Western European civilization was to emerge. Just as modern research has pointed out, the true significance of the Middle Ages is not that it marked the end of classical civilization, but that it represented the beginning of a new way of life that was later

to blossom into the Western European civilization. Thus the major end sought by this work is to prove by a comparative study of essential medieval theses that the true significance of the Middle Ages is that it served as the incubation period for Western European civilization.

PROBLEMS IN MEDIEVAL HISTORIOGRAPHY: A SELECTIVE STUDY

By

Wayne Mitchell Bledsoe

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## PREFACE

One of the greatest problems confronting any historian is that of persuading his audience to view a particular period of the past without preconceived notions. This is an old story in the study of history and one that is as sad as it is old. Probably no other period in history has been so burdened with this task as has the Middle Ages. Despite the efforts of medievalists in recent decades to undo the false notions wrought by earlier scholars wearing glasses of various colors, many educated persons still persist in accepting ideas and beliefs of the early Middle Ages that are no longer tenable. For this reason, one of the major objectives of this work will be to examine medieval historiography of the past six centuries in an attempt to identify some of these inaccurate, but enduring beliefs and in the process demonstrate the efforts of modern scholars to combat them. Naturally to present a definitive study of all the sources embodied in this vast span of years would be an impossible task. Thus, of necessity, the present work will deal only with those sources which most adequately represent major schools of thought and which have had a measurable effect upon the shaping of medieval historiography.

While the utilization of such an approach as this has obvious limitation, e.g., the elimination of important works which do not conveniently fit into a school of thought, it

likewise has its advantages. The most important advantage to be gained by this approach is that it permits the author to demonstrate systematically how the various schools of thought have addressed themselves to particular historical issues. If by limiting this work to a selected number of sources which have been influential in the development of medieval historiography the reader is made more aware of the nature and magnitude of the problems involved in a study of the early Middle Ages, the purpose of the work will have been served. The great German historian and philosopher, Ernst Troeltsch, once said that there are times when it is more important to make a beginning than to produce the finished product. It is in that belief that the present work has been undertaken.

Many of the historiographical problems relating to medieval history that have arisen over the centuries have been created by the conflict of opinions concerning the beginning of the Middle Ages. Was this a "catastrophic" event heralded by the onslaught of barbarism and the triumph of Christianity, or was it an "evolutionary" process covering over two centuries of decay and devastation within classical civilization? Did the beginning of the Middle Ages mark the introduction of a "dark age" that was for centuries to engulf Western Europe, or was it the genesis of a new civilization that was soon to surpass even the golden age of Rome? So significant have these two questions been in the development of medieval historiography that a second objective of this work will be to establish whether or not the beginning of the Middle Ages was a catastrophic

event and if it was the beginning of a "dark age" containing little of value for the modern mind.

More specifically, our task will involve a consideration of when and under what circumstances the ancient world came to an end in Western Europe and the medieval began. As previously indicated, the method by which this problem will be approached is not intended to be a chronological history of the early Middle Ages, but rather a comparative study of those sources which have been essential in shaping medieval scholarship. By employing such an approach as this not only will it be possible to see the development of medieval historiography, but also to clear away some of the academic debris that is no longer tenable, but serves only to obscure the study of early medieval history. This will enable us to accomplish the last objective of this work, that of establishing the nature and significance of the epoch-making era, the early Middle Ages.

The process of research and writing always gives rise to many unrepayable debts. I would especially like to acknowledge my indebtedness and express my gratitude to Professor Richard E. Sullivan for his professional guidance, personal interest and constant encouragement which were so essential in the preparation of this manuscript. In addition to the assistance which Professor Sullivan rendered during this stage of my education, the example which he has set through his superlative scholarship, excellent teaching and his genuine love for students will continue to serve as a constant source of inspiration and as a challenge for myself. I am likewise

greatly indebted to Professor Eleanor Huzar for the aid, encouragement and instruction which I received from her during the pursuit of my degree. Also, special recognition must go to my wife, Marilyn Joyce, whose patience, encouragement and sacrifice on my behalf will always be unrepayable.

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## CHAPTER I

### DEVELOPMENTS IN MEDIEVAL HISTORIOGRAPHY

Most medievalists are now and have been for a long time aware of the need for historical revision in many areas of medieval historiography. Although a number of the distorted views of the Middle Ages which originated prior to the twentieth century have been rectified in the past thirty years, this claim cannot be made with confidence for the early Middle Ages. Unfortunately it is still not an exceptional incident when one finds professors, students, and textbooks extolling views of the Middle Ages that were first proffered as early as the fifteenth century. The all too many adherents of these antiquated ideas are not only certain that the Roman Empire fell in 476 A. D., but also they are fairly certain they know why, how and with what results. To these individuals the tremor which preceeded the quake can be seen in the advancement of Christianity across the Empire as it destroyed many of the unifying forces of Rome and in the process left the Empire too divided to offer any meaningful resistance to the horde of barbarians who later overran the West. The result of these two events was the beginning of a "dark age" which prevailed in Western Europe until the fourteenth century when fortunately a great light came with the Italian Renaissance.

With such views as these continuing to prevail in the

twentieth century, the casual critic may be inclined to conclude that the medievalists are more prone to advocate revision than to practice it. However, a more careful examination of the issue would render such a criticism invalid. First and foremost the observer must bear in mind that medieval scholarship of the past half century has had the ominous task of trying to dislodge views of the Middle Ages, some of which have been prevalent since the fifteenth century.

The concept of a Middle Age first originated with the humanist writers of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In an attempt to achieve literary excellence and master the requirements of proper rhetorical form, the humanists began to bridge the gap which separated their own age from that of antiquity and in the process gave rise to the notion of a "middle" or "in-between" period.<sup>1</sup> To the humanists this middle period represented a vast chasm in the development of mankind as the primitive barbarians, who had taken possession of the Empire, lacked the ability to perpetuate such an advanced intellectual tradition.<sup>2</sup> The results were that they soon corrupted the language, permitted the Greek and Latin classics to fall into disuse and sacrificed the gains made by classical scholarship to the narrow and ascetic values of the theologians. The ten centuries which separated the golden

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<sup>1</sup>Wallace K. Ferguson, The Renaissance in Historical Thought (New York, 1948) p. 8; Karl F. Strohecker, Germanentum und Späntike (Zurich, 1965) p. 277.

<sup>2</sup>Ferguson, p. 8.

age of classicism from their own day was significant to the humanists only as a "dark age" dividing two vastly superior ages of culture and intellectual activity.<sup>3</sup>

Although the Renaissance had established the notion of a "middle age" and adjoined to it the inaccurate, but enduring appellation, the "dark age," an even more formidable obstacle to medieval historiography emerged with the Reformation of the sixteenth century. As a result of the internal dispute which had rent the very foundation of Christendom, the various factions involved in this turmoil turned to the past in search of evidence which would support the castigations being hurled at their opponent. Given the nature of the conflict which raged within the Church during the sixteenth century, it was only natural that both sides in this dispute would turn to the Middle Ages to amass evidence to support their predetermined views.<sup>4</sup> So intense was this religious conflict that for many years after the Reformation there was little opportunity for a free and impartial study of the Middle Ages.

The most devastating attack upon the Middle Ages was produced by the Protestant theologian-historians who were searching for evidence which would prove that the elaborate ritual, dogma and exalted political position of the Roman Church had been the result of satanic influence. For the Protestant historians the story of human development was a

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<sup>3</sup>Ferguson, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup>Harry Elmer Barnes, A History of Historical Writing (Norman, 1938), p. 122.

drama cast on an earthly stage filled with living marionettes which were manipulated by both God and the devil. Institutions of which the reformers disapproved, such as the papacy and monasticism, were thought to be condemned adequately by the suggestion of their satanic origin.

Although Martin Luther is remembered primarily as a theologian, no small portion of his work was devoted to a fiery condemnation of the two institutions, i. e., the papacy and monasticism, which had been essential in the shaping of the medieval world. According to Luther, from the seventh to the fourteenth century the papacy had become a temporal power in itself as a result of the satanically inspired popes exercising their authority in a supra-scriptural manner.<sup>5</sup> Luther presents such events as the coronation of Charlemagne as a direct attempt on the part of the papacy to gain temporal power and wealth. In the words of Luther, "...with a mere name and empty title they [popes] have...dug in their claws more and more, later strengthening this with the coronation... so that they, the robbers of authority could take what the Germans had won by the sword."<sup>6</sup> The work of Luther is filled with attempts to illustrate that the papal office had been responsible for much of the human suffering and disasters of the Middle Ages. Evidence of this can be found in such state-

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<sup>5</sup>Martin Luther, Luther's Works, ed., James Atkinson (55 vols.; Philadelphia, 1955-67), XLI, 372-75.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 375.

ments as "...a hundred years ago, that fine king of Hungary and Poland, Ladislaus, was tragically slain by the Turks along with so many of his people because he had been led astray by the papal legates...."<sup>7</sup> It was Luther's conviction that as a result of the popes' exercising temporal authority, which was alien to the teachings of the scriptures, there developed devastating political feuds between various lords and princes which proved to be detrimental to the entire Western world.

Luther also dwelt at length in his writings on the institution of monasticism which he likewise believed to have been the creation of men who were satanically motivated. Concerning this issue Luther asserted, "It [monasticism] is purely a most pernicious invention of men no different from all the other inventions of men."<sup>8</sup> In an attempt to dispel the reverent attitude in which the monks continued to be viewed by much of society, Luther developed a five point attack in which he tried to prove that monasticism was not commanded by God's word, but was actually contrary to it; that it conflicted with faith, was a violation of Christian freedom, violated the first commandment, and was contrary to common sense and reason.<sup>9</sup> After developing these five points in a very lengthy polemic, Luther concluded that "...you understand now with what faith

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 44, 194.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 252-53.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 249-59.

and piety these brothers of 'satan' take their vows...."<sup>10</sup>

Thus, the two institutions which are critical to any study of the Middle Ages, Luther dismissed as being the work of the devil and void of any positive achievements.

The attack which Luther had launched against the papacy and monasticism was taken up with equal vigor by a number of his disciples. Among the most sustained attacks of the reformers can be found in the works of Philip Melanchthon and Matthew Flacius Illyricus. In harmony with Luther's view on Church and State, both Melanchthon and Flacius denounced the presumptuous practices of the papacy whereby the Church was increasing its temporal authority at the expense of the State.<sup>11</sup> In regards to the papacy, Flacius wrote that, "...the desire to defend the truth of the Protestant position and overthrow the papacy" had been the objective of his labors in Church history.<sup>12</sup> To fulfill this end Flacius set out to prove that during the Middle Ages scriptural truth had been sacrificed to the wind by ambitious popes who were motivated by a desire to increase their worldly position. In pursuit of his announced goal, Flacius, along with a number of his associates, produced the Magdeburg Centuries, a vast history of the Church

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 260.

<sup>11</sup>Philip Melanchthon, On Christian Doctrine, ed., Clyde Manschreck (Oxford, 1965), pp. 326-27; Flacius, Correspondence of Matthew Parker, eds., John Bruce and Thomas Perowne (Cambridge, 1953), pp. 139-40.

<sup>12</sup>Flacius, pp. 139-40.

from the time of Christ to 1300 A. D., which represents one of the most industrious, as well as one of the most biased, undertakings of the Reformation period. The primary objective of this work was to reveal the extent to which "pure doctrine" had been corrupted since the death of Christ and expose the role which the papacy had played in this process.<sup>13</sup> As a result of the theological interests and apologetic purpose that inspired this work, it is obvious that it would result in a biased analysis of the Middle Ages.

While many additional references could be cited for the Reformation period, the essential points are obvious. In an attempt to justify their own actions, the Protestant reformers created a picture of Church history in which the devil was seen as the chief architect. As a result of the nature of the issues involved, not only were the Middle Ages being placed in an even more disparaging position than that which had been imposed upon it by the humanists, but it was being done in such a way as to impede future study of medieval history. The heated dispute which raged between the Protestants and the Catholics produced such emotional overtones that the repercussions are still with us today. If one were to accept the account of the Church and its related institutions as proffered by the reformers, the appellation, "the dark age" would seem appropriate indeed.

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<sup>13</sup>Matthew A. Fitzsimon, Alfred G. Pundt, and Charles E. Nowell, The Development of Historiography (Port Washington, 1954), p. 121.

As would be expected the Catholic scholars were not slow in responding to their adversaries. The central issue in all of their arguments was that the Church had always been the same and its doctrine had not been altered during the Middle Ages. Although the work of the Church scholars, like that of the Protestants, was inspired by their theological interests, the means which the former applied to their ends were far superior to those of the latter. In their efforts to answer the charges wrought by the reformers, the Church Fathers not only assembled a vast assortment of primary source material, but also, through their industry and labor, promoted great advances in the critical handling of medieval documents.

Although a number of examples could be given to illustrate the efforts of the Church to counter the attacks of the reformers, probably the most spectacular accomplishment of the Church during this period was achieved through the combined efforts of the Jesuits and Benedictines.<sup>14</sup> The Jesuits played a vital role in the opening of new vistas in the study of medieval history with their laborious investigations into the lives of the saints.<sup>15</sup> This project, which was started by Father Herbert Rosweyde and furthered by Father John Bollandus, was a notable advance in the handling of medieval manuscripts. The compilers of the Acta Sanctorum were compelled

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<sup>14</sup>The efforts of such men as Fathers John Bollandus, Mabillion, Luc d'Achery attest to this claim.

<sup>15</sup>Hippolyte Delehaye, S. J., The Works of the Bollandists, trans. V. M. Crawford (New York, 1907), pp. 7-56.

to examine a vast amount of material and in the process discovered that such sources as the Spanish chronicles and the lives of the Irish saints could not be trusted.<sup>16</sup>

Still another important figure in the Church's response to the reformers was Jean Mabillion. One of Mabillion's primary concerns was that of trying to rectify the image of the medieval monk which had been so bitterly assailed by such men as Luther. In his nine volume work entitled The Acts of the Benedictine Saints, Mabillion sought to reveal the virtues of medieval monasticism and the sanctity of the Benedictine Order.<sup>17</sup> This work, along with his Annals of the Benedictine Order, paid tribute to the highly critical talent that some men were beginning to apply to the study of the Middle Ages. Significant through these contributions were, the most famous of Mabillion's works was his Six Books on Diplomatics which appeared in 1681 and was devoted to the formulation of several scientific principles which could be applied to the study of ancient documents.<sup>18</sup> The author's objective in this work was to reveal the scientific procedures which he had employed in studying the seals, language, handwriting, paper and ink, in his effort to determine the authenticity of a particular document. Unfortunately, however, the searching study of medieval history which began with the Jesuits and Benedictines

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Fitzsimon, Pundt, and Nowell, pp. 129-30.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

did not hold sway over the intellectual activity of the eighteenth century. The attitude toward the Middle Ages that was expressed in the forthcoming "Age of Reason" was more in keeping with those ideas which we have seen set forth by the humanists and Protestants. It is to the historiography of the "Age of Reason" that we must now turn our attention.

During the period when the boundaries of the Western world were being extended as a result of the ventures of such men as da Gama, Columbus and Magellan, less renowned individuals were devoting themselves to the exploration of the universe.<sup>19</sup> Through the investigations of such men as Copernicus, Bruno, Galileo and Tycho Brahe, it was discovered that there was a certain harmony and orderly arrangement in the functioning of the universe and the understanding of this celestial arrangement was totally within the comprehension of man. Following through with the gains which were being made by science, Francis Bacon, Rene Descartes and John Locke assumed the responsibility for reducing the general implications of these scientific discoveries into a systematic body of philosophy.<sup>20</sup> The net result of the combined efforts of the scientists and philosophers was the gradual development of rational explanations for events which had formerly been attributed to miracles and wonders. No longer were the educated content to employ

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 147.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 148.

supernatural factors to explain history, as the intricacies of human activity now appeared to be within the limits of man's reasoning power.

The new scientific discoveries which had been made by the astronomers and systematized by the philosophers came to maturity in the eighteenth century movement known as the "Enlightenment." Captivated by the growth of rationalism the scholars of this, the "Age of Reason," began to apply the methods of the scientist to every aspect of human activity.<sup>21</sup> With reason being paramount in the eyes of the rationalists, they would not accept any concept or idea which could not be supported by the trestle of rational thinking.

For the present work, one of the most important innovations of the rationalist school was the attempt to discredit superstition and theological theories of historical causation and to substitute natural causes.<sup>22</sup> When the scientific concept of historical investigation was applied to the Middle Ages, it was only natural that the period which witnessed the triumph of Christianity and barbarization could not be viewed by the rationalists in an objective fashion. Evidence of this fact can be found in the works of Voltaire and Edward Gibbon as their buoyant faith in science and reason left their investigations of the Middle Ages dripping with disdain.

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<sup>21</sup>J. B. Black, The Art of History (New York, 1926), p. 22.

<sup>22</sup>Edward Fueter, Geschichte der Neueren Historiographie (Munchen, 1911), pp. 345-49.

Voltaire, the father of the Enlightenment, was committed to the view that human history had been advanced primarily by the clash of ideas and civilizations. In his efforts to support this theory, however, his approach consisted of a rather subjective grouping of historical events into two categories: those which had advanced humanity and rendered greater happiness and those which served only to burden the memory. According to the father of the Enlightenment, while it was a laudable task to record the former, it was likewise reasonable to ignore the latter. If one can conclude that silence is significant, Voltaire presented a most unique and profound criticism of the early Middle Ages. Viewing this period as one which serves only to burden the memory, Voltaire treated it in a very fragmentary fashion and it was not until he reached the reign of Charlemagne that his work assumed a more comprehensive form.<sup>23</sup> The reason for Voltaire's virtually ignoring the early Middle Ages is obvious. Being a product of the "Age of Reason" and a disciple of intellectual history, he could view the appearance of the barbarians in the West only as a catastrophic event. In the eyes of Voltaire, the onslaught of the barbarians reduced the Western Empire to a state of profound devastation and gross ignorance.<sup>24</sup> According to this authority, the conquerors turned to theft and

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<sup>23</sup>Voltaire, General History, Vol. XXIV of The Works of Voltaire, ed., E. R. Dumont (58 vols.; New York, 1901). Voltaire's attitude concerning the early Middle Ages can even be seen in his chapter headings as he passes from the fall of Rome to the age of Charlemagne.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

rapine to sustain themselves while about them lay vast regions of fertile soil. The intruders razed many cities while founding none to replace them.<sup>25</sup> In short, Voltaire would conclude that the barbarians brought ruin and decay to all that they touched, while contributing nothing to the development of humanity.

A similar opinion of the barbarians was echoed in the work of Edward Gibbon. Using the golden age of Rome as an absolute standard against which all others were to be judged, Gibbon saw flowing with the tide of invaders all of the misery and desolation that was to characterize Europe for the next thousand years.<sup>26</sup> To Gibbon, it was a painful sight to view the destruction of districts which had once been the centers of flourishing civilization.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to their vociferous animosity to the barbarians, Voltaire and Gibbon also looked with disdain upon the triumph of Christianity. According to these two sources, Christianity was a superstitious growth that developed in a barbaric community and resulted in a widespread acceptance of irrational practices and beliefs. Gibbon saw Christianity as the chief factor which brought chaos to the social, political and military institutions of the Roman Empire when they most

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>26</sup> Edward Gibbon, The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, ed., J. B. Bury (5th ed.; 7 vols.; London, 1900-02), I, 78.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

desperately needed orderly operation.<sup>28</sup> With this destruction of what Gibbon considered to be the greatest civilization previously known to mankind, he could not avoid being antagonistic toward Christianity.<sup>29</sup> Gibbon did, however, recognize the fact that Christianity played an important role in the history of the West once the secular Empire had fallen. According to Gibbon, while Christianity was a factor in hastening the collapse of the Empire, the Church did cushion the repercussions as it tended to tame the barbarians and impart unto them a higher set of values.<sup>30</sup>

Voltaire's very articulate hostility to religion can best be explained by his disapproval of what he considered to be "indiscretions" on the part of the clergy. According to Voltaire Christianity, which had evolved from very humble origins, had been maliciously manipulated by an ambitious group of men who were seeking to further their own ends.<sup>31</sup> The result of such behaviour, asserts Voltaire, was that the one institution which could have been the great binding force in the world became the instigator of intolerance, hatred and destruction.<sup>32</sup> The newly formulated dogma of the Church was

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., I, 163.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., III, 324.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., IV, 79-80, 163.

<sup>31</sup>Voltaire, XXIV, 85-87.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

used by the clergy to control the minds of the ignorant and to pursue their own ambitions.<sup>33</sup> Using an extremely narrow and biased view of the clergy as a basis for their attack, the rationalists came to view the Middle Ages as a period deeply scarred by decay, superstition and ignorance.

In conclusion it follows that the rationalists could not express themselves temperately or as disinterested spectators concerning the early Middle Ages and as a result the edifying attributes of the era were not called to their attention. They failed to see the new principles of life and energy imparted to the world by the barbarians and particularly by the Church. In virtue of their philosophy they could not do justice to papal history and the ecclesiastical organization of Europe which became the nucleus of a new and more enlightened order. For the man of the "Enlightenment" the Middle Ages stood as a "trough" in the development of humanity. It was truly a dark age.<sup>34</sup>

Although additional references could be cited to illustrate the predominant position which the rationalists held in Western Europe during the eighteenth century, it should also be noted that a reaction against it was already in the making.<sup>35</sup> The efforts of these men to enshrine reason as the

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>34</sup>Other works could be listed here to illustrate the new "Enlightenment," such as those of David Hume and David Robertson, but the tenor of their work is the same as Voltaire and Gibbon.

<sup>35</sup>Fitzsimon, Pundt and Nowell, p. 163.

"prime Enchantress" was not acceptable to eighteenth century scholarship as a whole. Many scholars of the Enlightenment period came to question the over-evaluation of the rational side of man as well as the cool and detached objectivity which characterized the work of Voltaire and those who followed his example. Under these conditions it was only natural that there would emerge a reaction against some of the premises and methods employed by the rationalists. Although the various stages in this transition were gradual, they were clearly distinguishable. As Harry Elmer Barnes has stated, "It began with the conservative rationalism of Montesquieu, passed to the almost irrational sentimentalism of Rousseau and ended in the mystic and idealistic vagaries of Romanticism."<sup>36</sup>

Turning to the work of Montesquieu we find that the primary importance of his investigations, as far as the present study is concerned, is contained within his general attitude toward methodology.<sup>37</sup> Unlike Voltaire, Montesquieu did not dismiss the unique elements of earlier societies simply because they did not harmonize with the thought and customs of his own age. On a number of occasions Montesquieu expressed the notion that, "To apply the ideas of the present to the distant ages is the most fruitful source of error."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Barnes, A History of Historical Writing, p. 165.

<sup>37</sup>Fitzsimon, Pundt and Nowell, pp. 152-53.

<sup>38</sup>Montesquieu, Esprit de Lois, ed., J. P. Prichard, (London, 1914), Bk. XXX, Chapter XI.

Thus, unlike his predecessors who measured the worth of an age by contemporary standards, Montesquieu expressed that the value of any idea or institution is not to be judged arbitrarily, but by the manner in which it served a particular society.<sup>39</sup> The importance of Montesquieu's position on this point lies within the fact that for the first time it was possible for scholars to devote attention to the Middle Ages in terms of its own history and view this era in a more objective manner.

An even more significant departure from the basic philosophy and methodology of the rationalists than that of Montesquieu, can be found in the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. It was Rousseau, and those who followed his lead, who actually paved the way for the transition from "Rationalism" to "Romanticism." The reaction of Rousseau to the rationalists was based primarily upon his assumption that pure reason in itself was not sufficient to render an accurate analysis of human nature and progress. In several of his works Rousseau maintained that "cold reason" in itself has never realized any illustrious accomplishments.<sup>40</sup> According to this authority, it is only when reason is supplemented by "feeling" and "imagination" that an adequate analysis of any situation can be achieved. As Rousseau has stated it, "In the long run

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Emile ou de l' Education (Paris, 1939), p. 358.

reason takes the line that the heart dictates."<sup>41</sup> In his works, Rousseau elevated "feeling" to a position superior to reason. As he expressed it in his Lettres Morales, "For us to exist is to feel; and our sensibility is incontestably prior to our reason."<sup>42</sup> Thus, for Rousseau, deep thinking was attainable only by a man of deep feeling.

The significance of Rousseau's attack upon "cold reason" lies in the profound effect which it had upon the realm of historiography in the early nineteenth century. As a result of this attack upon the rigid intellectual standards of the rationalists, there began to emerge in the late eighteenth century less rigid measures for examining the value and importance of the Middle Ages. Reason was no longer paramount and the way was open for the rise of Romanticism.

The reaction which had already begun to mount against the rationalism of Voltaire and his followers was further stimulated by the French Revolution. The war itself tended to accentuate the growing skepticism of some intellectuals in the ability of pure reason to alleviate existing problems and with this development the advent of the Romanticists was quickened.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Generale Correspondence, ed., Theophile Dufour (19 vols.; Paris, 1924-34), XIX, 42-63.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., III, 360-61.

<sup>43</sup>Barnes, p. 178.

The fundamental premise upon which the Romanticists based their historical perspective involved a belief in the gradual and unconscious evolvement of culture. Within this school of thought there existed a certain mysticism which defied any scientific analysis of the process whereby certain unconscious creative forces worked together to produce what the Romanticists called the "spirit" of an age or nation. Those aspects of national development which the Romanticists could not logically explain were simply attributed to the "genius" of the people.<sup>44</sup> Thus, in their investigations the Romanticists tended to emphasize national tradition and to employ rather fluid terminology, e. g., "spirit of a nation" or "genius of the people" to express their ideas. As the various adherents to this school of thought began to probe the mysteries of the past in an effort to discover the origin of the national state, the Middle Ages became a particularly fertile area of historical investigation. Although each state within Europe spawned a number of romantic writers, no better example of nineteenth century historiography can be found than the work of the noted French historian, Jules Michelet.<sup>45</sup> His voluminous work embodied, "par excellence," the romantic and national elements that characterized nineteenth century writing.

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>In Germany there were such men as Jacob Grimm and Karl F. Eichron; in France the father of the Romanticists, Chateaubriand and the most noted of England was Sir Walter Scott.

In contrast to the views which we found expressed in the work of the Humanists, Protestants, and Rationalists, Michelet discovered in the Middle Ages not only the origin of the national state, but also a number of previously neglected factors which inspired him to view both the barbarians and the Church in a more sympathetic fashion than had his predecessors.<sup>46</sup> To Michelet, the period of the Germanic migration should not be described as inaugurating a season of decline in Western Europe. According to him, the barbarians had long been harbored in the provinces of Rome and as a result had made considerable strides toward becoming civilized.<sup>47</sup> For example, Michelet maintained that the land which the invaders inhabited was not commandeered in a piratical fashion, but was that which had already been removed from cultivation. It was not uncommon, asserts this authority, for the invaders to indemnify the land owners for their lost land.<sup>48</sup>

Not only did Michelet's view of the barbarians differ from those of the rationalists, but he also advocated a more favorable account of the Church. During the early Middle Ages when the central authority was wavering in its social and political responsibility, it was the Church which retrieved the fallen reins of government and guided society to a firmer

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<sup>46</sup>Jules Michelet, History of France, trans., G. H. Smith (2 vols.; New York, 1857), I, 78.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 78-80.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

foundation.<sup>49</sup> According to Michelet, while the State was fluctuating amidst instability it was the Church which transformed the "genius" of the barbarians into a usable civil instrument and at the same time functioned as guardian of the West while directing the formation of a more enduring order.<sup>50</sup> It was the Church which taught the invaders to accept the responsibility and burdens of civilization.<sup>51</sup> To Michelet the early Middle Ages stood as the foundation for a greater, more progressive and more enlightened order which was to come.

In summary it can be concluded that although the Romanticists frequently saturated their work with sentimentalism, emotional appeal and placed too much faith in the "genius" of a nation, their endeavors were not without significance. The Romanticists merit a significant position in the development of medieval historiography as a result of their efforts to challenge the heretofore prevalent notion that the Middle Ages was a dark age and unworthy of scholarly attention. The stigma which earlier schools of thought had appended to the early Middle Ages began to fade as the period was now open to serious investigation. Another contribution of the Romanticists which was of major importance was their challenge to the concept of catastrophic causation. With their efforts to

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., pp. 64-65.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., pp. 99-100.

<sup>51</sup>Michelet later changed his views on the Church as he felt it had been partly responsible for the French Revolution.

trace the ideas that contributed to the spirit of a nation, they had inadvertently given rise to the idea of "continuation" in human development. Last, and equally important, with the emphasis which the Romanticists placed upon national tradition they opened the door for the purely nationalist historians who also appeared in the nineteenth century. It is to the latter group that attention must now be given.

The national states which had been developing in Western Europe since the later Middle Ages came to maturity in the nineteenth century and experienced a welling up of patriotic pride which needed an avenue of release. The chief means whereby the newly formed states were able to express this patriotism was through the publication of countless narratives devoted to a glorification of their past. Germany, France and England all witnessed the appearance of a number of scholars who diligently devoted themselves to the production of very chauvinistic works. In Germany such works as Friedrich Wilkins' History of the German People and Johannes Mullers' History of the Crusade were representative of this movement as both men labored to emphasize the powers of the German people and to glorify their medieval heroes.<sup>52</sup> Similar works were produced in France by such men as Claude Fauriel and Francois Raynouard which endeavored to prove the superiority of the French.<sup>53</sup> In England the historical literature of the

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<sup>52</sup>Barnes, p. 210.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 215.

nineteenth century was dominated by the Aryan myth which was designed to stress the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon people. Evidence of this myth can be found in E. A. Freeman's History of the Norman Conquest of England and John Kemble's, The Saxons in England as both hail the Teutonic race as a superior breed.<sup>54</sup>

Although the nationalists turned to the Middle Ages to find evidence and examples to support their claims, the contributions of this school have only limited value for medieval historiography. Being motivated by a desire to trace the origins of the national state, the nationalist historians concentrated their efforts upon the late Middle Ages and seldom penetrated the period prior to the eleventh century as it was not relevant to their desires. The result of this practice was that there remained a considerable portion of the Middle Ages still untouched.

In his most informative account of the development of historiography in the nineteenth century, G. P. Gooch has pointed out that prior to the nineteenth century historical scholarship labored under three major handicaps: the catastrophic theory of historical causation and contempt for the medieval period; the absence of an adequate collection of original sources; and the failure to provide for any competent or systematic teaching of history.<sup>55</sup> As was demonstrated in

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 218.

<sup>55</sup>G. P. Gooch, History and Historians (New York, 1913), pp. 10-13.

the above pages, the Romanticists made significant strides toward correcting the first of these handicaps by introducing the idea of continuity in historical development and by elevating the medieval period as a most fruitful age for historical research. It has likewise been demonstrated that the nationalist historians made notable advances against the second handicap with their magnificent collection of source material for the history of the modern nations. However, there was yet a third development during the nineteenth century which was to influence not only medieval historiography, but historiography in general. This third factor was the development of "critical scholarship" in the field of history.

As was noted earlier, the first important step in the growth of modern historical investigation came from the Benedictine monks at Saint-Maur. As will be recalled, the most significant historical advance which emerged from Saint-Maur came with Jean Mabillion's work on the science of diplomatics, i. e., the critical method of determining the authenticity of documents. While the advances which Mabillion had introduced were important in determining the validity of a source, his achievements had certain limitations. One very important omission of the monks was their failure to question the accuracy of the historical content of the texts which they worked so diligently to authenticate. It was not until the nineteenth century that there finally arose a group of scholars who devoted themselves to the task of critical historical scholarship in which the actual content of a document was challenged.

Although there were a number of scholars who were involved in this advancement, few became as well known or as often quoted as Leopold von Ranke. To his History of the Latin and Teutonic Nations, 1494-1514, Ranke appended a brief treatise entitled, A Critique of Modern Historical Writers which has continually served to influence the historical profession.<sup>56</sup> In this appendix Ranke applied historical criticism to the historians who at the time were considered authoritative sources and showed their general histories to be untrue. In the process of his interpretive criticism, Ranke established the axiom that only original documents and archives were the proper source for the reconstruction of history and that historical scholarship should be the simple truth of what really happened.<sup>57</sup> Although Ranke's ideal of objectivity has been seriously questioned by the twentieth century historians, this is hardly sufficient ground for minimizing his place in historiography.<sup>58</sup> It was Ranke who set forth the admirable, if impossible, doctrine that the historian must view the past independent of present biases and narrate the events of the past as they actually occurred.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Leopold von Ranke, History of the Latin and Teutonic Nations, 1494-1514 (London, 1915).

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Emory Neff, The Poetry of History (New York, 1947), pp. 189-91.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

In addition to his contribution of the principles for internal criticism and his insistence upon "total objectivity" Ranke also made a lasting contribution with his investigations into the continuity of history.<sup>60</sup> As a result of his years of research and writing, Ranke asserted in his Universal History that it was impossible, "to rest in the history of single peoples."<sup>61</sup> "The races have won in the course of the ages," said Ranke, "an heirloom in material and social advance, religion and creation of genius, memories of great events and great men which 'unify' all mankind."<sup>62</sup> According to Ranke there was a common denominator which moved progressively from one era to another and the purpose of universal history was to trace the sequence of events, "which link all nations together and control their destinies."<sup>63</sup> As shall be presently demonstrated, it was this philosophy, which emphasized the element of continuity in the development of civilizations, that was to be a key factor in the shaping of modern historiography. To Ranke, the Middle Ages stood as a link in the chain of human development and was no less important than those periods which preceded or followed it. It was this belief in the unity of mankind that inspired Ranke to assert in his History of the Popes of Rome that no history could be

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

<sup>61</sup>Ranke, Universal History, trans., G. W. Prothero (New York, 1885), p. x.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. xlvi.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. xi.

written except universal history.<sup>64</sup>

There was yet one other development which transpired in the nineteenth century that was to have a bearing upon medieval historiography. Once again historical research came to be influenced by the developments that were being experienced in science. Reference at this point is to the advancements that were being made in regard to the theory of evolution. Although this theory was by no means original in the nineteenth century, it becomes especially cogent to our task as it was now being applied to the development of social institutions. With the appearance in 1894 of W. E. H. Lecky's History of European Morals we see a conscious effort being made to apply the biological concepts of evolution to the realm of social change. His writing represents one of the first efforts of historians to correlate historical development with the notions of evolution.<sup>65</sup>

Lecky's entire thesis is based upon the debatable hypothesis that moral standards are in a constant state of improvement.<sup>66</sup> From the reign of Constantine when Christianity was first adopted as the accepted religion of the Empire, it began to exert a powerful influence on the moral standards of the people and eventually made possible a series of changes

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<sup>64</sup>Ranke, History of the Popes of Rome, trans., Sarah Austin (3 vols.; London, 1840), II, xix-xxi.

<sup>65</sup>Gooch, p. 366.

<sup>66</sup>James J. Auchmuty, Lecky (London, 1945), p. 50.

resulting in the formation of those institutions, such as feudalism, which served as a forerunner of the national state. Although the Church itself may have become corrupt during this process, it did not hinder the evolution of moral development that was taking place within society.

The first stages of Lecky's thesis see the Church presented as a very philanthropic institution, imparting to its subjects a new sense of the value of life and developing a much needed concept of universal brotherhood.<sup>67</sup> According to Lecky, as long as the moral life of the Empire had been directed by the teachings of pagan religions there existed no knowledge of the true value of human life. It was not until the advent of Christianity that man learned it was wrong to slay willfully his fellowman. This practice was common in Rome as is attested by the ever popular gladiatorial games. Christianity strongly attacked this sadistic means of entertainment by dogmatically asserting the sinfulness of destroying human life for amusement.<sup>68</sup>

While the earliest stage of Christianity was looked upon as a benevolent institution, there soon arose a great ascetic movement which eventually diverted the enthusiasm of the Church into new channels. Emphasis was no longer placed upon the virtue of charity, but now passed to the newly accen-

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<sup>67</sup>W. E. H. Lecky, History of European Morals (New York, 1894), p. 18.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 20.



tuated chastity. Although this was to curb the outward works and material accomplishments of the Church, it did not hinder moral development.

Lecky believed it was possible to criticise many of the policies of the fifth century Church, such as its inserting the fear of hell and demons into the mind of Europeans, yet the elevation of the monk to the position of idol of society had a profound effect upon the moral progress of Europe.<sup>69</sup> As men sought refuge in the monastic havens their attitude toward such essential issues as labor were greatly altered. No longer was this looked upon as a task for slaves, but became a virtuous occupation for all men. Also, the monastery was responsible for inserting into society the virtues of passive obedience and humility which provided the foundation for the acceptance of feudalism. It was in this manner that a particular attitude was gradually acquired whereby society came to accept autocratic authority. It was this attitude that was essential in the re-establishing of monarchical institutions in the later Middle Ages.<sup>70</sup>

Although the nineteenth century writers were successful in lighting some of the darkened corners of the Middle Ages, there still did not exist an adequate evaluation of the period as a whole. The Romanticists had been too emotional in their efforts to counter the philosophy of the Enlightenment to

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid., pp. 27-43.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 271.

present an objective study, and the nationalists, while overcoming this passionate approach and being more scientific, were primarily concerned with the genesis of the national state, therefore, leaving much of the Middle Ages still untouched. Thus, up to the twentieth century there prevailed particular influences that colored every work written or spoken about the Middle Ages.

To alter long established ways of historical thinking requires both powerful and original minds. Fortunately, the twentieth century produced many such men. One of the essential problems that had to be encountered by the twentieth century scholars was that of the transition from the ancient to the medieval world. As a result of the advances made in the nineteenth century the artificial periodization of an ancient world, middle age and modern era was no longer adequate in that it denied the essential continuity of human experience. Prior to the twentieth century it was generally accepted that the "Ancient World" and the "Middle Ages" were easily distinguished the one from the other and that a distinct break came in 476 A. D. with the appearance of the Germanic kingdoms and the triumph of Christianity.<sup>71</sup> This "catastrophic" interpretation had come to be the textbook point of view and was

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<sup>71</sup>Voltaire, Annals of the Empire, Vol. XXI of The Works of Voltaire, ed., E. R. Dumont (58 vols.; New York, 1901), pp. 7-8; Gibbon, III, 308, "In these volumes, I have described the triumph of barbarians and religion."; Michelet, I, 62, "The national language and religion...slumbered under Roman culture until the advent of Christianity."



generally accepted by most scholars.

The first effort to counter the catastrophic thesis appears to have come from the pen of Alfred von Gutschmid who attempted to dispel the need of a specific date to mark the fall of Rome.<sup>72</sup> In his work, Die Grenze zwischen Altertum und Mittelalter, which also appeared in his Kleine Schriften, he asserted there was no reason to accept the year 476 as the end of the Ancient world. The critical period to Gutschmid did not occur until the end of the sixth century when the Lombards became masters of Italy and the Church was a power unto itself. This represented the first substantial break with the past.<sup>73</sup> However, the emphasis which von Gutschmid attributed to "continuity" as opposed to "disruption" did not enjoy any lasting success until it was later revived by Alfons Dopsch and Henri Pirenne.

In the years which elapsed between the writing of von Gutschmid and that of Pirenne and Dopsch there were significant advances made in altering the idea that the fall of Rome was a catastrophic event. One can find evidence of this development in the work of such men as Samuel Dill, Otto Seeck and Ernst Stein. They attempted to absolve the Germans of total responsibility for the fall of Rome and show that the collapse of this august organism was due to a process slowly

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<sup>72</sup>Alfred von Gutschmid, Die Grenze zwischen Altertum und Mittelalter (Leipzig, 1863), pp. 393ff.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

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prepared and evolved by internal forces.<sup>74</sup> Although Seeck and Stein continued to advance the year 476 as marking the end of the Empire, they no longer relied solely upon external forces to explain the fall. They maintained that such events as the Germanic invasions had been preceded by an internal weakening of the Empire. Seeck, for example, advocated a biological explanation for the decline of Rome as he maintained Antiquity had lost her sustaining power in the "extermination of the best" through centuries of foreign and civil wars.<sup>75</sup> With this destruction of the best men, which had been going on since the reign of Augustus, Rome had lost her assimilative force and as a result the elite was gradually absorbed by the masses.<sup>76</sup>

One of the major advances in medieval historiography came in the second decade of the twentieth century with the writings of Alfons Dopsch and Henri Pirenne. Breaking with the traditional interpretation of the transition period, which was concerned primarily with the political and religious questions, Henri Pirenne began to ask new questions about the

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<sup>74</sup>Otto Seeck, Geschichte des Untergangs der antiker Welt (6 vols.; Berlin, 1891-1920), VI, 378-80; Samuel Dill, Roman Society in the Last Century of the Roman Empire (London, 1905), p. 277; Ernst Stein, Geschichte des spätromischen Reiches (2 vols.; Wein, 1928), I, 3-19; J. B. Bury, History of the Later Roman Empire (2 vols.; New York, 1923), I, 308-313.

<sup>75</sup>Seeck, VI, 378-80.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., I, Chap. III; see especially pp. 284-89.

Middle Ages which brought new life to the past and in the process increased the knowledge and understanding of that era.

Adopting what could fittingly be called a "modified" catastrophic thesis, Pirenne concluded that the Roman world--economically, culturally and even politically--continued in all particulars through the centuries of the Germanic invasions. It was rather the impact of Islam in the seventh and eighth centuries which, by destroying the unity of the Mediterranean, ended the Roman world and led to a significantly altered civilization in the Carolingian age.<sup>77</sup> We can see the critical era in the Pirenne thesis was no longer the fifth century Germanic invasions, but the seventh and eighth centuries which witnessed the triumphal entry of the sons of the Arabian desert into the Empire which brought an end to the heretofore classical unity.

Although the Pirenne thesis has been seriously challenged by American scholars, it has been much slower to succumb in Germany. One of the strongest and most articulate advocates of the Pirenne thesis is Ernst Kornemann, who maintains in his Gestalten und Reiche, that the decline was in process after the death of Justinian, but it was the Arabs who finally destroyed the Mediterranean unity.<sup>78</sup> Heinrich Dannenbauer is another who credits the Arabs with being

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<sup>77</sup>Henri Pirenne, Mohammed and Charlemagne (New York, 1939), p. 293.

<sup>78</sup>Ernst Kornemann, Gestalten und Reiche (Leipzig, 1943), pp. 367ff.

responsible for the final disruption of the Empire. Dannenbauer, like Pirenne, did not see the Germans as being imperialistic nor the bearers of political and social ills. Although the Empire did suffer from a corrupt bureaucratic system which affected the economic and social order, this was not created by the Germans nor was it the cause for the disruption of classical unity.<sup>79</sup> Only the political unity was affected by the invaders; the economy, cities, merchants, law, speech and literature remained essentially the same.<sup>80</sup>

Dannenbauer also stresses the sea as being the element which bound the ancient world together. Antiquity did not think or speak of continents because there were none.<sup>81</sup> The Roman world was a cultural unit bound together by the Mediterranean and it was in the seventh century with the appearance of the Moslems that this unity was broken. "Nicht die Germanen der Volkerwanderung haben diese uralte Einheit zerstört, sondern der Einbruch der Arabs, die Islam, in 7 Jahrhundert."<sup>82</sup> The Mediteranean now became a Moslem lake and along with the conquest went the unity of the classical world.

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<sup>79</sup> Heinrich Dannenbauer, Die Entstehung Europas vom der Spatantike zum Mittelalter (2 vols.; Stuttgart, 1958), II, 133.

<sup>80</sup> Dannenbauer, Grundlagen der mittelalterlichen Welt (Stuttgart, 1958), p. 16.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., pp. 12-13.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

The thesis advocating the continuity of antiquity was also advanced by the Austrian scholar Alfons Dopsch. In his classic, Economic and Social Foundations of European Civilization, which appeared in 1923, Dopsch holds that the famous "fall" of the Roman Empire in the West was by no means the catastrophic overthrow of an advanced civilization by primitive barbarians. On the contrary, medieval civilization descended in an orderly evolutionary fashion from that of the later Roman Empire. In fact, the Roman world was won by the Germans gradually from within, by a peaceful penetration which went on for centuries during which they absorbed its culture and even to a considerable extent, took over its administration.<sup>83</sup> "Rome did not fall in 476; it fell asleep without any convulsions."<sup>84</sup>

The attitude of the Germans to Roman organization, as conquerors after the fall of Roman rule, was clearly in their own interest, and they continued to develop their rich inheritance. Thus, Dopsch's emphasis was upon the continuity of this civilization and not its disruption.

In response to the works of Pirenne and Dopsch, Hermann Aubin was one of the first to question the emphasis which they placed upon the continuity of classical society. Aubin raised serious questions about the degree of romanization

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<sup>83</sup> Alfons Dopsch, Economic and Social Foundation of European Civilization (New York, 1937), p. 386.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

that was experienced by the barbarians and also their ability to stabilize the already tottering Empire.<sup>85</sup> Aubin maintains that Dopsch failed to realize that as a result of the Church the entire structure of Roman culture was already being changed and to assert otherwise was a mistake.<sup>86</sup> In place of the Dopsch thesis, Aubin suggests that it would be more plausible to view the period from the first migrations to the seventh century as one of "transition."<sup>87</sup> What existed was neither the classical nor the medieval period. The old established order was rapidly waning while the new had not as yet come of age.

Since the work of Aubin there have been numerous publications expanding upon the ideas he had voiced. One of the primary objectives of these recent publications has been to prove that the explanations proffered by the "catastrophic" and "continuation" schools are not sufficient to describe the beginning nor the significance of the Middle Ages. To this modern group of scholars, which shall be designated as the "transitional" school, the early Middle Ages was a period characterized not by a catastrophic break with the past nor by a continuation of the classical tradition, but rather a period characterized by a creative reorientation of society.

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<sup>85</sup>Hermann Aubin, Vom Altertum zum Mittelalter (Munchen, 1949), p. lff.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid.

<sup>87</sup>Hermann Aubin, "Die Frage nach der Scheide zwischen Altertum und Mittelalter," HZ, CLXXII (1951), 245.

For the "transitional" school the early Middle Ages was a period which witnessed a gradual reshaping of both the institutions and attitudes of society with the result being the emergence of a way of life sufficiently unique in its structure and ideology to be classified as a Western European civilization. The remainder of this chapter, and essentially of the work as a whole, will devote itself to a consideration of how the transitional school has attempted to dispel those ideas voiced by the catastrophic and continuation schools and at the same time attempt to analyze the alternatives that the transitional school has set forth as a more accurate appraisal of the early Middle Ages.

One of the most significant works of the transitional school appeared in 1927 with the publication of Ferdinand Lot's The End of the Ancient World and the Beginning of the Middle Ages. While Pirenne saw no break in the dike of classical civilization until the seventh century and Dopsch not even then, Lot cites the third century as the critical period of the Empire. Lot maintains that it was not external forces which brought Roman civilization to its knees, but rather an internal disease had undermined it and brought "the dissolution of all its vital organs."<sup>88</sup> While the details of these maladies will be left for later chapters, it is evident that Lot would essentially argue that the Germanic invasions did

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<sup>88</sup>Ferdinand Lot, The End of the Ancient World and the Beginning of the Middle Ages (Paris, 1927), p. 84.

not represent an epoch-making event and that the transition from ancient to medieval society was in the making long before the barbarians exposed themselves as a serious threat. Thus, Lot sees the crisis of the ancient world coming in the third century and the five centuries which followed as the transitional stage leading to the Middle Ages.

Still another attempt to bridge the gulf that separates ancient and medieval worlds has been made by H. St. L. B. Moss in his book, The Birth of the Middle Ages. In many respects Moss sees the institutions of the ancient world experiencing a mortal blow in the third century as a result of the prolonged period of anarchy that plagued the ancient world. In the words of the author himself, "...the breakdown of the Roman government, communications and trade,... may be placed not in the fifth century, but rather during the fifty years of anarchy, 235-285, which virtually destroyed the intricate fiber of the Empire."<sup>89</sup> The five centuries that followed this period of anarchy were viewed by Moss as a period in which the paralyzed institutions of the Roman world were gradually being transformed to meet the needs of a society bound by local horizons as opposed to the cosmopolitan outlook which existed during the first and second centuries A. D. While the casual reader may see in such statements as, "...so far as Western trade and industry are concerned, the late

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<sup>89</sup>H. St. L. B. Moss, The Birth of the Middle Ages (Oxford, 1935), p. iv.

Roman and early Medieval periods show no definite break," ideas akin to those espoused by Pirenne and Dopsch, a closer examination of Moss's thesis as a whole will reveal the fallacy of such a belief. Although Moss sees the early Middle Ages as a continuation of those developments which originated in the third and fourth centuries, it was not a continuation of the classical order. What the author is trying to suggest is that those institutions which were to characterize the Middle Ages, e. g., the power of the magnates, closed house economy, decline of the middle class, serfdom, manorialism, feudalism, etc., had their origins in the third and fourth centuries.<sup>90</sup> Such a position is far removed from the claims of Pirenne and Dopsch, who see the classical order continuing uninterrupted far into the Middle Ages. Thus, while Moss stresses continuity in his thesis, it was a continuation of those ideas and institutions which emerged during the breakdown of the Roman Empire in Western Europe and not a direct continuation of an unimpaired imperial order itself.<sup>91</sup>

Another work which supports the transitional thesis as opposed to the catastrophic or continuation is Kurt Pfister's Der Untergang der antiken Welt. Pfister's work, which appeared in 1941, resembles that of Otto Seeck not only in title, but in content as well. In harmony with the thoughts expressed

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<sup>90</sup>Ibid., pp. 248-49.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., pp. 242-65. Those elements that were continued were altered even more by the influence of the barbarians, p. 248.

by Seeck, Pfister maintained that the multifarious problems which eventually destroyed the Roman world were formulated during the reign of Caesar Augustus.<sup>92</sup> The efforts of the Princeps to alter the constitutional order of the Republic marked the beginning of the constitutional, financial, legislative, religious and moral decline that was to accelerate over the next three centuries and culminate in the dismemberment of the Western half of the Empire.<sup>93</sup> The third century crisis that Lot and Moss maintain was crucial in the decline of the Empire and the beginning of the Middle Ages, Pfister believes to have been preceded by three centuries of supra-constitutional behaviour on the part of the emperors which ultimately resulted in the disruption of the imperial order in the late third and early fourth centuries.<sup>94</sup> Although the work of Pfister represents an advancement of the transitional thesis, a number of his conclusions will be brought into question in later chapters. At the present it will suffice to point out that the work of Pfister is essentially an apology for the reign of Diocletian and the various reforms which emerged from his reign. Pfister's primary objective was to clear Diocletian of any responsibility for the fall of the Empire.

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<sup>92</sup>Kurt Pfister, Der Untergang der antiken Welt (Leipzig, 1941), p. 154.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., pp. 8-13. He holds the barbarians and Christianity responsible for playing a major role in the collapse of the Empire and bases his charge on the fact that they were the heirs.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid.



Of the more recent scholarship, the works of William C. Bark and Joseph Vogt serve as adequate representatives. While Bark sets no date for the end of the ancient world, he believes, as do Lot and Moss, that the crucial period was that of the civil strife of the third century.<sup>95</sup> In contrast, however, to the approach employed by Lot and Moss, who tend to dwell upon the decline of the ancient world and the significance which this event held for the Middle Ages, Bark takes a more positive approach as he is concerned not only with the death of an old order, but even more so with the beginning of a new.<sup>96</sup> The primary thesis of his work, "...is that something new, distinct and quite original began in the Western portion of the Empire and that its elements are distinguishable by the fourth century...."<sup>97</sup> To Bark, the major features of the early Middle Ages were characterized by a merging of various elements, some of which were Roman and some Germanic, with the result being the creation of a new society living in a new setting and governed by a new set of institutions.

Joseph Vogt who is concerned primarily with the cultural aspects of the late Roman period, advances a thesis which is closely related to the continuation school and which

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<sup>95</sup>William C. Bark, Origins of the Medieval World (New York, 1958), p. 66.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., pp. 67-80.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., p. 80.

is also highly debatable. Vogt maintains that it is true that the third century quartered a number of civil grievances that tended to weaken the fabric of the imperial regime, but, as we shall see in the next chapter, he also believes that Diocletian and Constantine experienced a great deal of success with their reforms and the faltering Empire was restored to an even keel.<sup>98</sup> The political unity of the Empire was not seriously altered, says Vogt, until the invasions of the fifth century when the barbarians appeared on the scene necessitating changes which the State was unable to enact at the time.<sup>99</sup>

With respect to the cultural issues, Vogt is in the mainstream of the continuation school. Concerning this issue, he advances the debatable conclusion that the classical culture was a feature of the ancient world which was unique to the senatorial aristocracy and as long as this body continued to exist in the West so did the classical culture.<sup>100</sup> Vogt goes on to assert that even the Church Fathers, due to both their genealogical and cultural ties with the aristocracy, assisted in the preservation of the classical tradition. Thus, to Vogt, while the political, economic and social aspects of the ancient world had experienced an alteration by the sixth century, the cultural aspects continued to function throughout the Middle Ages.

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<sup>98</sup>Joseph Vogt, Der Niedergang Roms (Zurich, 1965), p. 194. "The systems established by Diocletian and Constantine long withstood the ravages of the times."

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., pp. 223-246.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid.

While it is reserved for the remaining chapters of this work to discuss the details and examine the variations of these theses, it is evident that neither the catastrophic interpretation nor the continuation thesis is sufficient to describe the beginning or the nature of the early Middle Ages. The catastrophic views fail to consider the creative elements that were present during this period, e. g., the Church, while the continuation thesis tends to minimize the internal problems with which the Empire was confronted while at the same time exaggerating the talents and ability of the invaders. As we now proceed with our investigation not only will we be able to see how the transitional school addresses the problems created by the catastrophic and continuation schools, but also the alternatives which the former has to offer.

## CHAPTER II

### THE CRISIS OF THE THIRD CENTURY

The political history of Rome from the latter part of the second century to the first half of the fourth centers around the gradual, but steady, usurpation of the powers of the senate by the emperor. The political order which had emerged from the reign of Augustus was a unique and delicate combination of absolutism and republicanism.<sup>1</sup> So ingeniously had Augustus shrouded his power with republican trappings that some authorities have been inclined to regard his political arrangement as a "dyarchy;" a joint rule in which the Princeps assumed the responsibility for one segment of the Empire and the senate the responsibility for another.<sup>2</sup> In spite of the disguise, however, this concept is no longer

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<sup>1</sup>The chief primary sources for the Principate of Augustus are: Res Gestae Divi Augustii, ed., J. Gage (2nd ed.; Paris, 1950); Suetonius, The Twelve Caesars, trans., Robert Graves (Baltimore, 1957); Cassius Dio, Roman History, trans., E. Cary (9 vols.; New York, 1914-27); Velleius Paterculus, Compendium of Roman History, Trans., Frederick W. Shipley (New York, 1929); Tacitus, The Annals of Imperial Rome, trans., Michael Grant (Baltimore, 1956). The fragments of Augustus' own works are collected in H. Malcovati's Caesaris Augusti operum fragmenta (1948). The most important documents are collected by V. Ehrenberg and A. H. M. Jones, Documents Illustrating the reign of Augustus and Tiberius (2nd ed.; Oxford, 1955). Additional comments will be made concerning the use of these sources in the course of the chapter.

<sup>2</sup>Bury, History of the Later Roman Empire, I, 1-9.

very widely accepted as it is now clear that Augustus had been quite careful not to divide the actual power. The Princeps at all times retained within his own control the ultimate sanction which was the army. On the other hand there was a division, but that which was divided was the work. In developing the administration needed to run the Empire, Augustus was careful to preserve all that was workable from the ruins of the Republic and this meant first and foremost a utilization of the Senate. In establishing the Principate, Augustus treated Rome's most venerable body with respect and shared with it the various functions of government.

Under Augustus the Senate maintained a position of considerable prestige and influence. The Augustan system delegated to the Senate the administrative responsibility for a number of provinces and the supervision of the Roman treasury, grain supply and highways. The judicial responsibilities were likewise divided as the Senate was one of the two highest courts from whose verdict there was no appeal. The Senate also had legislative power as it was one of the two sources of new law and in the period of the Principate the emperors usually preferred to issue their own legislation in the form of "senatus consulta."<sup>3</sup> In addition to these powers, Augustus also permitted the Senate to exercise elective rights as they

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<sup>3</sup>Under Augustus "senatus consulta" were not, strictly speaking, laws. They were resolutions by the senate tendered as advice to the magistrates. They were in fact law as the magistrates never failed to act on them. H. Last, CAH, X, 441ff.

were permitted to designate consuls and praetors.<sup>4</sup> Thus, in all spheres of government, other than military, the Senate retained a significant portion of its traditional power.<sup>5</sup>

The political machinery of Augustus continued to function for two centuries as the accepted political order. Although the actual power of the Princeps rested with his control of the army, the subjects did not seem to view it as an oppressive or despotic rule. In the middle of the second century the famous Greek orator, Aelius Aristides, delivered a series of lectures at Rome in which he dwelt at length upon the theme that within the boundaries of the Roman world, society functioned independently of tyrannical or despotic rule.<sup>6</sup> It is apparent in the claim of Aristides that the Princeps had not introduced any noticeable changes in the traditional way of life within the Empire, yet by the end of the third century this claim can no longer be made. The constitutional history of the Principate was highlighted by a steady usurpation of nearly all the duties of government which Augustus had been careful to assign to the Senate. By the end of the third century the republican disguise which he had used to temper the appearance of his own authority had fallen away

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<sup>4</sup>A. H. M. Jones, "Imperial and Senatorial Jurisdiction in the Early Principate," Historia, III (1955), 464-488.

<sup>5</sup>Dannenbauer, Die Entstehung Europas vom der Spatantike zum Mittelalter, I, 3.

<sup>6</sup>P. Sattler, Augustus und der Senate (Stuttgart, 1960), p. 217. We can see from this work that Augustus was not unopposed in his reforms.

leaving a monarchical order in its place.

For the present work it is not necessary to trace the slow, but continual, process whereby the Principate was transformed into a monarchy for in the early third century this process was still not completed.<sup>7</sup> During the reign of Alexander Severus (222-235) the Senate was treated respectfully and its talents utilized in the service of the Empire.<sup>8</sup> Alexander entrusted to it the election of the prefects and sought the advice of this body on numerous occasions. Although the emperor was clearly the dominant partner in this quasi-dyarchy, the concord that existed between the emperor and the Senate during the reign of Alexander was by no means slight.

It was precisely at the end of Alexander's reign that there erupted a formidable crisis which nearly brought the Empire to an early death. With the assassination of Alexander light is reflected on one of the basic problems of the Empire. Despite its appearance of brilliance, the Empire had no constitution. The control of the Empire rested on brute force and the guile of the individuals seeking power. Further evidence of this can be found in the fifty years of anarchy which separated the death of Alexander from the reign of

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<sup>7</sup>The process whereby the Senate lost its power and authority can be seen progressing with great speed from the reign of Septimius Severus to its culmination under Diocletian. While the reign of such men as Septimius and Gallienus could be listed as high points in this usurpation, it was not until the reign of Diocletian that this process was formalized and experienced its most lasting repercussions.

<sup>8</sup>Cassius Dio, LXXI, p. 15.

Diocletian. Few periods in history can match these five decades in the number of claimants to the throne and the brevity of their tenure. During this half century of turmoil there were twenty legitimate emperors and a host of usurpers who, from time to time, ruled parts of the Empire. With the exception of Claudius, who died a natural death, and Valerius, who was captured by the Persians, all of these men died a violent death.<sup>9</sup> The army, which was available to the highest bidder, began to make and unmake possessors of the purple at will.<sup>10</sup> The army would elevate a man with little or no ability to the throne if he happened to be wealthy, e. g., Didius Julianus.<sup>11</sup> From the death of Alexander to the reign of Diocletian, the Empire was controlled by an army which was imbued more with a professional "esprit de corps" than with a devotion to the Empire.

From this material we can see that with the closing of the second century the little eddies which warned of the coming ebb were already swelling within the Empire. The winds

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<sup>9</sup>The fifty years of anarchy were dark in both senses of the word. Herodian, who began his work with the reign of Marcus (229) ended his narrative in 238 with the death of Maximinus. For the fifty years of anarchy we have to rely upon the late fourth century chroniclers such as Aurelius Victor, Eutropius and Zosimus. There is also the Christian writer, Cyprian, but he deals primarily with the persecutions. Ernst Kornemann, Gestalten und Reiche (Leipzig, 1943), p. 375; Jones, The Late Roman Empire, I, 24-25.

<sup>10</sup>Dannenbauer, I, 6-7; Vogt, Constantin der Grosse, pp. 28-30.

<sup>11</sup>Lot, The End of the Ancient World and the Beginning of the Middle Ages, p. 9.

of civil strife that was brewing during the second century reached a hurricane proportion in the third leaving the Mediterranean edifice trembling in chaos. To quell the numerous internal maladies that plagued the Empire at this time required leadership possessing the wisdom of a Solomon and the strength of a Sampson, but the Empire had to settle for the relatively lesser geniuses, Diocletian and Constantine.

In an effort to restore order to the troubled world of the third century, Diocletian instituted a number of political reforms which resulted in a significantly altered imperial political structure. On the day following his accession to the throne (284) Diocletian realized that he would be no more successful in combating the power of the army and retaining the reins of government within his own hands than his predecessors had been unless changes were invoked. It was only too obvious to Diocletian that in the future one person could not direct the affairs of state.<sup>12</sup> The solution to the problem seemed to lie in the selection of a colleague who was neither a rival nor an enemy.<sup>13</sup> The attention of Diocletian was gained by his militaristic friend, Maximian, who, although unlettered and rude, was content to be the hands for the brain which was precisely what the emperor was seeking.

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>13</sup>Dannenbauer, I, 16; Kornemann, pp. 375-76; Stein, Geschichte des Spätromischen, I, 96-98; Gibbon, The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, ed., J. B. Bury, I, 352; Lot, pp. 13-14; Vogt, Constantine der Grosse, p. 98.

Even this measure proved to be insufficient. With the Persians attacking in the East and the Germans in Europe, the omnipotence of Diocletian and Maximian proved to be insufficient to sustain the weight of public administration. With the Empire being threatened on every side by invasion, Diocletian decided the Empire needed on every side the presence of an army and emperor. Thus, in 293, he went a step further in his division of administrative duties as he and Maximian acquired administrative assistants. The two assistants who were chosen to aide the emperors received the actual sovereignty, but with the inferior title of "Caesar" which left them in subordination to their Augustus.<sup>14</sup> The two persons chosen to fill the offices of the "Caesars" were Galerius and Constantius. In an effort to strengthen the political bond between the Caesars and Augusti, each of the latter actually assumed the character of a father to one of the Caesars.<sup>15</sup> The four heads of state then divided amongst themselves the various districts of the Empire in an effort to restore order. The territories of Gaul, Spain and Britain were entrusted to Constantius, while Galerius was to protect the Illyrian provinces. Italy and Africa were given to Maximian and Diocletian reserved for himself Thrace, Egypt and the wealthy regions of Asia.

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<sup>14</sup>Lot, p. 14; Jones, I, 41; Gibbon, I, 354; Stein, I, 98.

<sup>15</sup>Gibbon, I, 354.

Although each member of the Tetrarchy was responsible for a separate region of the Empire, Diocletian retained a position superior to his three lieutenants.<sup>16</sup> Proof of this lies in the titles which the Augusti selected to describe their positions. Diocletian adopted the cognomen Jovius, the vice-regent of Jupiter, king of gods and men, while Maximian was referred to as Herculus, the heroic agent whose responsibility it was to rid the world of evil.<sup>17</sup>

Another innovation of Diocletian which altered the political order even further was the introduction of an elaborate oriental court ceremony at Rome.<sup>18</sup> As a part of this ceremony Diocletian went so far as to assume the diadem which had previously been viewed by the Romans as an open sign of royalty and as a consequence, strongly rejected by the populace.<sup>19</sup> The garb of the emperors was of silk and gold and it is recorded that even their shoes were studded with precious gems. In addition to these measures, there emerged during the reign of Diocletian a number of courtly procedures which made it quite difficult to gain access to the emperor's

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<sup>16</sup>Jones, I, 41; Lot, p. 14; Vogt, Constantin der Grosse, p. 103.

<sup>17</sup>Jones, I, 38; Gibbon, I, 353-54; Stein, I, 98.

<sup>18</sup>Seeck, pp. 106; Pfister, Der Untergang Antiken Welt, p. 256; Vogt, pp. 104-105, Vogt argues that Diocletian did not get this from the Persians, but used it simply to show his superior position; F. F. Abbott, Roman Political Institutions (Boston, 1911) p. 335; Jones, I, 40; Kornemann, p. 385; Gibbon, I, 382-83.

<sup>19</sup>Kornemann, p. 385; Jones, I, 40; Gibbon, I, 383.

presence. The palace came to be guarded by an ever increasing number of eunuchs whose presence was a sign of increasing despotism. When a subject was permitted into the presence of the emperor he was required to prostrate himself and adore the divinity of his lord and master.<sup>20</sup> In both appearance and structure, Diocletian was drastically changing the political order of the Empire.

The actual administration of the Empire was also radically changed during the reign of Diocletian. The Senate, which had long been an instrument of power in the Roman world, was permitted to sink into oblivion.<sup>21</sup> Diocletian, in his efforts to revive the Empire, realized that he must deprive the Senate of many of its remaining powers because it alone represented the most powerful element of the old order. It will be recalled that during the reign of Alexander Severus the Senate had acted with a considerable amount of authority and a number of the senators had even begun to entertain ideas of restoring the Republic. These ambitions which continued to linger during the reign of Diocletian had to be extinguished by the emperor. As the sovereign of Italy, Maximian was entrusted with removing the troublesome members.

In pursuit of his goal, Maximian devised a scheme

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<sup>20</sup>Pfister, p. 226; Vogt, Constantin der Grosse, pp. 104-105; Abbott, p. 335; Jones, I, 40; Kornemann, p. 385; Gibbon, I, 382-83.

<sup>21</sup>Pfister, p. 229; Gibbon, I, 380; Jones, I, 49; Abbott, p. 336; Vogt, p. 112; Dannenbauer, Vom der Spatantike zum Mittelalter, I, 361.

whereby the most ambitious members of the Senate were accused of participating in imaginary plots which provided him with an excuse to deprive them of their positions. In addition to its physical reduction in numbers, the Senate experienced a more devastating blow when the emperor decided to move his official residence from Rome to Milan.<sup>22</sup> As long as the emperor lived at Rome the Senate might be physically oppressed, but it could hardly be ignored as it came to be once the emperor resided at Milan. When the emperor fixed his residence at a location removed from the ancient capital he could then lay aside the constitutional dissimulation which Augustus had constructed.

Under the new imperial edifice which Diocletian was constructing, the army was the object of his personal concern. During the previous fifty years of anarchy, the praetorian guard had been one of the chief instigators of trouble and as a result its prerogatives were greatly reduced.<sup>23</sup> Septimius Severus had already expelled from its ranks the Italian members who could no longer be trusted and replaced them with soldiers from the provincial armies who had satisfactory military records. Diocletian went a step further as he filled the ranks of the guard with his most trusted friends from Illyria.

Diocletian also expanded the practice of selecting the

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<sup>22</sup>Gibbon, I, 380.

<sup>23</sup>Lot, p. 15; Gibbon, I, 380; Jones, I, 52-60.

commanders of the army from among trusted friends instead of permitting the Senate to hold these powerful positions.<sup>24</sup> This practice had been initiated not only out of jealousy, but also as a matter of necessity. For the men of the Senate, military duty was never an end in itself, but a preparatory stage for civil office. This practice was no longer compatible with the times. To carry on the struggles against the barbarians and Persians, professional officers were needed and to fill this need the emperors turned to the Equestrian order. The highest offices in the army came to be filled with men whose loyalty to the emperor was unquestioned.

Along with the military reforms, additional measures were introduced by the emperors to reduce senatorial authority even further. The executive, legislative, jurisdictional and financial privileges of the Senate were, by the third century, monopolized by the emperor.<sup>25</sup> Even the provincial structure of the Empire was reorganized so as to diminish the Senate's influence.<sup>26</sup> After decreasing the geographical size of the provinces, in an effort to reduce the responsibility of each governor, Diocletian then combined the provinces into larger political units called dioceses and entrusted each of these

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<sup>24</sup>Jones, I, 48-49; Lot, p. 16; Bury, I, 12.

<sup>25</sup>Abbott, pp. 336ff.; Dannenbauer, Vom der Spatantike zum Mittelalter, I, 361; Vogt, p. 112; Gibbon, I, 380-83; Seeck, I, 45ff.

<sup>26</sup>Jones, I, 46-49; Stein, I, 98-102; Vogt, p. 112.

areas to the care of his personal friends.<sup>27</sup> The Senate which had once been the fountain head of power in the Empire was now becoming a social position and nothing more.

The measures which were introduced by Diocletian in his effort to transform the Empire from a "magistracy" to a "monarchy" were continued by Constantine.<sup>28</sup> By the end of the latter's administration the palace had become the center of the state and the emperor rigidly regulated the life of the Empire. The old organs of sovereignty, such as the Senate, retained only a mere shadow of their former greatness as the Roman political order drifted closer and closer to a form of royal absolutism with all its pettiness.<sup>29</sup>

The reigns of Diocletian and Constantine have long posed a problem for scholars in that it is difficult to determine to what extent each was responsible for the reorganization of the Empire and to evaluate the degree of success experienced by their numerous reforms. Was the colossal edifice of classical civilization reestablished upon a foundation sufficient to weather such events as the barbaric invasions of the fourth and fifth centuries, or was it essentially a new empire, ready to succumb with the slightest agitation? Did the reformers reincarnate the robust and happy days of

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<sup>27</sup>Stein, I, 102; Jones, I, 48-49.

<sup>28</sup>Lot, p. 86.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 93. We can find evidence of court spies and arrests being made on the flimsiest pretext.

Augustus, or did they merely provide a temporary lease on life prolonging the inevitable destiny of a withering age? It is in light of these and similar questions that the crisis of the third century and the reforms of the fourth have relevance for the present work. Thus, the remainder of this chapter, and essentially the entire work, will be to illustrate the manner in which particular schools of thought, i. e., the catastrophic, continuation, and transitional, have viewed the rise of absolutism in the fourth century and how the various analyses of this period have influenced the different interpretations of the collapse of the Roman Empire and the beginning of the Middle Ages.

The earliest accounts of the ills which plagued the Roman world came from the humanist writers of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Although the works of a number of these men were concerned with the collapse of the Empire, their accounts of this event were, for the most part, quite general and their explanations rather superficial.<sup>30</sup> Being motivated, and sometimes commissioned by the government, to trace the history of the Italian states, the humanist historians naturally concentrated their talents upon the rise of the communes and their development into powerful territorial states. The result of this particular procedure was that they failed to

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<sup>30</sup> Niccolo Machiavelli, Florentine History, trans., W. K. Marriott (London, 1909). He covers the period from the fall of the Empire to the reign of Charlemagne in sixteen pages.

penetrate the intricacies of Rome's internal problems which in turn rendered them blind to the numerous innovations that were being introduced through the reforms of Diocletian and Constantine.

Evidence of the humanist treatment of this issue can be found in the works of Leonardo Bruni, Flavio Biondo, and Niccolo Machiavelli. Bruni, who was swayed in his thinking by the personal conviction that republicanism was the best of all political systems, believed the Empire began to decline with the loss of political freedom which he directly related to the despotism of the earliest emperors. In the words of Bruni, "The Roman imperium began to go to ruin when the name of Caesar fell like a disaster upon the city."<sup>31</sup> It was the opinion of Bruni, that freedom vanished with the appearance of the imperial regime and the loss of liberty was paralleled by a decline in civic virtue.<sup>32</sup> In spite of the internal ills that resulted from imperial rule, Bruni maintained that the Empire was also to continue for another two hundred years by virtue of the strength it had absorbed from the Republic. In the eyes of Bruni, the critical period for Rome did not come until the invasions of the fourth century. Once Constantine had moved the capital to the East, the Western provinces were neglected and left vulnerable to repeated inundation

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<sup>31</sup>Wallace K. Ferguson, The Renaissance in Historical Thought, p. 10.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

by the barbarians.<sup>33</sup> It is clear that Bruni believed the Roman world did not experience any major changes in its political structure until the invasions of the fourth century. For Bruni, it had been the invaders who were responsible for the chaos which finally destroyed the western portion of the Empire.

In many respects the work of Flavio Biondo is in harmony with that of Bruni. One notable difference, however, is that Biondo extends the period of Rome's greatness much further than Bruni. The Empire, Biondo argued, continued to grow in power until the death of Theodosius the Great in 395 A. D.<sup>34</sup> According to Biondo, it was not until the death of Theodosius that the Empire was deprived of effective leadership and, as a result, left open to the attacks of the barbarians.<sup>35</sup> It was this latter event which ultimately launched Rome on a downward course. Although the emphasis of this observer was upon the external factors as being the critical element in the decline of the West, he was also aware of the internal factors as he raised the question of effective leadership in the West prior to the invasions.

Machiavelli, in his Florentine History, likewise attributed a major role to the barbarians in bringing death and destruction to the Western portion of the Roman Empire. His

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 11-14.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

work did, however, represent a significant advancement over the two previously cited sources in that he placed much more stress upon the internal weaknesses of Rome as being responsible for the success of the barbarians.<sup>36</sup> Machiavelli asserted that the invaders destroyed the West, "...by taking advantage of the opportunity that was given them by the emperors who abandoned Rome, the ancient seat of the Empire, and degraded themselves by residing at Constantinople."<sup>37</sup> In brief, it was the belief of Machiavelli that the political decline of the Empire was brought about by the sloth of the emperors, the treachery of the ministers and the persistency of the assailants.<sup>38</sup>

Although the humanist writers did not deal specifically with the political crisis of the third century, it is clear they believed there were no significant problems or alterations of Roman imperial machinery until Constantine moved the capital to the East. It was this event that spelled doom for the West as the barbarians were then free to penetrate the provincial boundaries with little or no resistance. Thus, the emphasis of the humanists was upon the invaders as being the major factor in the disruption of the heretofore viable Roman political order.

It was not until the eighteenth century and the "Age

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<sup>36</sup> Machiavelli, p. 5.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

of Reason" that a more comprehensive inquiry was undertaken concerning the Roman political developments of the third and fourth centuries. While the humanists had been relatively silent on the political developments of these two centuries, Edward Gibbon presented in his Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire a most vivid and extensive investigation. Gibbon viewed the half century of political anarchy that dominated the period between the reigns of Alexander Severus and Diocletian as one of the most blighting episodes in Roman history.<sup>39</sup> With the constitution of Rome under the heel of an army void of any national consciousness, the Empire was racing toward an early death. According to Gibbon it was only the reforms initiated by Diocletian and continued by Constantine that altered the fateful course of the Empire.<sup>40</sup>

When viewed through the eyes of Gibbon, the reign of Diocletian was one of the most eventful and illustrious periods

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<sup>39</sup>With the reign of Diocletian the source material becomes more abundant. In addition to the already mentioned works of Aurelius Victor and Eutropius, there is the Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius which describes not only the persecutions, but also throws light on the contemporary secular conditions as well. An even more important source is Lactantius' treatise. It is contemporary and useful in that it castigates both the secular and the religious policies of the persecution emperors. The legal sources are considerably fuller than the previous fifty years. Justinian's Digest contains substantial material from two jurists and the Justinian Codes preserved about 1300 constitutions of Diocletian. For the reign of Constantine, in addition to the sources listed above, there is the Life of Constantine by Eusebius and a number of polemical tracts by Athanasius. We also have the Theodosian Code which includes over 400 laws from the reign of Constantine, but the dates for these laws are difficult to determine.

<sup>40</sup>Gibbon, I, 274-316.

in the history of Rome. Gibbon saw in Diocletian a political theorist of the first order.<sup>41</sup> Following the accession of Diocletian to the throne not only was he capable of identifying the political ills of the Empire, but he was likewise capable of prescribing a remedy. The program formulated by Diocletian in his effort to restore political stability necessitated the implementation of a new system of imperial government.<sup>42</sup> To still the disquiet of the Roman world, the emperor instituted a program which resulted in the Principate of Augustus being transformed into an absolute monarchy.<sup>43</sup> As a result of the reformer's efforts not only was the army brought to bay, but also the ancient role of the Senate was greatly altered as it was reduced in both numbers and authority. The administrative duties which had been shared with the Senate under the Principate were now concentrated into the hands of a central authority. While the details of this new imperial order will be left to the remaining chapters, we can conclude that Gibbon viewed the reforms of Diocletian as being the artful policy of a master politician.<sup>44</sup> The policies introduced by Diocletian and continued by Constantine not only quelled the

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., I, 352. For the reign of Diocletian, Gibbon relies almost entirely upon the work of the fourth century chroniclers Aurelius Victor, Eutropius and the highly polemical works of Lactantius.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 379.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 351.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 379.

disorder of the Roman world, but also instilled into it a new life which permitted the imperial order to function with success until it later fell victim to the barbarians and Christianity.

Following the monumental work of Gibbon there were no comparable investigations produced on the political transition of the Empire until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although there were significant advances made in the field of medieval historiography during the intervening century, as we have already noted in the first chapter, these advances were essentially dictated by a variety of interests which did not necessitate an investigation of the early Middle Ages. Thus, it was not until the closing decades of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth that late antiquity was once again brought under serious investigation.

Using the voluminous works of Otto Seeck and J. B. Bury as examples of this revival in classical studies, it is questionable whether the investigations of these two men represent any substantial advancement over the work of Gibbon. While both Seeck and Bury proffered explanations for the fall of the Empire that were more detailed and sophisticated than Gibbon's, they both ultimately concluded that the invasions of the fourth and fifth centuries represented the death blow for the West.<sup>45</sup> Of the two, however, the analysis rendered

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<sup>45</sup> Seeck, Geschichte des Untergangs der antiker Welt, I, 1-10; Bury, I, 1.

by Seeck stands as the more unique. In his six volume work, Geschichte des Untergang der antiken Welt, Seeck sought to introduce the novel idea, which he expressed in his formula, "Die Ausrottung der Besten," that the decline of the Roman Empire was brought about by a demographic decay and the disappearance of the "best men."<sup>46</sup> For Seeck the political life of Rome, and the ancient world in general, was based upon a fatal plan of self-destruction. Being strongly influenced by Darwin's Descent of Man, Seeck set out to discover whether the forces of struggle and natural selection were given free play in producing those men best fitted to govern and he concluded that, within Rome, the opposite was true.<sup>47</sup> Seeck maintained that as a result of the numerous civil and foreign wars which had plagued Rome since the days of the Republic, many of the ablest men had been liquidated.<sup>48</sup> In addition to the fatal loss that occurred from the prolonged wars, he also believed that the ancient world was hastened to its end as a result of the unnatural and primitive conditions that existed in regards to family life. In an effort to retain the political and economic privileges that accompanied their exalted social position, the ruling class in Rome, i. e., the senatorial aristocracy, had long accepted the practice of forced marriages, which Seeck believed violated the process

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<sup>46</sup>Seeck, I, 257-289.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

of natural selection, and as a result the most capable men seldom rose to the head of affairs.<sup>49</sup> It was not uncommon, says Seeck, for children to be married at the ages of nine or ten with no concern being expressed for love or feeling. The aristocracy developed an attitude in which marriage was viewed as a necessary evil and became a mere transaction in which the dowry played the decisive part.<sup>50</sup> As a result of this process of unnatural selection, the political scene in Rome came to be dominated by men of inferior character and by the fifth century A. D., the Empire stood as easy prey for the militant barbarians.<sup>51</sup> While Seeck maintained the ultimate collapse of the West was brought about by external forces, he also believed the fall had been preceded by an internal weakening of the political structure as a result of the loss of capable leadership.

Turning to the work of J. B. Bury we find that he placed even greater emphasis upon the role of the barbarians in the collapse of the West than did Seeck. Although he maintained in his History of the Later Roman Empire that it was impossible to cite one event which led to the fall of Rome, in each of the causes which he cited the barbarians appeared as the chief instigators.

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., IV, 353-380.

While it is true, said Bury, that the Empire experienced a period of grave political instability during the fifty years which separated the reigns of Alexander Severus and Diocletian, it was restored to a sound basis as a result of the reforms of Diocletian and Constantine.<sup>52</sup> Bury maintained that it was not until the end of the fourth century that the West began its decline and that the gradual collapse of the Roman power in this section of the Empire was the consequence of a "series of contingent events."<sup>53</sup> The first contingency, says Bury, was the eruption of the Huns into Europe, "an event resulting from causes which were quite independent of the weakness or strength of the Roman Empire."<sup>54</sup> It was the appearance of the Huns that precipitated the movement of the Visigoths into the Empire and the problems which grew out of this event were totally mismanaged. The emperor Valens, desiring to handle the matter independently, took the offensive against the Visigoths and in the process was not only defeated, but lost his own life. The mismanagement of the Visigoths, says Bury, was the second contingency leading to Rome's fall.<sup>55</sup> The third factor leading to Rome's loss of its Western provinces came with Valens' successor, Theodosius I. According to Bury, Theodosius, assuming a course of least resistance,

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<sup>52</sup>Bury, I, 1ff.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 311.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

permitted the barbarians to settle on imperial soil and through this measure, established a very unfortunate precedent. Even this event, however, was not cause for undue alarm had the succession passed to a capable leader. Unfortunately, Theodosius had not produced a competent heir and the government of the West passed into the hands of less skilled Honorius.<sup>56</sup> The ascendancy of Honorius to the imperial throne was the fourth and last contingency which Bury cites as being responsible for the collapse of the West.<sup>57</sup> Bury maintained that it was during the reign of Honorius the Germans came to fill important posts in the West and ultimately established independent kingdoms. As a result of these developments the Empire lost control of its Western provinces. Thus, while Bury may list a series of contingencies which led to the collapse of the Western portion of the Empire, it is obvious that he sees the barbarians as being the chief villains in each of them.

The role of the invaders in the disruption of classical antiquity was first brought into question by the "continuation" school. The works of Henri Pirenne and Alphonse Dopsch represent, par excellence, the efforts of this school to absolve the invaders of any responsibility for the fall of the Empire. In presenting their case, however, the continuation school went to the opposite extreme from the catastrophic in asserting

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 312.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

that classical civilization continued, intact, far into the post-invasion period.

Viewing the political reforms of Diocletian and Constantine through the sympathetic eyes of Henri Pirenne we see the Empire as a mythical marathon runner who after receiving the proverbial second wind thrusts forward with renewed vigor and strength, dethroning not only the besetting internal maladies, but possessing sufficient stamina to outdistance any external threat posed by the pressing barbarians. The appearance of this uncivilized mass of humanity in the provinces of the Empire created no real problem for Pirenne because he was convinced that the invaders desired not to destroy the Mediterranean unity, but only to gain a spot in the brilliant classical civilization. According to Pirenne, it was not the invaders that effected the great rupture between Antiquity and the Middle Ages, but the rapid and unexpected advance of Islam in the seventh century.<sup>58</sup> Pirenne believed the Germanic kings who established themselves within the Latin portion of the Empire did not possess the power of a true sovereignty, but were merely generals of the Roman army honoring the true supremacy of the Emperor.<sup>59</sup> The entire imperial administration was maintained. The Vandals in Africa were careful in the heat of their venture to retain the well established Roman

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<sup>58</sup>Pirenne, Mohammed and Charlemagne, p. 284; Medieval Cities (Princeton, 1925), p. 27.

<sup>59</sup>Pirenne, Mohammed and Charlemagne, p. 46.

institution. The face of Spain and Gaul bore no marks of disfigurement as a result of the invasion and certainly the Goths brought no change in their respective areas.<sup>60</sup>

What appeared to the catastrophic school to denote a decisive alteration in the status quo, namely the Germanic invasions of the fourth and fifth centuries, Pirenne considered to be only another crisis in the history of the Empire. He asserted that nothing was changed by the barbarians who admired Roman institutions and desired to preserve that to which they had fallen heir. They did not introduce a new form of government. The only significant alteration that came with the invaders was their effort to substitute independent kingdoms for the old imperial unity.<sup>61</sup> Within the analysis of Pirenne lies a basic assumption upon which the validity of his entire thesis rests. Pirenne labored under the assumption that if the invaders wrought no change then no change took place. However, simply because the Germans desired no change is not sufficient evidence to claim that no change occurred. As shall be demonstrated later, profound alterations in the status quo had already taken place before the Germans appeared as a threat.

The emphasis which Pirenne placed upon the "continuation" of classical antiquity had previously been examined by the Austrian scholar, Alphons Dopsch. His thesis supported not

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 125.

only the belief of a continuation of the established order following the migration of the Germans, but also that conditions continued with notable improvement. Basing his argument upon archaeological evidence, Dopsch was convinced that the Germans did not behave as enemies of Roman culture, but actually preserved and developed it.<sup>62</sup> According to Dopsch, the Germanic conquest of Rome was unlike the conquest of any other state in political history. "The Germans did not overrun the Empire in a savage onslaught and then build their culture on its primitive ruins. The Roman world was won from within by a peaceful penetration which went on for centuries during which time they absorbed not only its culture, but to a considerable extent, took over its administration."<sup>63</sup> Dopsch maintained the Germans did not destroy Rome, but actually strengthened it by virtue of their own ability.<sup>64</sup>

According to Dopsch, the political organization, which by the end of the fifth century was regulated by the new rulers, was not a radical change which occurred instantaneously, but was the culmination of a process which had been in the making since the first migrations. Dopsch asserts, "The primitive political organization of the Germans," which was characterized by a vast number of small independent tribes, "began

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<sup>62</sup>One of the reasons for the tremendous impact of the work of Dopsch was his use of the latest archeological findings, particularly coins.

<sup>63</sup>Dopsch, The Economic and Social Foundations of European Civilization, p. 386.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

to break down by the time of the migrations as these various independent units were slowly forged into larger tribal groupings under the authority of a single ruler."<sup>65</sup> The cause of this amalgamation of smaller tribes into larger units, Dopsch attributed to the numerous wars with the Romans. The results were the development of tribal kingships with a much larger basis of popular support and at the same time the development of greater political powers by the various kings.<sup>66</sup>

According to Dopsch, as the power of the kings increased, their influence also expanded by virtue of their conquest of smaller tribes. The ultimate end of this process was the development of a single monarchy. Soon after the final settlement of the Germans in the West, a monarchical constitution evolved as the accepted order.<sup>67</sup> Actually, as Dopsch recorded it, the Germanic political order was more acceptable to the Romans than their own corrupt system. It was not uncommon, as this authority has indicated, for a Roman to relinquish his possessions and position to seek refuge among the Germans. In conclusion Dopsch asserted that the abolition of the Roman political control of the West was only a step in a much more involved process of change. "The readjustment, so to speak, of a firm whose old name has long ceased to describe the actual head of the business."<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 312.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 183.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 187.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 356.

The assessment of the political crisis of the third century and the reforms of the fourth as found in Joseph Vogt's Der Niedergang Roms is also in harmony with the "continuation" school. In his assessment of the fourth century, Vogt maintained the absolutism of Diocletian was the result of a priori thinking by a skilled political theorist.<sup>69</sup> "As a politician," says Vogt, "Diocletian had the exceptional ability for analyzing existing power relationships and making long-term plans based on his findings. Although the immediate objective of his measures might be to remove certain specific abuses, they were so skillfully dovetailed that the result was a fully articulated system of government...whose hard core was strong enough to weather many storms."<sup>70</sup> In the eyes of Vogt, both Diocletian and Constantine were master statesmen who were not only capable of analyzing the existing problems, but who were also capable of providing a solution. According to Vogt, Diocletian, after carefully evaluating the problems which he had inherited from the fifty years of anarchy, came to the conclusion that the ancient institutions of the Empire, such as the Senate and the annual magistracies, were politically innocuous and as a result all of the offices in the imperial administration were placed under his authority.<sup>71</sup> To justify this move, as well as the autocratic measures which

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<sup>69</sup>Vogt, Der Niedergang Roms, p. 72.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., pp. 72-73.

he believed necessary to restore unity and order, Diocletian introduced the very ancient tradition in which the absolute power of the dominate was believed to rest ultimately on the semi-divine nature of the ruler.<sup>72</sup> Vogt maintains it was by establishing himself as "god-emperor" that Diocletian came to possess unlimited powers in the government of the Empire and he exercised this absolute authority in such a manner as to reorganize the central and outlying regions, "...in a new and enduring form."<sup>73</sup> Thus, according to Vogt, as a result of the superior political ability of Diocletian and Constantine the Empire was restored upon a sound footing and was to continue as a viable institution far into the post-invasion period.<sup>74</sup>

It would appear from the investigations of these adherents to the continuation thesis that the classical order of the ancient world was unaffected by the flood of barbarians that swept over Europe in the fourth and fifth centuries. However, the emphasis which this school placed upon the "continuity" of the classical order was soon brought into question through the investigations of the "transitional" school. Using the work of Ferdinand Lot as a representative of this school it soon becomes apparent that he is not in agreement with either

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., pp. 72-98.

of the two previously mentioned schools of thought.<sup>75</sup> Lot turns our attention once more to the civil chaos of the third century. With his emphasis focused upon the internal maladies which plagued the Empire, he is rather dubious concerning the degree of success experienced by Diocletian and Constantine in curing the economic, social, and political sores which had infected the Roman world. Lot maintains that while the political reforms of these two men had restored a temporary stability to the Empire, they were unable to correct the internal problems that were breeding in its political, economic, and social orders. Diocletian and Constantine were able to cover the outward signs of the disease, but the malignancy which had worked its way into the spiritual fibers of classical society could not be removed by the most skilled political surgeon.<sup>76</sup>

According to Lot, one of the key problems which must be considered in the transition from ancient to medieval civilization, as has already been encountered in a number of the sources that have previously been considered, was the persistence of Roman political institutions in the West after the settlement of the Germans. Lot would agree that those institutions to which the intruders had fallen heir continued to function with some degree of efficiency throughout the fifth century. The Visigoths who came to control Spain and a major

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<sup>75</sup> Lot, The End of the Ancient World, p. 60.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

portion of Gaul were closely allied to the Empire and performed quite admirably in the service of Rome.<sup>77</sup> While it is true King Euric refused to recognize the absolute power of the emperor, there was still a recognition of the Roman Empire. Evidence of this can be seen in the fact that one hundred years after the death of Euric, Visigothic coins still carried the name of the emperor.<sup>78</sup> Also, documents of the council continued to be dated in the Roman fashion and the Roman financial system continued to function.<sup>79</sup>

The continuation of the Roman political order can be seen among other Germanic tribes as well as with the Goths. According to Lot, the Burgundians remained faithful allies of the Romans for nearly a century. Each Burgundian king upon his accession to the throne was careful to announce his loyalty to the emperor as his federate.<sup>80</sup> Even the Franks, says Lot, were often on the best of terms with the imperial government in Constantinople. Even those kings who were opposed to the sovereignty of the emperor were incapable of becoming completely independent of the imperial tentacles. Of all the Germanic tribes, the Vandals in Africa were probably the most hostile to imperial control, but even they were

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<sup>77</sup>Ibid., p. 243.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., p. 245.

<sup>79</sup>The economic factors involved in the transition will be treated in a later chapter.

<sup>80</sup>Lot, p. 246.

careful to maintain many of the well established institutions of the Romans such as their economic systems.<sup>81</sup>

While one could conclude, in light of the above comments, that Lot essentially agrees with the "continuation" of the Germans' rich inheritance, this statement must be made with reservations. Although it is true that Lot believed the intruders attempted, in many instances, to continue the institutions to which they had fallen heir, the critical factor in Lot's thesis, as shall be more clearly illustrated in the following chapters, was that he believed the institutions which the invaders received had already been disrupted before they became a controlling factor in the West.

Still another effort to analyze the crisis of the third century and evaluate the reforms of Diocletian and Constantine is found in Michael Rostovtzeff's Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire. The work of Rostovtzeff differs with the brief analysis of the third century crisis given in the opening pages of this chapter in that he maintains the basis of this crisis was social and not political. In his own words, Rostovtzeff asserts that, "The usual explanation given by modern scholars which suggests that the violent convulsions of the third century...were created by the endeavors of the emperors to eliminate the senate politically and transform the Augustan diarchy into a pure monarchy...does not stand the

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<sup>81</sup>Ibid., p. 248.

test of facts."<sup>82</sup> According to Rostovtzeff the struggle in the third century was between an oppressed peasantry and the city bourgeoisie.<sup>83</sup> The mass of the Roman population, says Rostovtzeff, was comprised of peasants and serfs who existed as the subjects of the more powerful city bourgeoisie. "In short, the peasants were a special caste separated by a deep gulf from the privileged classes, a caste whose duty it was to support the high civilization of the cities by their toil and work, by their taxes and rent."<sup>84</sup> In the eyes of Rostovtzeff the crisis of the third century was social in character as the peasants, with the help of the army, tried to escape the oppressions to which they had, for centuries, been subjected.

Concerning the efforts of Diocletian and Constantine to quell the numerous problems that grew out of the third century crisis, Rostovtzeff, like Lot, is rather dubious of their success.<sup>85</sup> The primary objective of the oriental despotism which emerged from the reign of Diocletian, says Rostovtzeff, was the restoration of unity and order within the Empire.<sup>86</sup> Unfortunately, while Diocletian and Constantine

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<sup>82</sup>Michael Rostovtzeff, Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire (Oxford, 1926), p. 441.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., pp. 441-443.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., p. 443.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., p. 454.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid.

were expending herculean efforts to obtain this goal, they were unable to arrest the decay that was destroying the social and economic order of the Empire.<sup>87</sup> While it will be left to the next two chapters to discuss in detail Rostovtzeff's views on the social and economic decline of the West, it is obvious that he, like Lot, attributes the decline of the West to internal weaknesses and not to external forces such as the Germanic invasions. "Without Diocletian and Constantine," says Rostovtzeff, "the Empire no doubt would have succumbed much sooner, but cure for the disease of the Empire there was none."<sup>88</sup>

Another representative of the "transitional" school whose conclusions are in general agreement with those of Lot and Rostovtzeff is William C. Bark. In his efforts to amend the analysis of the late Roman Empire and early Middle Ages proffered by the continuation school, Bark maintained "...the real catastrophe of the Roman Empire occurred in the civil strife of the third century which destroyed the foundation of the economic, social and intellectual life of the ancient world."<sup>89</sup> Powerful administrators and reformers through Diocletian and Constantine may have been, "...their methods in an extremely complicated situation calling for extraordinary insight, finesse, and encouragement of individual talent were

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<sup>87</sup>Ibid., pp. 454-87.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid.

<sup>89</sup>Bark, Origins of the Medieval World, p. 42.

imperceptive, clumsy, and oppressive."<sup>90</sup> In harmony with the views expressed by Lot, Bark maintained that the primary significance of the reign of Diocletian was the restoration of the political unity of the Empire which prevented its fragmentation into individual states at so early a date.<sup>91</sup> In spite of their rigorous reforms, says Bark, Diocletian and Constantine were unable to arrest the forces that were destroying the ancient world. In his conclusion to this issue, Bark maintained that the Empire, by the fourth century, was beyond total restoration, "...for the chaos and destruction of the third century could not be rescinded even by the most despotic legislation."<sup>92</sup>

Although there has been a great deal more literature produced concerning the reforms of Diocletian and Constantine than has been considered above, much of this work has concentrated more on the reformers than upon the significance of their reforms.<sup>93</sup> Whether or not the reformers were justified in the despotic measures which they employed in the early fourth century was probably debated less by their contemporaries than by modern historians. The central issue in question is not whether they were justified in their actions, but rather whether or not the policies which they introduced

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<sup>90</sup>Ibid.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., pp. 43-44.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., p. 42.



represented a genuine restoration of the classical world. Politically speaking, it has already been demonstrated that the concept of Empire as existed in the first and second centuries A. D., experienced a radical change at the hands of Diocletian and Constantine. No longer could the claim of Aelius Aristides, that the Empire was free of despotic rule, be made. The power was now absolute and exercised solely at the discretion of the emperor. As it shall be more clearly demonstrated in the following pages, the state no longer existed for the people, but the people came to exist for the benefit of the state.

In spite of the obvious constitutional changes that emerged from the late third and early fourth centuries, the adherents of both the "catastrophic" and "continuation" schools are of the opinion that the Empire was not permanently affected by the civil disturbances of the third century. Both of these schools maintain that as a result of the expedient measures taken by Diocletian and Constantine the ancient world, in all respects, was restored to a sound basis of operation. In the eyes of the catastrophic school the collapse of classical civilization was not the result of internal weaknesses, but rather the result of external pressures, e. g., Christianity, barbarians, Islam, that were brought to bear upon the Empire and which sapped it of all its vital strength.

The position of the "continuation" school with regards to the crisis of the third century and reforms of the fourth

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is obvious in its title. It is the opinion of this school that not only was the ancient world restored through the efforts of Diocletian and Constantine, but that it retained sufficient strength and vitality to be relatively unaffected by such events as the Germanic invasions of the fourth and fifth centuries. Those events which the "catastrophic" school classified as a significant alteration of the status quo, the continuation school dismissed as only superficial political novelties which caused no lasting effect upon the imperial structure.

In contrast to both of these interpretations stands the investigations of the "transitional" school. It is the belief of this school that while Diocletian and Constantine had been able to restore political unity to the Empire and thus avert its early fragmentation, their methods in an extremely complicated situation, to use the words of Bark, had been imperceptive, oppressive, and clumsy. According to the transitional school the real catastrophe of the Roman Empire occurred during the civil strife of the third century at which time the foundations of the social, economic, and intellectual life of the ancient world were being destroyed. While Diocletian and Constantine had been able to restore a measurable degree of stability for the Empire, they had been unable to construct a program whereby the internal problems of the ancient world could be resolved. According to this school of thought the ancient world did not continue uninterrupted into the seventh century nor did it experience a



catastrophic end at the hands of external foes. The Roman world collapsed in the West as a result of internal weaknesses and the influence that was brought to bear upon these frailties by the Church and the barbarians. The ancient world was gradually transformed into a new way of life which was motivated by a new ideology and directed by a new set of institutions.

As we turn now to a more detailed analysis of the problems inherited by Diocletian and Constantine and the manner in which they tried to solve them, the importance of the later third and early fourth centuries in the shaping of medieval historiography can be more clearly demonstrated.



## CHAPTER III

### THE ECONOMIC CRISIS (THIRD-SIXTH CENTURIES)

Although it has required a legion of scholars working in many areas to rent the shroud of ignorance which so long engulfed the early Middle Ages, few of them deserve more credit than those who undertook the arduous task of reconstructing the edifice of late Roman and early medieval economic institutions. While the quantity of source material is limited, the final harvest has been plenteous in that much has been accomplished toward altering the existing concept of a "Middle Age."

Just as the cultivation of any field of research is often subject to a stunted yield as a result of the scholar's biases and misconceptions, the investigations of the economic institutions of late antiquity have proved to be no exception. Using the continuation school as evidence of this claim, the following pages will seek to demonstrate how the adherents of this school, particularly Alphons Dopsch, Henri Pirenne, Joseph Vogt, Ernst Kornemann and Kurt Pfister, were led astray as a result of being blinded by the past brilliance of classical civilization and by their exaggerated faith in the economic ability of the invaders. The continuation school could not conceive of a civilization possessing the grandeur which Rome had once possessed falling into a state of internal

decay and succumbing so early in life. As a result of their blindness, they created a picture of late Roman and early medieval economic institutions as possessing a vitality and stability which actually did not exist.

Viewing once more the posthumously published work of Henri Pirenne, Mohammed and Charlemagne, we find the author imbued with the same confidence in stressing the economic continuity of classical civilization throughout the so-called "dark age" as he was in stressing the political continuity. He persistently maintains that while the crisis of the third century and the appearance of the invaders in the fourth and fifth may have initiated a brief reign of chaos, the calm returned after the tempest leaving the Mediterranean unity as it had existed prior to these events.<sup>1</sup> Concerning the classical economy, the author erroneously sees numerous utterances in the work of Gregory of Tours as indications that the economic unity of the Mediterranean continued to exist until the seventh and eighth centuries when the mare nostrum finally became a Moslem lake.

According to Pirenne, evidence of the economic unity of the Mediterranean following the invasions can be found in the extensive trade which flourished long after the barbarians had effected their triumph. Pirenne is extremely dogmatic in his reference to the commercial movement which he saw existing between the Eastern and Western portions of the Empire. In

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<sup>1</sup>Pirenne, Mohammed and Charlemagne, p. 75.

the eyes of Pirenne, the lucrative traffic which existed in both necessities and luxury items was unaffected by either the crisis of the third century or the invasions.

To support his contention that extensive commercial activity persisted, Pirenne placed great emphasis upon the large number of oriental merchants residing in the West during the fifth and sixth centuries. With the chief commercial agent of the day being easterners, particularly the Jews, Syrians, and Egyptians, Pirenne maintained the repeated references to their presence in the West was proof of an extensive commercial program. Had these men not been operating at a substantial profit they would have discontinued their activities. Yet, Southern Gaul leaves evidence of a large number of these oriental merchants whose business it was to transport merchandise from the East to the West; and in addition to those who were involved in the transportation of wares there was a large number of merchants who established permanent residence within Gaul.<sup>2</sup>

Further evidence convincing Pirenne of the continuation of commercial activity during the post invasion period was the large number of luxuries that were to be found in the West. Pirenne finds frequent reference in the work of Gregory of Tours to ivory carvings, decorative liturgical tunics, oriental curtains, papyrus and silks which were present in the West and could have had as their origin no other place

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 82.

than the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>3</sup> Also, there was a large amount of table luxuries which must have been imported from the East. The wines of Syria could be found in large quantities and the bitter herbs of Egypt were imported for ascetic consumption during the Lenten season. But most significant was the extensive spice trade that existed.<sup>4</sup> Pirenne believes it would be impossible to exaggerate the flow of spices into the West as they continued after the invasions, as before, to form an important constituent of the everyday diet. Spices from the East could be found on practically every table in the West.<sup>5</sup>

While the presence of the merchants and luxuries in the West following the invasions was essential in Pirenne's efforts to support his economic thesis, he placed even greater emphasis upon the amount of gold that existed in the West from the fourth to the sixth century. If there was an extensive commercial program in operation, as Pirenne claims, then there would have to be an equally extensive amount of gold present. Here Pirenne did not falter as he saw the Germanic kings quite successfully implementing the imperial economic system. The Roman gold solidus which had been adjusted by Constantine, continued to serve as the monetary unit throughout the Empire. This monetary system, with which the

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 82-89.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 89-90.

Germans had long been acquainted while serving the Empire, was preserved after their final triumph as the accepted financial standard.<sup>6</sup> Nothing attributes more clearly the persistence of the economic unity of the Empire, Pirenne maintains, than the continuation during the fifth and sixth centuries of the Roman monetary system.<sup>7</sup> The economic standards of the barbarians were those of Rome and no alteration was made until the introduction of the silver standard during the Carolingian period. For Pirenne, there is no doubt that the economic unity of Rome continued with all of its splendor into the post invasion period.

The central issue in the work of Pirenne is that the unity of the Mediterranean world was maintained unbroken into the eight century when the unity was finally shattered as a result of the Arab conquest. Although Pirenne, as a result of his superb pleading, won a number of converts, a large number of scholars were not convinced of the validity of his claims. For the last forty years nearly all that has been written on early medieval economic history has reflected the heat of the controversy over the "Pirenne thesis."

The nature of this controversy can be seen in such works as Norman H. Baynes' "M. Pirenne and the Unity of the Mediterranean World."<sup>8</sup> With Pirenne's heavy reliance upon

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Norman H. Baynes, "M. Pirenne and the Unity of the Mediterranean World," in Byzantine Studies (London, 1955), pp. 310-16.

the presence of an extensive commercial program in the West during the fifth and sixth centuries to support his thesis of economic unity, the central issue in Baynes' essay involves the role which the Syrian merchants played in the economic life of the Merovingian kingdom. In respect to this issue, Baynes maintains that Pirenne was guilty of imposing upon his major source, History of the Franks by Gregory of Tours, ideas that were foreign to its context.<sup>9</sup> According to Baynes, Pirenne tried to impose modern concepts and meaning upon medieval terminology. Where Pirenne saw reference to a "merchant" he was inclined to presume that this was an indication of a far-reaching commercial program.<sup>10</sup> While such an assumption as this may hold true for modern history, the same cannot be said for the early Middle Ages. In contrast to Pirenne's use of the term merchant, Baynes asserts that a more accurate description of a medieval merchant is that of one who was involved primarily in local trade and even there, only on a very modest scale.<sup>11</sup> It is a mistake, says Baynes, to cast a medieval merchant in the role of an entrepreneur as Pirenne has attempted.

Pushing his argument even further, Baynes asserts that Pirenne likewise abuses the sources when he sees inference in the mention of "Syrians" in the West that these Eastern

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 310-16.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

immigrants remained in close commercial relations with their country of origin and that their population was being constantly reinforced by new arrivals from the East.<sup>12</sup> In support of his criticism of Pirenne's use of the sources, Baynes claims that if there had been the extensive trade between the East and West which Pirenne claims, Gregory would have been much better informed of the East than his work indicates. In those areas to which there were frequent embassies, such as Visigothic Spain, Gregory was fully informed while of Rome and the popes of the time we hear nothing.<sup>13</sup> Had there been the regular contact between the East and West, as Pirenne claimed, no doubt Gregory would have given longer accounts of the affairs in Rome. His silence, says Baynes, is due to the lack of information which was at his disposal which is also an indication of the limited contact between the East and West.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to the work of Baynes there exists a considerable body of literature which has been quite critical of other aspects of the Pirenne thesis. One could cite the work of H. St. L. B. Moss, who questioned Pirenne's claim that the invasions had no appreciable effect upon trade, or the works of Robert Lopez and Daniel Dennett, who refuse to accept Pirenne's claim that the Moslem conquest was a

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

"catastrophic" event for the West economically.<sup>15</sup> However, in spite of the sustained attacks against the work of Pirenne, the acceptance of the "continuation" thesis has not been completely aborted. As shall be demonstrated in the following pages, the additional weight which was supplied to the continuation thesis through the investigations of Alfons Dopsch provided it with sufficient strength to weather the attacks of its opponents.

As indicated in the above statement, another representative of the continuation school who places great emphasis on the persistence of the Roman economic order in the West is Alfons Dopsch. Dopsch believed that after peacefully penetrating the Empire, the Germans did not disrupt the existing order of trade, but actually served as a stimulant. According to Dopsch, the Gothic kings looked very favorably upon commercial activity and in the course of events even passed significant legislation which resulted in increased activity.<sup>16</sup> The Germans had long been in contact with the Roman economic organization and had developed a considerable knowledge of its functions which permitted a continuation of these activities after their final settlement.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>H. St. L. B. Moss, "Economic Consequence of the Barbarian Invasion," Economic History Review, VII (1937), 206-16; Robert Lopez, "Mohammed and Charlemagne: a Revision," Speculum, XVIII (1943), 14-38; Daniel C. Dennett, "Pirenne and Mohammed," Speculum, XXIII (1948), 165-90.

<sup>16</sup>Dopsch, The Economic and Social Foundations of European Civilization, pp. 340-41.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 340-44.

With respect to the large number of Oriental merchants living in the Western Mediterranean and their transporting from the East such products as silk, spices, paper, and rare wines, Dopsch maintains it is wrong to suppose that trade in this period was carried on exclusively by foreigners and that their products were limited to luxuries.<sup>18</sup> According to Dopsch, the monasteries were dependent upon trade in the fifth and sixth centuries and they were capable of supplying their needs by purchasing such items as cloth, grain and oil for their lamps, in the local markets. Also, much of this trade was being conducted by enterprising members of the local population in addition to the Syrians. Dopsch asserts that one can find evidence to prove that even the clergy engaged in trade, under assumed names, in an effort to reap some of the lucrative rewards.<sup>19</sup> The German participation in commercial activities should not be difficult to accept, says Dopsch, because archaeological findings have proved that trade had been flourishing between Rome and the barbarians since the third century; this exchange provided the Germans with a considerable background in economic dealings.<sup>20</sup> This long-established trade did not cease when the barbarians overran the West, but just assumed a new partner. Thus, the migrations

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 344.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., pp. 344-46.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., pp. 347-48.

of the Germans into the Empire had not created economic chaos, but actually made new connections which in turn created increased commercial activity.<sup>21</sup>

Migrations have always served to integrate mankind and have often functioned as a catalyst to bring different civilizations into touch so that gulfs were bridged and cultures could be transmitted one to the other. The migrations of the Germans, Dopsch asserts, proved to be just such an event in that it eventually stimulated the economic life of the Mediterranean which continued to flourish into the sixth century. Returning once more to the evidence produced by his archaeological endeavors, Dopsch concludes that evidence has been sufficient to support the belief that the Germans continued to employ the monetary system to which they had fallen heir.<sup>22</sup> The coins which have been discovered illustrate that the Germans were familiar with the Roman currency and wanted to preserve it.<sup>23</sup> The lack of German coins during the early invasion period does not mean they were incapable of producing their own, but actually indicates there was such an abundance of Roman coins that the Germans had no need of minting new. When they did commence striking their own coins, which embodied the effigy of the emperor, they were so genuinely produced that it is difficult to distinguish them from the

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 348.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 359.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

Roman.<sup>24</sup> According to Dopsch, this is adequate evidence to support the belief that the Germans actually possessed sufficient knowledge and craftsmanship to continue the imperial monetary system.

Although the findings of Dopsch and Pirenne have been seriously challenged in recent decades, there are those who continue to advocate the "continuation" thesis.<sup>25</sup> The works of Heinrich Dannenbauer and Joseph Vogt represent two of the strongest efforts to perpetuate the economic ideas which were first espoused by Dopsch and Pirenne.<sup>26</sup> The Oriental merchants who had come to dominate the trade of the Mediterranean world, Dannenbauer and Vogt found to be omnipresent in the West. In the sixth century, Gaul swarmed with merchants as there was an abundance of Syrians, Jews, Egyptians and Greeks who continued to peddle their wares from the frontier of the Rhine to Britain.<sup>27</sup> Dannenbauer also believes that the Germans themselves assisted in the perpetuation of the Roman commercial system as he states, "...ihr Weg ist also von Agypten uber der Meer nach Italien ins langobardische Reich

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> The opponents of the continuation thesis will be examined in the latter portion of this chapter.

<sup>26</sup> Dannenbauer, Die Entstehung Europas vom der Spatantike zum Mittelalter (Stuttgart, 1959), II, 88-93; Vogt, Der Niedergang Roms, pp. 201ff. The views expressed in these works on economics are almost identical to the conclusions found in the work of Pirenne.

<sup>27</sup> Dannenbauer, Vom der Spatantike zum Mittelalter, II, p. 88; Grundlagen der Mittelalter Welt, p. 15; Vogt, p. 201.

gegangen, und von hier über der Alpenpasse weither norder, nach Alemannien und an der Rhein, und die Vermittler müssen langobardische Kaufleute gewesen sein."<sup>28</sup> The chief articles of import from the East continued to be luxuries as the West received an abundance of silver tableware from Syria, myrrh and frankincense from Arabia, and spices from Malabar.<sup>29</sup> The works of Dannenbauer and Vogt are also in agreement with those of Dopsch and Pirenne in maintaining that the Roman monetary system continued to thrive during the period of the invasions and managed to maintain its proper weight and standard until it was polluted by the Carolingians in the ninth century.<sup>30</sup> Both Dannenbauer and Vogt would agree that the imperial economic system continued to function with a great deal of success in the post invasion period and that it was not until the period of the Carolingians that the system experienced any decline.

While additional references for the continuation school could be cited, e. g., Ernst Kornemann and Kurt Pfister,

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<sup>28</sup>Dannenbauer, Vom Spatantike zum Mittelalter, II, p. 89.

<sup>29</sup>Dannenbauer, Grundlagen der Mittelalter Welt, pp. 15-16; Vogt, Der Niedergang Roms, p. 201. Vogt also maintained there was a considerable trade in non-luxuries--"Sie handelten auch mit waren für den gewöhnlichen Verbrauch."

<sup>30</sup>Vogt, Der Niedergang Roms, pp. 103-202; Dannenbauer, Vom der Spatantike zum Mittelalter, II, pp. 89-91. It is at times difficult to follow the conclusions of Vogt and Dannenbauer as their evidence does not always support their conclusions. For example both maintain there was an abundance of luxuries and gold in the West, but they sold for exorbitant prices. Evidently the law of supply and demand did not apply to the ancient world!

its aim and objectives are already apparent. From the above material it can be concluded that it is the belief of the continuation school that the economic order of the classical world passed from the Romans to the barbarians without any appreciable alterations. Neither the internal maladies which plagued the Empire in the third century nor the external threat posed by the barbarians in the fourth and fifth had been sufficient to undermine the economic foundations of the ancient world. The fiscal difficulties that arose from the civil disturbance of the third century were forced into abeyance through the ingenious efforts of Diocletian and Constantine. In a similar fashion, the continuation school dismisses the idea that changes were invoked at the hands of the Germans who both admired and wished to preserve that to which they had fallen heir. The various members of this school of thought are of the opinion that the barbarians had been sufficiently schooled in the economic ways of the Empire to continue that which they received. For the continuation school, the flame of economic unity passed from the Romans to the barbarians with little more than a flicker in the process.

The analysis of the late Roman economic institutions as proffered by the continuation school has been seriously challenged by the members of the "transitional" school. The basic objection which the transitional school has set forth concerning the continuation thesis is in regards to the obvious liberties which the continuation school has taken in its use of primary sources. Evidence of their questionable

use of sources has already been alluded to in the case of Pirenne seizing upon the occasional reference to merchants in the work of Gregory of Tours in order to make a case for a vigorous commercial activity in the fifth and sixth century. As previously noted, a number of scholars, such as Norman Baynes, have since illustrated the futility in attempting to cast the "peddlers" of the sixth century in the role of great entrepreneurs. The chief commodity in their trade was slaves, and, with a few exceptions, they seem to have carried out their activities on an exceedingly modest scale. When put to the test of facts, many of the claims of Dopsch concerning the ability of the Germans to perpetuate their rich inheritance also appear to be wanting. As C. Warren Hollister has recently observed, one must search in vain for any real evidence of what Dopsch describes as "a political solicitude for the welfare of the mass of the free population."<sup>31</sup> Pirenne and Dopsch both postulated a vigorous commercial life for the post invasion period which more recent and dispassionate investigations have made clear was a mirage. As we shall see in the following analysis, William C. Bark may not have exaggerated too extremely when he concluded that the continuation school "possessed not only the ability to make bricks without straw, but at times did not even need clay."<sup>32</sup> Pirenne

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<sup>31</sup>C. Warren Hollister, "Twilight in the West," in The Transformation of the Roman World, ed., Lynn White (Berkeley, 1966), p. 187.

<sup>32</sup>Bark, Origins of the Medieval World, p. 13.

could build a flourishing trade on the basis of a few debatable references found in the writing of Gregory of Tours while Dopsch could make a mint out of the presence of a few coins uncovered in his archaeological endeavors. The exaggerations and fabrications which support a number of the conclusions reached by the continuation school will be further revealed as we turn to a consideration of the economic crisis as found in the works of the transitional school.

In an effort to counter the theses advanced by the continuation school, the transitional school turned to the crisis of the third century and the internal maladies that plagued the imperial economic order. It is a fact generally agreed upon by the transitional school that the Roman world underwent a serious economic upheaval from the second half of the second century on.<sup>33</sup> In every age of upheaval the coinage serves as one of the most sensitive of all gauges. With the advance of the third century, the severity of the domestic and foreign problems plaguing the Empire was revealed in the work of such men as Michael Rostovtzeff, Ferdinand Lot, Robert Latouche, William Bark and H. St. L. B. Moss, that the once stable imperial weight of the coins had become increasingly irregular and their content polluted.<sup>34</sup> The portion of base

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<sup>33</sup>Lot, The End of the Ancient World and the Beginning of the Middle Ages, p. 55; Robert Latouche, The Birth of Western Economy, trans., E. M. Wilkinson (New York, 1961), pp. 3, 13; Stein, Geschichte des Spätromischen Reiches, I, 107-108; Bark, p. 47; Moss, The Birth of the Middle Ages, pp. 1-9; Rostovtzeff, Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire, p. 417.

<sup>34</sup>Rostovtzeff, p. 417; Lot, p. 55; Latouche, pp. 3, 13; Bark, p. 47; Moss, pp. 1-9.

metal had risen to an astonishing 98.5 per cent with the silver coins becoming little more than a piece of lead or copper dipped in silver wash.<sup>35</sup> While Diocletian and Constantine were able to restore a sound coinage of the silver products and of the gold solidus, the latter, which was the basis of their monetary system, was already becoming rare. Due to the scarcity of precious metal, Constantine established the practice of minting copper coins to be used for every occasion except imports.<sup>36</sup> As Robert Latouche has observed, however, these inferior coins were never accepted by the people as a great number of them turned to barter.<sup>37</sup> In spite of the efforts to curb the economic maladies, unmistakable signs made it clear that ancient society was in a state of economic retrogression with the monetary economy yielding more and more to a natural economy.<sup>38</sup>

Thus far there has been no mention of a natural economy because with all the gold which the continuation school saw existing in the West during the post invasion period, they would have dismissed any thought of a natural economy

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<sup>35</sup> Lot, p. 56; Bark, p. 51; F. F. Abbott and A. C. Johnson, Municipal Administration in the Roman Empire (Princeton, 1926), p. 220.

<sup>36</sup> Latouche, pp. 13-17.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Stein, I, 177; Pfister, p. 230. Pfister believes that a natural economy did exist, but the reforms of Diocletian forced it into abeyance. Gunnar Mickwitz, Geld und Wirtschaft im Römischen Reich des vierten Jahrhundert (Helsingfors, 1923), p. 3.

during this era. However, the verdict of recent scholarship would not agree with the conclusions of these men.<sup>39</sup>

By the end of the third century the finances that were needed to maintain the Roman world far exceeded its available revenue.<sup>40</sup> As a result of the numerous internal and external wars which plagued the Empire, its supply of precious metal was greatly impaired which in turn upset the heretofore stable monetary system. For Diocletian to be able to continue with the numerous reforms which he had instituted (see Chapter II) and maintain the splendor of the classical world, it was necessary that he establish a reliable income for the Roman fisc. As the currency was debased and unstable the solution to this problem could not be a monetary one. According to such authorities as Gunnar Mickwitz and Michael Rostovtzeff, the answer provided by the emperor was the revival or extension of the annona, a tax in kind, which up to this time had been used only as a special assessment to supplement the normal revenue in times of war or famine.<sup>41</sup> Thus, under the reign of Diocletian, states the transitional school, the annona was changed from an emergency measure to a regular burden and the Empire came to depend upon a tax in kind for its sustenance.

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<sup>39</sup>Mickwitz, p. 190. He stresses the fourth century as being critical in the transition to the Middle Ages as the economy was already headed toward a natural economy. Bark, p. 72.

<sup>40</sup>Kornemann, p. 362; Rostovtzeff, pp. 464-66.

<sup>41</sup>Mickwitz, pp. 190ff.; Rostovtzeff, p. 464.

The annona was levied on a standard fiscal unit, the iugum, which was worked out from a survey of all the land available plus the size of the labor force, the capita, available to work it.<sup>42</sup> In the beginning the iugatio-capitatio assessment was determined every five years by an imperial agent whose job it was to determine the potential productivity of the land.<sup>43</sup> According to Rostovtzeff, the instituting of the annona as a regular tax represents the efforts of the state to solve its economic problems without regard for the interest of the people.<sup>44</sup> "It represents," says Rostovtzeff, "the efforts of a soldier to solve a delicate problem by ignoring its delicacy."<sup>45</sup> The demands of the fisc became increasingly burdensome as the assessments were increased tremendously, the ability to pay declined and the collection of the dues became more brutal. One source in the fourth century records a case where a man who was unable to pay the assessed amount was thrown into prison, his wife flogged and his three sons sold into slavery.<sup>46</sup>

In addition to the normal hardships imposed by the

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<sup>42</sup>Seeck, II, 25-52, 266-79. Seeck has contributed a great deal of original insight into the working of the annona. Stein, I, 108-111; Rostovtzeff, p. 465; Bark, p. 53; Lot, p. 121.

<sup>43</sup>Seeck, II, 250-52; Stein, I, 108-111; Rostovtzeff, p. 465; Bark, p. 53; Lot, p. 121.

<sup>44</sup>Rostovtzeff, pp. 464-65.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Dannenbauer, Vom der Spatantike zum Mittelalter, I, 245.

annona, such as fifteen year assessments, failure to consider the condition of the soil and the possibility of crop failure, the burden was further magnified by the fact that the bulk of the responsibility was placed on the small farmer who was least able to pay. The wealthy lords, the senatorial class, had, by virtue of their position and strength, escaped the burdens of taxation. In his extensive work, Westromischen Studien, Johannes Sundwall has given an excellent account of the inequities which existed within the Empire during the late fourth and fifth centuries in respects to the distribution of wealth and taxation.<sup>47</sup> Sundwall has demonstrated that in the fifth century most of the wealthy lords, who were most able to pay, were in arrears with their tax payment.<sup>48</sup> So blighting was the annona that many of the small farmers began to impair their own farms in an attempt to reduce their tax due. This practice had become so widespread by the end of the fourth century that Emperor Theodosius proclaimed that anyone who permitted his yield to decline would be punished by confiscation and death.<sup>49</sup> As we shall see in the next chapter, so heavy was the responsibility of the small farmer that many began to desert the land to escape the hardships.

As the transitional school has shown, by the end of

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<sup>47</sup>Johannes Sundwall, Westromische Studien (Berlin, 1915), p. 167.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Dannenbauer, Vom der Spatantike zum Mittelalter, I, 246.

the third century and the beginning of the fourth, the Roman state had instituted the practice of receiving the land tax in kind and in the process also established the policy of paying the salaries of state officials in kind.<sup>50</sup> Gunnar Mickwitz, in his Geld und Wirtschaft im Römischen Reich des vierten Jahrhundert, claims the imperial administrators actually labored to implement a tax in kind as well as salaries in kind because such a system would have been to their advantage with the uncontrolled inflation of the fourth and fifth centuries.<sup>51</sup> However, Mickwitz, who is one of the foremost authorities on this subject, has also been careful to point out that there was by no means a thorough replacement of a gold economy by a natural economy.<sup>52</sup> As he and Michael Rostovtzeff have stated, there was a wide variation of conditions within the Empire making it both risky and erroneous to generalize about the entire Empire from specialized cases.<sup>53</sup> No better evidence of this can be seen than in the Eastern portion of the Empire as this area of the ancient world was able to restore a relatively stable economy while the West passed into greater poverty.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Lot, p. 57; Bark, p. 53; Moss, p. 9; Stein, I, 110-111; Seeck, II, 266-79; Mickwitz, pp. 2-3, 190.

<sup>51</sup>Mickwitz, p. 176.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., pp. 176ff.

<sup>53</sup>Rostovtzeff, "The Decay of the Ancient World and its Economic Explanation," Economic Historical Review, II (1930), 200-01.

<sup>54</sup>Mickwitz, p. 188; Stein, I, 26-27; Bark, p. 71.

It is the conclusion of the transitional school that as a result of the profound economic upheavals which infested the ancient world, society became very disillusioned, indebted and insecure with their present stations in life. As the noted economic historian, Robert Latouche, has pointed out in his work, The Birth of Western Economy, the problems of the second and third centuries became so devastating in the fourth and fifth that they were climaxed by an extensive exodus to the large estates.<sup>55</sup> Many individuals began to seek security by placing themselves in the hands of men more powerful in order that they might gain their guardianship and protection.<sup>56</sup> Along with the small, free farmer who was unable to meet the demands of the fisc, the residents of the cities also left their declining and insecure positions to seek refuge on the large estates.<sup>57</sup>

As we have already seen, with the eclipse of city life the rural economy assumed a position of greatest importance in the survival of society. As we shall see in the next chapter, so significant was the agrarian class that the government was impelled to take action which would ensure the continued services of this economic entity. More important, however, than the economic aspects of the agrarian community was that the large estates represented one of the few

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<sup>55</sup>Latouche, p. 21.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>57</sup>Abbott and Johnson, p. 200; Latouche, pp. 19-23.

institutions that were capable of existing amidst the otherwise chaotic world. This system which served as a haven for slaves, small landowners weighted down with debts, barbarians, and the discontented element of the cities, was so successful that it was later adopted by the Germanic aristocracy and came to be one of the moulding forces of the new Western world.<sup>58</sup>

Additional repercussions set in motion by the economic upheavals can be seen in the deterioration of the military order. According to such authorities as Lot, Latouche, Mickwitz and Bark, with the lack of precious metal, which resulted in the disappearance of money payment, the costly Roman army was soon supplemented by barbarians using their own weapons, fighting under their own chiefs, and receiving land as payment for their services. These authorities of the transitional thesis are correct in concluding that the inevitable consequence of a system which allows services rendered to be rewarded by means of salaries in kind or the distribution of land, is the emergence of the so-called feudal system.<sup>59</sup>

From the above material there emerges a problem of the highest importance. How can it be explained that the Roman

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<sup>58</sup>Latouche, pp. 19-23.

<sup>59</sup>Lot, p. 13; Latouche, p. 123; Mickwitz, pp. 167-68. Payment of salaries in kind began in the fourth century with the army and later was extended to the administrators. By the fifth century the practice had been established to reward the army with land as payment for their services.

world, economically prosperous at the end of the Republic and during the first century and a half of the Empire, was now irreparably ruined? One of the critical factors can be found in the Roman industrial system. There can be little doubt that the population of Rome had been decreasing since the close of the second century.<sup>60</sup> Along with the demographic decline one must also bear in mind that the man of antiquity had few needs. His food and clothing was simple and no emphasis was placed upon mass consumption of products. With the frugality and simplicity in which man lived there was little opportunity for the development of industry.<sup>61</sup> Even the rich, who were financially able, showed little inclination to create or maintain any extensive industry. They were content to live off the products of their own estates and to purchase any additional commodities from Eastern merchants.

Producing little the Romans had little to sell, and, as William C. Bark and Robert Latouche have stated, this resulted in an unfavorable balance of trade which in turn created a constant drain on the Western economy. Rome's perpetuation of this unfavorable balance of trade meant the West had to pay for the raw materials and wares which it received with precious metal. As the mines which produced this metal

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<sup>60</sup> Lot, p. 73; Arthur E. R. Boak, Manpower Shortage and the Fall of the Empire (Ann Arbor, 1955). Moses I. Finley, "Manpower Shortage," Journal of Roman Studies, XLVIII, (1958). 156-64. Finley takes exception with the emphasis which Boak attributes to the manpower shortage and the fall of the Empire.

<sup>61</sup> Bark, p. 47; Latouche, p. 13.

were exhausted or lost in war, the Empire was rapidly becoming bankrupt.<sup>62</sup> When Constantine finally transferred the capital from the West to the East, the center of world trade moved with it and from this time Constantinople grew at the expense of Rome.<sup>63</sup>

In spite of the efforts of such men as Ernst Stein, Michael Rostovtzeff, Gunnar Mickwitz and Norman H. Baynes, too little concern is still shown to the East in determining the economic status of the late Empire.<sup>64</sup> These authorities have been quite dogmatic in asserting that it is only by looking at the East that the decline of the West can best be understood. What was saved out of the wreckage of the third century and the reforms of the fourth? Certainly not the Empire of Augustus. What was salvaged was renewed life for the Eastern Empire, and it is a mistake to consider that the complete Empire of classical times continued intact. The old Roman Empire expired in the rigors and reforms that brought new life to the East. As shall be evident in the following pages, the East experienced economic recovery at the end of the fourth century, but the West was quite otherwise.<sup>65</sup> As

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<sup>62</sup>Latouche, p. 13.

<sup>63</sup>Moss, p. 50; Stein, I, 23-27. Stein shows that the East began to recover while the West was unable to do so. Additional evidence of this can be seen in the work of Mickwitz. See especially p. 188.

<sup>64</sup>Rostovtzeff, pp. 200-01; Baynes, pp. 29-35; Stein, I, 26-27; Mickwitz, pp. 188ff.

<sup>65</sup>Stein, I, 26ff.; Mickwitz, pp. 188ff.; Bark, p. 71.

Ernst Stein and Gunnar Mickwitz have expressed it, the East jettisoned the destructive forces that ran free in the West.<sup>66</sup>

As was previously suggested by the writings of the continuation school, the economy of the West, if not closely examined will tend to give a false impression of stability which it actually did not possess.<sup>67</sup> The various representatives of the transitional school would agree that there was gold remaining in the West during the fourth and fifth centuries, but how extensive was it and how long did it remain there? It is certain, says Bark, "...that a good deal of it had already found its way back to the East from whence it came."<sup>68</sup> It can be demonstrated that Constantinople repeatedly escaped the aggressions of the barbarians by bribing the would-be attackers with gold whereas the West had to go through

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<sup>66</sup>Stein, I, 26ff.; Mickwitz, pp. 188ff.; Bark, p. 71. In these references we can find evidence that the East was able to abort the natural economy while the West was not.

<sup>67</sup>As we shall see in the following pages the primary mistake of Pirenne and Dopsch was that they exaggerated on the minute evidence which they had to support their thesis. Pirenne also misrepresented some of his secondary sources. He used the work of Gunnar Mickwitz to prove that there was no natural economy in the West and as we have seen in the above material, Mickwitz did not say this. Dopsch and Pirenne also expanded upon some of the terminology which they found in their source material, such as the term "merchant." Vogt and Dannenbauer expanded upon the source material they used as they included literary works of such men as Symmachus to prove there was still faith and hope in the Roman economic system into the fifth century. They fail to point out that Symmachus was the owner of over a dozen large estates and with all his wealth it is little wonder that he was not weighed down with pessimism.

<sup>68</sup>Bark, pp. 45-48; Mickwitz, pp. 245-46; Lot, p. 513.

such difficulties without this advantage.<sup>69</sup> Johannes Sundwall, in an attempt to show the economic superiority of Constantinople over Rome, concluded that the East did not hesitate to sacrifice the West, nor Rome itself, as can be seen with the Visigoths and again with the Huns, in an effort to protect herself.<sup>70</sup> The point is obvious: the East could afford to buy protection with money while the poorer West could not and therefore had to forego this life-sustaining luxury.<sup>71</sup>

As a result of its enfeebled position, the West was no longer a viable force within the Empire. It was in the process of dying. Its provinces were being plundered while its cities were destroyed and abandoned. It is true, as Pirenne had pointed out, that the trade of the West had fallen into the hands of Oriental merchants, primarily the Syrians and Jews.<sup>72</sup> It is also true that these merchants were operating at a profit or they would not have remained in the West, but this was made possible primarily by the supply of gold that was arriving periodically in the West as tribute money to the Merovingian kings from the Eastern emperors.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>Bark, p. 48; Stein, I, 21-22; Sundwall offers an estimate of the amount of tribute the Huns were able to extract from the East; see especially pp. 153-54.

<sup>70</sup>Bark, p. 48; Stein, I, 21-22; Sundwall, pp. 153-54.

<sup>71</sup>Stein, I, 23, 520-21; Mickwitz, p. 189; Sundwall, pp. 153-54.

<sup>72</sup>Lot, p. 81; Bark, pp. 48-49; Solomon Katz, The Jews in the Visigothic and Frankish Kingdoms of Spain and Gaul (Cambridge, 1937), pp. 125-36.

<sup>73</sup>Lot, p. 81; Bark, pp. 48-49; Katz, pp. 125-36.

It was this activity of the Eastern merchants that gave to the West an appearance of prosperity which it did not possess. In the words of Bark, "From the Eastern point of view these merchants were bold, capable businessmen, able to make money even under the unproductive, adverse conditions in the West. From the Western point of view they were foreigners, hated because of their wealth and Byzantine connections."<sup>74</sup>

Robert Latouche is correct when he concludes that the presence of these merchants in the West was not to suggest prosperity, but decline. "It was the deterioration of the commercial activity resulting from the internal and external forces at work in the West which brought these eastern traders with hope of making a substantial profit from the wares they brought with them."<sup>75</sup> It has also been pointed out that the products handled by the merchants were not always respectable as slavery was the most profitable of their concerns. It has likewise been shown that it is an exaggeration to speak in terms of big business, international trade or import-export trade. Such phrases are too modern to describe the modest activities in which most of these traders engaged.<sup>76</sup> With regard to the economy of the West in the late fifth and early sixth century, Latouche concludes that, "The now fashionable, if unpleasant work, 'rot' describes it to perfection."<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>Bark, p. 50.

<sup>75</sup>Latouche, p. 123.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., p. 139.

Also, as Norman H. Baynes has indicated, even the presence of the Oriental merchants in the West does not necessarily indicate that a transmarine trade existed.<sup>78</sup> As was previously stated, Baynes believes the term "merchant" has been expanded by modern day economic historians to include more than was originally intended. Many of these persons who bore the title merchant were involved primarily with local trade. This is by no means to indicate that they were in communication with the East nor that their numbers were being replenished by new arrivals.<sup>79</sup> There is actually little to suggest that there was any tremendous commercial activity existing during the post invasion period.

By the end of the sixth century, it is inconceivable to conclude, as does the continuation school, that the barbarians continued an extensive economic program as there was little to continue. It must be added, however, that there were efforts to use those economic institutions which did remain. There is evidence to support the fact that they continued to collect the indirect taxes, such as tolls, but at the same time, were incapable of collecting the direct tax which would have been their greatest source of revenue. It is now evident that by no stretch of the imagination can it

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<sup>78</sup>Baynes, "M. Pirenne and the unity of the Mediterranean World," in Byzantine Studies and other Essays (London, 1955), pp. 310-16; Latouche, pp. 122-23.

<sup>79</sup>Baynes, Byzantine Studies and other Essays, pp. 310-16.

be maintained that a brilliant economy existed in the post invasion period. As the transitional school has tried to demonstrate, trade was stagnant, the monetary system was debased, gold was rapidly being drained from the West, wealth was very unequally divided as was the tax, inflation was destroying the cities, a partial natural economy was prevailing, feudal practices were being introduced, and the large estates were the center of the social and economic order. Any accurate statement concerning the continuity of an economic order following the invasions must, of necessity, include these grave reservations.

In conclusion it can be said that during the period from the fourth to the sixth century there was not a continuation of classical economic order, but a period of transition which permitted the Germans to retain a small degree of the imperial system. Had the Germans received a more substantial inheritance, they may have salvaged more. But as we shall see in a later chapter, the developments of the sixth and seventh centuries became even more deplorable than before.

## CHAPTER IV

### SOCIAL TRANSITION (THIRD-SIXTH CENTURIES)

In viewing the social conditions which existed in the Roman world from the reign of Diocletian into the post invasion period, the interested student is confronted with a problem which is relatively different from that which has been encountered in the previous chapters. While the various sources which we have been considering in this study reveal a marked disagreement regarding the economic condition of the West during the fourth and fifth centuries, their variances on the social conditions of the Empire during the same period are far more difficult to distinguish. The fact that the Roman world experienced a social transformation from the reign of Diocletian on is not a widely disputed point.<sup>1</sup> The dispute which exists among scholars on this issue involves, primarily, the degree of emphasis which the social changes merit as a contributing factor in the decline of the Western portion of the Empire. Because of the subtlety in which this issue is handled by a number of sources, the casual reader, if not careful, will be lulled into seeing a unanimity which

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<sup>1</sup>Practically all of the sources which we will be considering in this chapter are in agreement that from the reign of Diocletian on certain legislative policies were introduced which led to an alteration of the existing social order.

a more careful investigation will reveal to be wanting. Quite often it is not until the conclusions of the various writers are viewed in light of their more general theses on the decline of the West that these variances can be detected. It is for this reason that the reader should bear in mind whether the various authorities under consideration in this chapter cite external forces or internal weaknesses as the major factor in the collapse of the West, for it is only by doing so that he can properly evaluate the conflicting interpretations of the social reforms of the fourth century.

It is a fact generally agreed upon that the Western portion of the Roman Empire experienced a significant and lasting alteration of its social order during the perilous days of the late third and early fourth century. To understand both the nature and historical significance of this reordering of society, it is necessary that the reader view this development in light of the fluctuating and unstable political and economic conditions within the West during the same period (see Chapters II & III). As will be recalled, the revenue which was needed to maintain the splendor of Rome was, by the fourth century, increasing while the inability of the subjects to meet such demands went unrespected. The inexorable demands of the Roman fisc upon the dwindling resources of the middle and lower classes became an unbearable burden. Unfortunately for her subjects, Rome tried to live with the same degree of public display during a period of relatively insolvency as she had during earlier periods

of prosperity. When the unpalatable financial demands of the imperial regime are viewed along with the increasing menace posed by the barbarians and the inability of the State to cope with them, the future of the Roman citizenry appears exceedingly dismal.<sup>2</sup> Being oppressed from within and threatened from without, the Roman public could no longer tolerate the insecurity of their present stations in life and the doubtful prospects of improvement. A large segment of society came to believe that the only hope of social and economic appeasement was to be found in escaping their present stations in life. As a result, peasants left the countryside, artisans abandoned their trade and the decuriones fled the municipal senates.<sup>3</sup>

Living in memory of the period of anarchy which had nearly shattered the Roman Empire in the third century, Diocletian and Constantine could see but one means of securing the still vacillating Roman edifice and that was to be instituted at the expense of the public. In a desperate move to halt the exodus of citizens from their posts and to preserve production, public services and revenue, the Roman government implemented the suppressive policy of forcing

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<sup>2</sup>Seeck, Geschichte des Untergangs der antiker Welt, I, see especially pp. 257-81.

<sup>3</sup>Lot, The End of the Ancient World and the Beginning of the Middle Ages, p. 100; Vogt, Constantin der Grosse, p. 228; Pfister, Der Untergang der antiken Welt, p. 234; Dill, Roman Society in the Last Century of the Roman Empire, p. 228; Abbott and Johnson, Municipal Administration in the Roman Empire, p. 206.

citizens to remain at their jobs in spite of the hardships which it entailed.<sup>4</sup> With many of the Roman subjects already expending considerable energy to escape the burdens of the State, stringent precautions were taken by the emperors to eliminate every possible avenue of escape. It was through these measures, aimed at preserving productivity and service, that the once free and mobile society of Rome was turned into a blighting standardized machine.<sup>5</sup>

Just as Diocletian had turned to an oriental form of monarchy in his efforts to stabilize the Roman political order, his reign likewise witnessed the adoption of another practice that was common to the Orient, i. e., the caste system, in an effort to stabilize and perpetuate the productivity of the Empire. The methods employed by the emperor in pursuit of this end has provided a notable controversy among scholars which has been reflected in medieval historiography. The central issue in this controversy involves the question of whether or not the measures employed by the State in its efforts to preserve productivity and public service within the Empire were actually a major factor in hastening its

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<sup>4</sup>Vogt, Der Niedergang Roms, p. 27; Abbott and Johnson, p. 218; Seeck, II, pp. 320-24; Dill, pp. 250-59; Bark, Origins of the Medieval World, p. 47; Moss, The Birth of the Middle Ages, pp. 25-30; Lot, pp. 100-27; Dannenbauer, Die Entstehung Europas vom der Spatantike zum Mittelalter, I, 36; Bury, History of the Later Roman Empire, I, 55.

<sup>5</sup>Abbott and Johnson, p. 218; Bark, p. 47; Moss, pp. 25-30; Lot, pp. 100-27.

decline. Although it is reserved for the latter portion of this chapter to illustrate the nature of this controversy, it can be stated at this point that the views of the various scholars in respect to the social reforms of Diocletian and Constantine have in essence been shaped by their more general interpretations of the collapse of the Empire itself. For those who attribute the collapse of the Western portion of the Empire to external forces, e. g., Christianity or barbarians, the reforms of the emperors are viewed as necessary and successful measures while the views of those who attribute the decline of the West to internal weaknesses are quite otherwise. Before proceeding with our analysis of this controversy, however, it will first be necessary to present a general picture of the measures introduced by Diocletian and Constantine in an effort to see the nature and extent of their innovations.

The history of the caste system actually dates far back into the dim past of the Orient as the ancient monarchs of the East often used this system to tie the peasants to the soil. In the hands of the desperate emperors of the fourth century A. D., however, this practice was greatly expanded to include not only the peasants, but practically every element of society.<sup>6</sup> Naturally the first group to be affected by the

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<sup>6</sup>Dannenbauer, *Vom der Spatantike zum Mittelalter*, I, 36; Seeck, II, p. 324; Pfister, p. 235; Kornemann, pp. 364-65; Bury, pp. 55-56; Dill, pp. 228ff.; Lot, pp. 100-27; Bark, pp. 47-48; Moss, pp. 26-30.

saving efforts of the emperors were those public servants whose fidelity to the state was most urgently needed.<sup>7</sup>

As was demonstrated in the previous chapter, many of the immediately pressing problems within the imperial regime during the third and fourth centuries had an economic basis. The lack of industrialization, the unfavorable balance of trade with the East, and the continual diminution of specie necessitated that the state-owned and operated mines be one of the first institutions to be regimented. During the days when Rome was constantly expanding, employment in the imperial mines had been no problem as the labor force was being constantly replenished by captives taken in war. By the second century, however, as Roman imperialism waned and the once stable influx of slave labor declined, the problem of staffing the mines became acute. With hope of preserving a sufficient labor force and curbing the fiscal maladies which threatened the Empire, employment in the imperial mines had, by the fourth century, become compulsory and even hereditary.<sup>8</sup> This development should not be difficult to understand, for who would have accepted voluntarily the burdens and hardships suffered by an ancient miner?

The fate of the Roman miners, which had been determined by the saving efforts of the emperors, was soon to be

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<sup>7</sup>Vogt, Der Niedergang Roms, p. 194; Abbott and Johnson, p. 207; Seeck, II, pp. 310-11; Lot, p. 101.

<sup>8</sup>Abbott and Johnson, p. 207; Dannenbauer, Vom der Spatantike zum Mittelalter, I, 32.

shared by the vast number of artisans within the Empire. Seeking assurance that the large body of craftsmen needed to maintain the splendor of Rome would be loyal to their posts, Diocletian expanded the caste system to include their services. As a result, another large segment of the Roman labor force became bound to their stations by a life sentence which passed from father to son.<sup>9</sup> So penetrating were the efforts of the emperors that they came to dominate even the personal life of the artisans. It was stipulated that the son of a craftsman must marry the daughter of a fellow craftsman and if anyone was even suspected of attempting flight, he would be readily subjected to adverse treatment.<sup>10</sup>

As the regimentation of society continually gained in momentum, a comparable fate was soon to befall all civil servants. The armourers, weavers, blacksmiths, carpenters and all posts of significance soon became rigidly organized and subject to a military form of regulation and discipline.<sup>11</sup> Those merchants who were charged with the transportation of the imperial income, which was now being paid largely in kind, and those responsible for the preparation of these receipts for public usage, were also bound socially.<sup>12</sup> Even

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<sup>9</sup>Dannenbauer, Vom der Spatantike zum Mittelalter, I, 36; Jones, The Late Roman Empire, I, 369; Bury, I, 56; Dill, pp. 245-46; Seeck, II, 301-11.

<sup>10</sup>Lot, p. 101; Bury, p. 56; Vogt, Der Niedergang Roms, p. 196.

<sup>11</sup>Lot, pp. 101-03; Vogt, Der Niedergang Roms, p. 27.

<sup>12</sup>Seeck, II, 311; Vogt, Der Niedergang Roms, p. 98; Bury, I, 58.

the maintenance of buildings and gladiatorial games became tightly regulated institutions.<sup>13</sup> In the mind of the emperors, it was only through such harsh measures as these that the state could be assured of the continued services of its personnel.

Although the caste system was first used as a tool to regulate the movement of civil servants, it was eventually expanded to include other phases of life as well. Whether the inability of the Empire to supply the adequate numbers needed to fill its military ranks was due to a decline in man-power or to the waning of public spirit is a question which is still disputed.<sup>14</sup> Regardless of the cause, however, the imperial army, by the middle of the fourth century, experienced considerable difficulty in finding a sufficient number of recruits to defend the Roman borders. In the second half of the fourth century the state came to demand recruits from the coloni who were working the land of the large estates. The proprietors, on the other hand, often found ways, either through bribery or open resistance, of evading this levy.<sup>15</sup> The resistance to the call to arms among the

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<sup>13</sup>Lot, p. 103; Dannenbauer, Vom der Spatantike zum Mittelalter, I, 36ff.; Vogt, Der Niedergang Roms, p. 194.

<sup>14</sup>Boak, Manpower Shortage and the Fall of the Empire; Finley, "Manpower Shortage," The Journal of Roman Studies, XLVIII (1958).

<sup>15</sup>Vogt, Der Niedergang Roms, p. 193; Lot, p. 105.

conscripts themselves was so widespread that there are frequent references in the imperial codes to self mutilation by recruits and desertion on the part of soldiers.<sup>16</sup> In light of these conditions, the State concluded that the caste system would be applied to all military personnel. Once a man was enlisted in the army he was required to take an oath of allegiance which bound him to his post until his usefulness was exhausted. Even the children of soldiers became the property of the army as sons were forced to follow their fathers in duty.<sup>17</sup> It is neither surprising nor difficult to understand that the prowess of the Roman army declined as it was reduced to the bonds of strict servitude.<sup>18</sup> It is little wonder that the barbarians experienced repeated success when confronted by an army whose esprit de corps had vanished in the wake of the saving efforts of the emperors.

Still another element of Roman society to be affected by the caste system was the coloni or free farmers.<sup>19</sup> The process whereby the coloni were reduced to an inferior social position is not altogether clear.<sup>20</sup> In the early Empire the

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<sup>16</sup> Vogt, Der Niedergang Roms, p. 193; Lot, p. 105.

<sup>17</sup> Lot, p. 105.

<sup>18</sup> Vogt, Der Niedergang Roms, p. 193; Lot, p. 105; Bury, I, 61.

<sup>19</sup> Moss, p. 26.

<sup>20</sup> Lot, pp. 100-27; Vogt, Der Niedergang Roms, p. 21; Rostovtzeff, Studien zur Geschichte des römischen Kolonates (1910), p. 398ff.

coloni were chiefly free tenants, but by the fourth century they were free in name only as no small portion of them had been bound to the soil.<sup>21</sup> It seems probable that the bondage of the colonate came about as a result of the economic problems which plagued the Empire in the late third and early fourth centuries.<sup>22</sup> As was demonstrated in the previous chapter, by the fourth century it was no longer possible for the Western portion of the Empire to survive from the fruits of commerce and industry. As a result of Rome's blighted commerce and dwarfish industry, the hope of survival passed into the hands of the peasants. Being dependent upon the yield of the coloni to sustain the idle masses that inhabited the cities and the vast army, it became necessary for the State to regulate their activity in an effort to guarantee their production.<sup>23</sup> Thus, due to their significant position within the life of the Empire, the station of the coloni rapidly deteriorated from a free tenant to a position of life employment and serfdom.<sup>24</sup> Their personal freedom was greatly

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<sup>21</sup>Rostovtzeff, Studien, pp. 398ff.

<sup>22</sup>Lot, p. 111; Abbott and Johnson, p. 217; Rostovtzeff, Studien, pp. 398ff.

<sup>23</sup>Bark, p. 56; Vogt, Der Niedergang Roms, p. 22, maintains this actually stimulated production. Jones, I, 293; Bury, I, 56; Abbott and Johnson, pp. 217-18, stress the need of free labor to develop an agrarian society. With their reforms, the emperors destroyed the basis of their economy. Seeck, II, pp. 320-24; Lot, pp. 100-27; Moss, pp. 25-30; Dannenbauer, Vom der Spatantike zum Mittelalter, I, p. 38; Dill, p. 228.

<sup>24</sup>Bury, I, 56; Lot, pp. 100-27; Seeck, II, 320-24; Dannenbauer, Vom der Spatantike zum Mittelalter, I, 37-38; Vogt, Der Niedergang Roms, p. 22; Jones, I, 293; Moss, p. 26.

curtailed as they were reduced to an inferior legal position. In an attempt to prevent the coloni from resisting their social demotion all avenues of escape were closed off as they were forbidden to leave the soil.<sup>25</sup> If the subject attempted to desert his post he was to be chained and treated as a common slave.<sup>26</sup>

The caste system, which was being used to regulate most of society, came also to affect the municipal life within the Empire.<sup>27</sup> Until the political reforms of Diocletian, the Empire could be regarded as "...an organization based upon a federation of municipalities forming an aggregate of civic communities enjoying a measure of autonomy and having a certain characteristic derived from an age when state and city were convertible terms."<sup>28</sup> Up to the fourth century the municipalities had always been responsible for their own operation as they provided their own labor, resources and authority. The local senate, the curia, which was composed of the leading citizens of the city, was almost totally responsible

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<sup>25</sup>Abbott and Johnson, p. 218; Dannenbauer, Vom der Spatantike zum Mittelalter, I, 38; Vogt, Der Niedergang Roms, pp. 193-98. As has been demonstrated in previous chapters, Vogt's Der Niedergang Roms is often given to contradiction. Here we find it again as he states on page 193 that a legion of officials were needed to pursue those who were leaving the land and on page 198 he claims the rural population must have acquiesced in their descent into serfdom.

<sup>26</sup>Jones, I, 293; Abbott and Johnson, pp. 216-18; Dannenbauer, Vom der Spatantike zum Mittelalter, I, 42.

<sup>27</sup>J. S. Reid, Municipalities of the Roman Empire (1913), p. 478.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

for the administration of the municipal community.<sup>29</sup> It held court, managed local finances, provided for the maintenance of the roads, temples, baths, and in each of these functions actually shared a considerable portion of the cost.<sup>30</sup>

Unfortunately, from the end of the third century, the municipal constitution underwent a serious alteration. With the political reforms of Diocletian and his efforts to create a more centralized authority, municipal self-government was radically changed. Instead of devoting their time to local problems, the curiales became responsible for a number of imperial duties.<sup>31</sup> The most arduous of their newly found responsibilities was that of being charged with the collection of the tax.<sup>32</sup> During the first and second centuries of the Empire the collection of the imperial due had been no problem as it was handled by publicans who made a sizeable profit from the venture. By the end of the third century, however, the publicans were no longer interested in assuming the task as the revenue was becoming more and more difficult to collect.

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<sup>29</sup>Dannenbauer, Vom der Spatantike zum Mittelalter, I, 34; Dill, p. 245. Dill believes the municipal structure had been the core of the Roman political-social organization and when it was destroyed, the ancient world was destroyed. See especially pp. 250ff.

<sup>30</sup>Dannenbauer, Vom der Spatantike zum Mittelalter, I, 34; Dill, pp. 250ff.

<sup>31</sup>Dill, pp. 250ff.; Vogt, Der Niedergang Roms, p. 199; Abbott and Johnson, p. 222; Bury, I, 59; Seeck, II, 314-19.

<sup>32</sup>Dill, pp. 250ff.; Vogt, Der Niedergang Roms, p. 199; Seeck, II, 314-49.

Tax collecting actually became a crushing burden. In an effort to insure the receipt of this tax the curiales were made responsible for its collection, and, as a result of the imperial demands, their office became almost unbearable. The wealthy proprietors, for example, who were functioning as independent authorities throughout the countryside, refused to co-operate with the curiales. On occasions they would even use force to drive away the would-be tax collector. This, along with the numerous bad harvests, tended to ruin the holders of this responsibility as they were compelled by the State to make up any deficiencies out of their own finances.<sup>33</sup> The most serious repercussion from this development was that influential citizens no longer sought the important municipal offices.<sup>34</sup>

Under the weight of the crushing imperial demands, many of the curiales began to flee the city to seek refuge on their rural estates. In addition to the rural havens, a number of the curiales were trying to escape their imperial responsibilities by joining the army, buying their way into the senatorial ranks or by taking holy vows. However, just as the State had taken measures to tie other elements of

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<sup>33</sup>Moss, p. 29; Abbott and Johnson, p. 222; Dill, pp. 250-51; Bury, I, 59; Dannenbauer, Vom der Spatantike zum Mittelalter, I, 35; Vogt, Der Niedergang Roms, p. 27; Seeck, II, 314-19.

<sup>34</sup>Dill, pp. 250-51; Bury, I, 59; Abbott and Johnson, p. 222; Dannenbauer, Vom der Spatantike zum Mittelalter, I, 35; Vogt, Der Niedergang Roms, p. 27.

society to their post, the curiales were prevented from escaping their burdens.<sup>35</sup> By the end of the fourth century the exodus from the cities had impaired the tax income to such an extent that stringent measures were taken to prevent the curiales from deserting their posts.<sup>36</sup> The expansion of the caste system to cover the curiales forced these officials and their heirs to remain in the cities and to hold the posts which were certain to bring ruination to them in the future.<sup>37</sup>

In contrast to the declining social status that was being experienced by most of Roman society, stand the wealthy landlords.<sup>38</sup> With the Empire having to depend more and more upon the products of the land for its survival, the power of the landlords was greatly expanded. As we have seen in their treatment of the curiales, the owners of the large estates were slowly acquiring privileges which would ultimately with-

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<sup>35</sup>Latouche, The Birth of Western Economy, p. 20; Dannenbauer, Vom der Spatantike zum Mittelalter, I, 35; Jones, I, 228; Abbott and Johnson, p. 206; Dill, p. 254.

<sup>36</sup>Dannenbauer, Vom der Spatantike zum Mittelalter, I, 35; Bury, I, 58-59. Here Bury states that the decline of municipal life and the middle class was one of the important social facts of the fourth and fifth centuries, but on pages 31-11, where he lists the causes for the fall of the Empire, he cites the barbarians as the primary culprits. Abbott and Johnson, p. 222; Seeck, II, p. 317; Dill, p. 245; Lot, pp. 100-27; Latouche, p. 23.

<sup>37</sup>Dannenbauer, Vom der Spatantike zum Mittelalter, I, 35; Bury, I, 58-59; Dill, p. 245; Lot, pp. 100-27; Latouche, p. 23.

<sup>38</sup>Moss, pp. 29-30; Dill, p. 249; Abbott and Johnson, p. 203.

draw them from the authority of the imperial regime.<sup>39</sup> Taking advantage of the central government, which was preoccupied with the barbarians and major internal problems, some of the more powerful lords began to develop their own power in such a way that the estate soon became a separate enclave within society.<sup>40</sup> As a result of the rigid reforms being introduced by Diocletian and Constantine, the lords were becoming the most important element within society.

One of the essential tools employed by the large proprietors in an effort to expand their sphere of influence was that of "patronage." Being motivated by a desire to increase their own power and become more independent, the lords began to turn their estates into asylums where they received runaway slaves, the curiales who wanted to escape the burdens of city life, and anyone who had need or reason to escape the mounting pressures imposed on society by the State.<sup>41</sup> The large proprietors came to control not only the coloni, but also the free peasants residing in the general area of their

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<sup>39</sup>Abbott and Johnson, p. 203; Vogt, Der Niedergang Roms, p. 22; J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, The Barbarian West 400-1000 (London, 1952), p. 10. Wallace-Hadrill, who stresses the role of the invaders in bringing destruction to the West, maintains the lords were doing all they could to assist the state by keeping taxable land in production. Dill, pp. 272-75, disagrees with Wallace-Hadrill and says the lords were using their positions and wealth to remove themselves from the jurisdiction of the State.

<sup>40</sup>Vogt, Der Niedergang Roms, p. 98; Bury, I, 57; Abbott and Johnson, p. 203; Dill, p. 272.

<sup>41</sup>Vogt, Der Niedergang Roms, pp. 197-98; Bury, I, 57; Abbott and Johnson, p. 203; Dill, p. 275; Moss, pp. 29-30; Lot, pp. 128-34; Bark, pp. 79-82.

estates who wanted to escape the burdens of taxation and the corporal punishment that accompanied such action. As the free peasant turned to the lord for protection he would surrender his property and receive it back on a temporary basis, thus, becoming the client of his patron.<sup>42</sup> In their use of the patronage system the lords not only expanded their geographical sphere of influence, but also their power as they came to control a large segment of the population.

While the binding of various elements of Roman society to their posts is a fact which is disputed by neither the continuation nor the transitional school, the significance of this development does not share the same consensus. Undoubtedly the reason for the unanimity among authorities in respect to the nature and extent of the reforms of the fourth century can be attributed to the numerous references to these measures found in the imperial codes. (There are no fewer than 192 enactments in the Theodosian Codes which deal with the position and duties of the curiales alone.) In light of the unanimity which exists among scholars concerning the nature and extent of these reforms, the student will no doubt be puzzled, and with justification, by the diversity which exists among the same scholars as to the significance of these innovations. In an effort to illustrate the manner in which the reforms of the fourth century have been treated by various schools of thought, we must turn to a more detailed analysis of the various sources.

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<sup>42</sup>Vogt, Der Niedergang Roms, pp. 197-98.

As would be expected, those authorities who adhere to the continuation thesis maintain that the ancient world was not diversely affected by the saving efforts of the emperors. Although the continuation school has offered a number of reasons for asserting this claim, probably none is less satisfying than that which has been proffered by Kurt Pfister. Pfister appears to have proceeded on the assumption that the crucial factor in the reforms of Diocletian and Constantine was not whether society was diversely and permanently affected by these measures, but whether or not the emperors were justified in their implementation.<sup>43</sup> If one of the tasks of the historian is to concern himself with the issue of "cause and effect," then the investigations of Pfister into the reforms of the fourth century only fill half the bill. In his work, Der Untergang der antiker Welt, Pfister's primary objective is to relieve Diocletian of any responsibility for the decline of the ancient world by proving that the rigid measures introduced by the emperor were necessary. According to Pfister, the problems which emerged from the crisis of the third century were of such a magnitude that Diocletian had no alternative other than the severe and drastic measures which he employed.<sup>44</sup> Thus, Pfister is concerned primarily with the cause of the reforms and not with their effect.

Although most of the authorities which will be

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<sup>43</sup>Pfister, Der Untergang der antiker Welt, p. 234.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

considered in this chapter would agree with Pfister's contention that there was justification for the social reforms of the fourth and fifth centuries, one notable exception to this view can be found in the work of Otto Seeck. Without going into a repetitious account of Seeck's thesis, it will be recalled that he was of the opinion that Rome had been in a state of decline since the days of the Republic due to the lack of competent leadership. While Seeck would agree that the use of compulsory labor to preserve and stabilize productivity may have been necessary during the reigns of Diocletian and Constantine, he maintains that the continuation and expansion of this program into the late fourth and early fifth centuries was not.<sup>45</sup> According to Seeck the expansion of the caste system by the successors of Constantine to include every class and industry was not for the purpose of revenue, but rather for "the delight of the wicked ruling class."<sup>46</sup> In the eyes of this authority, such measures as the reduction of free peasants to a position of serfdom came as a result of weak and aimless rulers yielding to the demands of wealthy lords who were in need of a cheap and permanent labor force.<sup>47</sup> However, while it can be said that Seeck was cognizant of the social abuses of the fourth century, he did not interpret these abuses as a significant factor in the

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<sup>45</sup> Seeck, II, pp. 314ff.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 314.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 331.

collapse of the West. As will be recalled from a previous chapter (see Chapter II) he was of the opinion that the Western portion of the Empire fell at the hands of the barbarians and such factors as incompetent leadership and social abuses served only to make the ultimate victory of the barbarians less difficult.

Turning once more to the views of the continuation school we find that while a number of the representatives of this school have devoted more attention to the "effects" of the caste system than did Pfister, it is questionable whether their interpretations are any more acceptable. For example, the compulsory measures introduced by Diocletian and Constantine which left a large segment of Roman society bound by a hereditary status, such authorities as Joseph Vogt, Heinrich Dannenbauer, J. B. Bury and A. H. M. Jones conclude were of only relative importance. Both Vogt and Dannenbauer try to lessen the severity of these measures by concluding that while in practice the people were bound to their jobs, in theory they remained free men.<sup>48</sup> Dannenbauer goes even further when he asserts that from the third to the sixth century the social order of the Empire was not appreciably altered. According to this authority, while it is true the coloni and curiales may have experienced some infringement upon their freedom, this did not alter the social structure

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<sup>48</sup>Dannenbauer, Vom der Spatantike zum Mittelalter, I, 36; Vogt, Der Niedergang Roms, pp. 198ff.

of the ancient world.<sup>49</sup> In support of his claim, Dannenbauer maintains that Roman society had always been composed of free and unfree and by the sixth century these conditions continued to exist.<sup>50</sup> The fact that the ranks of the unfree were being increased at the expense of the free was not a significant factor to Dannenbauer.

Another work which concludes that society had not been appreciably changed by the reforms of the fourth century is that of Joseph Vogt. Although Vogt is aware of the numerous compulsory measures imposed upon society by the State, he concludes that Roman society had not been disrupted by these measures.<sup>51</sup> According to Vogt the most significant element of Roman society was the senatorial aristocracy and this class was unaffected by either the reforms of the fourth century or the invasions of the fifth.<sup>52</sup> He maintains that the senatorial aristocracy continued to function as the core of the Roman social order long after the reforms of the fourth century.<sup>53</sup> What Vogt fails to see, however, is that the role of the aristocracy had, by the fourth century, been drastically changed. As shall be demonstrated in the latter portion of this chapter, instead of working from within the classical

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<sup>49</sup>Dannenbauer, Vom der Spatantike zum Mittelalter, I, 42.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Vogt, Der Niedergang Roms, pp. 98, 197-98.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., pp. 197-98.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

structure, the aristocracy began to work against it.

Additional efforts to minimize the significance of the reforms of the fourth century as a factor in leading to the decline of the West can be found in the works of J. B. Bury and A. H. M. Jones. According to Jones, the immobilization of Roman society has been greatly exaggerated as an element in the collapse of the West. Sons were only too happy, says Jones, to be heirs to their fathers' business.<sup>54</sup> In harmony with the views expressed by Jones stand the conclusions of Bury. In his own words, Bury claims that, "along with the hardships of the system the individuals also received benefits as the sons had the right to follow their fathers."<sup>55</sup> The coloni, says Bury, profited considerably from the compulsory measures of the fourth century. They could now be protected against exorbitant taxation and unjust removal from the land.<sup>56</sup>

Both Jones and Bury are also opposed to the idea that the regimentation of the populace into hereditary castes created a fatal degree of inertia and discontent.<sup>57</sup> Using the curiales as an example, both of these authorities maintain there was a decline in public spirit in the late Empire, but this condition was not produced by the implementation

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<sup>54</sup>Jones, I, 369.

<sup>55</sup>Bury, I, 56.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

<sup>57</sup>Jones, I, 369ff.; Bury, I, 56ff.

of a hereditary caste.<sup>58</sup> Under the principate there had existed a strong sense of civic patriotism among the curiales and they had given freely of their time and money not only to improve the amenities of their cities, but to perform many administrative duties. Jones and Bury argue that from the third century onwards this civic patriotism faded and the imperial government had to rely more and more on its own administrators and civil servants.<sup>59</sup> With both of these men attributing the decline of the West to external forces, they concluded that the apathy which characterized the late Empire was produced by the Church and not by any action on the part of the State.<sup>60</sup> Under the late Empire the old pagan idea of public service waned as the Church expanded its sphere of influence and taught its converts to regard imperial service as sinful work.<sup>61</sup> Thus, according to Jones and Bury the waning of public spirit within the Empire was not the result of oppressive measures introduced by the State, but rather of the spread of Christianity and its teaching that salvation was to be found only in the world to come and the things of this world did not matter.<sup>62</sup> Although it is left for the following chapter to discuss the details of the conflict between Christian and pagan ideologies, a very important

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<sup>58</sup>Bury, I, 56ff.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

<sup>61</sup>Jones, I, 369ff.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

question emerges from the conclusions of Jones and Bury. If the spread of Christianity in the third and fourth centuries was the cause of the inertia, discontent and apathy which came to characterize late Roman society, how then is the rapid growth of Christianity during this period to be explained? This is an issue which Jones and Bury leave unexplained. As shall be demonstrated in the next chapter, the spread of Christianity is probably more accurately explained by viewing it as a "result" of the apathy and discontent which plagued the Roman world, than as the "cause" of these conditions as suggested by Bury and Jones.

Thus, according to the continuation school, the compulsory measures employed by Diocletian and Constantine in the fourth century were not a significant factor in the collapse of the Western portion of the Empire. While in practice a considerable portion of society became bound to their post, in theory they remained free men. The hardships which were imposed upon society by the caste system were offset by the benefits which came with the reforms. According to this school of thought, the collapse of the West was not the result of internal weaknesses.

In contrast to the views on the social reforms of the fourth century as expressed by the continuation school, stand those of the transitional school. Viewing the reforms of the fourth century through the works of such men as William C. Bark, Ferdinand Lot, Samuel Dill, H. St. L. B. Moss, and Frank F. Abbott, there emerges a picture of the fourth and

fifth centuries totally different from that portrayed above. As the transitional school places great emphasis upon internal weaknesses as a major factor in the collapse of the West, the social measures employed by Diocletian and Constantine are not viewed in the same fashion as was shown above.

It will be recalled from a previous chapter that William C. Bark, while agreeing that there was a need for reform measures in the fourth century, concluded that the measures employed by Diocletian and Constantine were harsh and oppressive.<sup>63</sup> Along with Bark, Michael Rostovtzeff concludes that the chaos and destruction which had come to plague the Roman world by the fourth century could not be rescinded by the most despotic legislation.<sup>64</sup> The transitional school, in general, maintains that in a very complicated situation calling for encouragement of individual talent and initiative, the emperors turned instead to a regimentation of society and as a result the social order of the ancient world was irreparably ruined.<sup>65</sup>

In support of their conclusions, the transitional school looks to such events as the enslavement of the coloni. In regards to the fate which befell the coloni, Michael Rostovtzeff, Samuel Dill, Ferdinand Lot and William C. Bark

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<sup>63</sup>Bark, p. 42.

<sup>64</sup>Bark, p. 42; Rostovtzeff, Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire, pp. 464-87.

<sup>65</sup>Bark, pp. 42ff.; Rostovtzeff, pp. 464-87; Dill, p. 228; Lot, pp. 100-27; Abbott and Johnson, pp. 270ff.

maintain that it is a legal fiction to argue, as the continuation school does, that a man bound to the soil is free.<sup>66</sup> The truth is he is neither free to move nor free to change his occupation. Under such circumstance, his nominal freedom could have been little consolation. Although the binding of the coloni to the soil was an effort to preserve productivity, according to Frank F. Abbott and A. C. Johnson it had the reverse effect. Abbott and Johnson maintain that for an agricultural society to develop there must be a supply of free labor.<sup>67</sup> With the regimentation of labor, the initiative of the individual was destroyed which in turn resulted in a decline in production rather than an increase.<sup>68</sup>

The transitional school also questions the so-called "benefits" which the coloni received from the caste system. As will be recalled, the continuation school maintains that the coloni, as a result of their being bound to the soil, were protected against such offenses as exorbitant taxation. In respect to this issue Lot, Moss, Rostovtzeff and F. F. Abbott contend that the opposite was true as the proprietors, once they had gained control over the coloni, increased their economic burdens.<sup>69</sup> As the colonus became more and more

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<sup>66</sup>Bark, pp. 42ff.; Rostovtzeff, pp. 464-87; Dill, p. 228; Lot, pp. 100-27; Abbott and Johnson, pp. 270ff.

<sup>67</sup>Abbott and Johnson, pp. 217-18.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

<sup>69</sup>Lot, pp. 120-27; Moss, p. 26; Rostovtzeff, pp. 464-87; Abbott and Johnson, pp. 217-18.

oppressed by the State his courses of action became fewer and fewer. He could join others in the same predicament who had become bandits, or he could seek the protection of a man more powerful than himself. According to the transitional school, many of the harassed farmers accepted the latter of these alternatives as they placed themselves under the protection of potentates who were capable of defying the State, and virtually sold themselves into bondage.<sup>70</sup>

At the same time the coloni were being reduced to the ranks of serfdom, the curiales, the upper middle-class of the towns, were experiencing the same end. According to Samuel Dill, Michael Rostovtzeff, Frank F. Abbott and A. C. Johnson, it was not Christianity which destroyed municipal life, but the rigid reforms of Diocletian and Constantine.<sup>71</sup> The burdens which were imposed upon the curiales during the fourth century were responsible for extinguishing the free civic life which in an earlier period was the greatest glory of Roman administration.<sup>72</sup> The most devastating of the burdens which the curiales had to bear was the collection of the tax. This responsibility was slowly bringing ruination to the middle-class as they had to make good any deficiency in income.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>Lot, pp. 120-27; Moss, p. 26; Rostovtzeff, pp. 464-87; Abbott and Johnson, pp. 217-18.

<sup>71</sup>Dill, p. 250; Rostovtzeff, p. 477; Abbott and Johnson, p. 222.

<sup>72</sup>Dill, p. 250; Rostovtzeff, p. 477; Abbott and Johnson, p. 222.

<sup>73</sup>Dill, p. 250; Rostovtzeff, p. 477; Abbott and Johnson, p. 222.

As Dill, Lot, Moss and Rostovtzeff have pointed out, in the end the only recourse open to the oppressed curiales was the same as that of the coloni: flight to the large estates.<sup>74</sup> Thus, the transitional school attributes the disruption of city life to the harsh and rigid reforms of the fourth century.<sup>75</sup>

With the disruption of the rural and urban life, the oppressed citizenry turned to the wealthy lords for protection. As the adherents to the transitional thesis have pointed out, the lords began to turn their estates into asylums where they received anyone who had need or reason to escape the burdens imposed on society by the State.<sup>76</sup> By the fifth century the lords had, in some cases, become judge and jury in the life of their subjects.<sup>77</sup> According to the transitional school, more and more the citizens of the Empire were turning to a powerful individual for those functions which had once been provided by the State. No longer do the cities stand as the centers of political, economic and judicial activity in the lives of the people, as the landed aristocracy was slowly assuming those responsibilities which had previously been exercised by the State. The center of life

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<sup>74</sup>Lot, pp. 100-27; Dill, pp. 245ff.; Moss, pp. 29-30.

<sup>75</sup>Dill, pp. 260-61; Lot, pp. 121ff.; Bark, pp. 58-65; Rostovtzeff, pp. 477-78; Moss, p. 29.

<sup>76</sup>Abbott and Johnson, p. 203; Dill, p. 275; Moss, pp. 29-30.

<sup>77</sup>Bark, pp. 79-82; Dill, p. 275.

was gradually gravitating towards the estates and a landed aristocracy which functioned independent of the central government.<sup>78</sup>

The transitional school is of the opinion that as a result of the reforms introduced by Diocletian and Constantine, there was a major change in the social order of the ancient world. This change was characterized by the destruction of the middle class, the control of many small land holders by the great proprietors and the resulting increase in the powers of the landed aristocracy. These changes, according to this school of thought, were the basic features of the transition from late Roman to medieval society. The Rome of old which had been built upon a federation of municipalities with each community enjoying liberty, self-government, and social mobility was rapidly falling to the wayside. While it is true the Romans had always been a class oriented society and the barriers which separated these classes were high, nevertheless, the barriers were not insurmountable. Although the advances from one stratum to another were difficult, the hope of such advancement had always existed for the citizen. Either by virtue of his wealth, education, or military prowess, a father could leave to his son a position superior to that which he had received from his father. Unfortunately, as a result of the reform measures instituted by the emperors of the fourth and fifth centuries, not only was

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<sup>78</sup>Bark, pp. 79-82; Lot, pp. 128-34; Abbott and Johnson, p. 203.

society reduced to an inferior legal position, but even the hope for advancement, which had existed previously, was destroyed. In an attempt to stabilize the Empire, which had been visibly shaken by the anarchy of the third century, the emperors instituted the primitive and fatal practice of enslaving a large portion of the population for the benefit of a few. With the regimentation of society and the growth of the landed aristocracy, many of the citizens lost all that they possessed and in the process, lost all interest in maintaining the system that had ruined them.<sup>79</sup> According to the transitional school, the Roman populace had been forced not only to give up their material goods, but even worse, their legal status as free men. As a result of these events there developed a new social order from the ruins of classical civilization. This change was from the highly developed, but decadent, imperial order, to a more primitive, but workable, regime of the landed aristocracy. With the displacement of the middle class and the ensuing division of society into two unequal groups, society was already becoming medieval.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup>Lot, pp. 186ff.; Bark, pp. 80-87; Moss, pp. 28ff. No one can fail to be struck by the apathy of the Roman populace by the fifth century. In 406 there was a general appeal calling everyone to resist Radagaeus who had broken into Italy. The appeal went unheeded.

<sup>80</sup>In regards to the variances which we have seen expressed above concerning the social transition of the late Roman Empire, one of the contributing factors in these differences lies in what can be called the two faces of Rome. The imperial codes which exist from the reign of Constantine to Honorius, repeatedly bear witness to the decay of the middle class, the aggrandizement of the aristocracy and the defiant tyranny of the imperial regime. This view is also

According to the transitional school, if the Roman social order continued, it was only in the striking phrase of Michael Rostovtzeff, "as a vast prison for scores of millions of men."<sup>81</sup>

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supported by various Christian moralist such as Salvianus. In contrast to this view is that produced by other contemporary writers such as Sidonius Apollinaris, Aurelius Symmachus, and Ausonius who, representing the cultured upper class, present a much more illustrious picture of Roman society. Those scholars who present the social life of antiquity as experiencing an early death rely, primarily, upon the imperial codes and the Christian writers (Dill, Seeck, Lot, Bark, etc.) while those who insist on a continuation of the social order until it was destroyed by the barbarians, depend upon the latter sources. What these latter works fail to take into consideration, however, is that most of the problems which plagued the late Roman society did not touch the upper class so it is natural they would present a brighter and more optimistic picture of the future.

<sup>81</sup>Rostovtzeff, Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire, p. 478.

## CHAPTER V

### CULTURAL TRANSITION (THIRD-SIXTH CENTURIES)

Although the problem of Rome's fall and the beginning of the Middle Ages has been a subject of great interest for centuries, there still does not exist any general consensus among scholars concerning the particulars of this event. One major reason for this lack of consensus is that the passing of classical civilization was characterized as much by a spiritual change as by a physical. From the third to the sixth century there occurred a significant alteration in the cultural life of the West, the causes and effects of which are not easily explained. Those aspects of classical culture which had characterized the Roman world during its early history were, by the sixth century, replaced by a number of ideas and concepts which were alien to the classical tradition. The educational and intellectual traits of man in the sixth century were no longer those of the time of Augustus or Marcus Aurelius. The moods, traits, sentiments and views of life were also quite different. The efforts of scholars to account for the nature and significance of this spiritual change within the Western portion of the Empire have led to a number of controversies. Thus, the subject of this chapter will involve a consideration of the various individuals and problems involved in understanding the cultural transition

from antiquity to the Middle Ages.

For several generations the historiography of medieval culture was dominated by two conventional school of thought. Before turning to a detailed analysis of these two schools, however, it will first be necessary to present a brief summary of their major theses in an effort to understand their more general position concerning the nature of medieval culture. The first school, which may rightfully be labeled as the continuation school, maintains that the culture of Europe was the same as that of Rome.<sup>1</sup> (It should be understood that the term culture is being used in this present work in its older literary and intellectual connotation rather than in the more recent sociological sense.) This particular school interprets the years 400-1000 A. D., as a period when the classical elements of culture were being preserved. Throughout this age of disorder the saving school saw various learned individuals present who were instrumental in salvaging culture from the throes of chaos. The adherents to this particular

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<sup>1</sup>In regard to the saving school we will be examining such works as, Pirenne, Mohammed and Charlesmagne; Christopher Dawson, The Making of Europe (New York, 1932); Dill, Roman Society in the Last Century of the Roman Empire; Vogt, Der Niedergang Roms; Dannenbauer, Die Entstehung Europas vom der Spatantike zum Mittelalter, II; H. O. Taylor, The Classical Heritage of the Middle Ages (New York, 1901); David Knowles, The Evolution of Medieval Thought (New York, 1962); R. R. Bolgar, The Classical Heritage (New York, 1954). For those who read German, a valuable supplement to this chapter is Kulturbruch oder Kulturkontinuitat im Ubergang von der Antike zum Mittelalter, by Paul E. Hubinger. This work contains a selection of German writings dealing with the problems of the cultural transition. Several of the selections will be treated in this chapter.

school see the first saving effort coming in the fourth and fifth centuries when the classical tradition passed into the hands of the Church Fathers. Although a number of the intellectuals of the Patristic Age were intimately associated with the Church, they were also progenies of the upper class which meant they had been schooled in the ancient tradition making them classical authorities. The work of St. Augustine was saturated with classical style and wording. St. Jerome revealed in his Latin Vulgate a style which was definitely classical while St. Ambrose was strongly influenced by the classical ethical concepts which he conveyed in his work.<sup>2</sup>

As shall be more adequately demonstrated in the latter portion of this chapter, the various members of the continuation school maintain that in addition to the valuable material retained by the Church Fathers, there were also other geniuses engaged in the saving work as well. Donatus was a grammarian who set down valuable grammatical rules for the future in addition to preserving the texts of some of the most polished classical scholars such as Cicero. Boethius, who receives a near sacred position in the eyes of the continuation school, is credited both with keeping alive the philosophical manner of thinking in a difficult age and with

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<sup>2</sup>Dill, pp. 390-92; Vogt, Der Niedergang Roms, pp. 236-37, 258-60; Taylor, p. 10; Knowles, pp. 30-31. As shall be demonstrated, there were actually two approaches which the saving school employed in their work. For example, Dill and Vogt placed their emphasis on the fact that this was a class phenomenon while Taylor and Knowles stress the continuation of pagan ideas by way of Christian dogma.

contributing valuable translations of Plato and Aristotle.<sup>3</sup> Another figure who played an important role in the preservation of the pagan sources was Cassiodorus who, in compiling a reading program for the clergy, assimilated what was later to become an important guide to the classical authorities.<sup>4</sup> Also within its catalogue of scholars, the continuation school cite a number of havens on the Western fringe of the Empire where various enlightened individuals exerted a conscious effort to keep alive their cultural heritage.<sup>5</sup> In the monasteries of England and Ireland there were a number of monks who, in addition to being spiritual leaders, revealed a distinct appreciation of secular knowledge and as a result adopted it as a part of their educational program.<sup>6</sup> It was through the efforts of such men as these, maintains the continuation school, that various elements of classical culture were preserved. This process whereby classical culture was being saved reached its zenith during the Carolingian renaissance when all that was going to be saved was brought together and this body of knowledge served as the raw material out of which the medieval mind was shaped.

What this first conventional school is trying to

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<sup>3</sup>Views such as these can be found in each of the works above. For example, see Dannenbauer, II, p. 51; Laistner, pp. 88, 90.

<sup>4</sup>Dannenbauer, II, pp. 73-74; Taylor, pp. 45-57; Vogt, p. 163.

<sup>5</sup>Dannenbauer, II, pp. 79-80; Bolgar, pp. 91-96.

<sup>6</sup>Dannenbauer, II, pp. 80-82; Knowles, p. 72; Taylor, p. 44; Vogt, pp. 236-37; Bolgar, pp. 91-96.

establish is that in two places along the fringe of the Empire, southern Europe and the British Isles, there were men who appreciated the classical past and exerted strenuous efforts to preserve it. The conclusion of this school would then be that the medieval mind of Western Europe was the outgrowth of what was saved from the classical world and was marked by little that was original.

The second conventional school can best be classified as the barbarization school with its emphasis being placed upon the deterioration of classical culture.<sup>7</sup> Although the barbarization school is by far the older of the two, it is not widely accepted by authorities today. As will be recalled from the first chapter, the barbarization thesis reached its zenith during the eighteenth century "Age of Reason," and since that time has come to hold less and less sway over medieval scholarship. It is for this reason that the barbarization school will receive only limited attention in the present chapter.

Essentially, those works which continue to be influenced by the barbarization thesis, e. g., Otto Seeck, J. B. Bury, A. H. M. Jones, are the same which attribute the collapse of the Western portion of the Empire to external causes.

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<sup>7</sup>This is by far the older of the two schools as its origin can be found as far back as the Renaissance. This school is represented par excellence in the works of Voltaire and Edward Gibbon. Fortunately, this school is not widely accepted today, but as we shall see, its influence has carried over into the works of such men as Ferdinand Lot, Otto Seeck, J. B. Bury and A. H. M. Jones.

(One notable exception to this which will be dealt with in greater detail later, is the work of Ferdinand Lot.) As shall be demonstrated in greater detail in the following pages, the general thesis of this school starts with the third century where its adherents see the classical tradition undergoing a profound debasement as a result of the introduction of a foreign element into the mainstream of classical life.<sup>8</sup> In regards to the literary and intellectual standards of the ancient world, this foreign element, which had its origin in the East, brought with it irrational religious practices which proved to be detrimental to classical culture. When this mode of thought became dominant it began to eat away at the rational thinking of antiquity with decay being the ultimate result.<sup>9</sup> To this school of thought the Patristic Age represented not renewed life for the classical tradition, but debasement.<sup>10</sup> The triumph of Christianity and barbarism marks the end of the classical tradition as was attested by the widespread superstition, fanaticism and ignorance

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<sup>8</sup>Lot, The End of the Ancient World and the Beginning of the Middle Ages, pp. 136-41; A. H. M. Jones, The Decline of the Ancient World (London, 1966), pp. 364-70; P. Boissonnade, Life and Work in Medieval Europe (New York, 1927), pp. 24-25.

<sup>9</sup>Gibbon, The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, III, 324; Voltaire, Annals of the Empire, vol. XXI of The Works of Voltaire, ed., Dumont, pp. 85-87.

<sup>10</sup>Gibbon, III, 324; Voltaire, XXXI, 65-87; Lot, pp. 136-41; Bury, The Later Roman Empire, I, 61; Jones, The Decline of the Ancient World, pp. 364-70.

that prevailed.<sup>11</sup> The adherents of the barbarization thesis cite such works as the writings of Gregory of Tours to support their thesis of a barbarization of the literary standards of antiquity and a general decline in intellectual activity.<sup>12</sup> This particular school with its emphasis on the termination of the classical tradition, portrays the early Middle Ages as a period void of any cultural standards or achievements. It would conclude that Western Europe had to forge a new set of values out of the same ruins which brought destruction to the classical.

In an effort to give substance to these brief comments on the continuation and barbarization schools, we must now turn to a consideration of some of the works which are representative of these two schools. Beginning once more with the classic of Henri Pirenne, Mohammed and Charlemagne, we see that he continues to advance the thesis that classical civilization proceeded uninterrupted into the fifth and sixth centuries. In a labored attempt to support his thesis of a cultural continuity, Pirenne recalls the names of Theodoric's two chief ministers, Boethius and Cassiodorus, and with two perfunctory paragraphs given to these extraordinarily influential men, Pirenne tries to use them as props for his thesis.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Gibbon, III, 324; Voltaire, XXXI, 65-87; Lot, pp. 136-41; Bury, I, 61; Jones, The Decline of the Ancient World, pp. 264-70.

<sup>12</sup>Lot, p. 158.

<sup>13</sup>Pirenne, Mohammed and Charlemagne, p. 119.

By stressing their use of pagan sources as well as their employment of classical literary devices, Pirenne places Boethius and Cassiodorus in the mainstream of the classical tradition.<sup>14</sup> On the subject of Christianity, Pirenne agrees that it was gaining converts within the Empire, but it was only with a few ascetics and intellectuals that its hold was really complete. Relying upon secondary sources and the writings of a few members of the senatorial aristocracy, e. g., Sidonius Apollinarius, Pirenne concludes that society was still predominantly secular.<sup>15</sup>

The implications which we find in Pirenne's work are extremely misleading as he says nothing of the role which Boethius and Cassiodorus played in the theological controversies of the day. He likewise says nothing of the decadent state of classical rhetoric and literature, nor of the bitter struggle against the profane classical tradition in which the Church Fathers of the Patristic Age were so involved. It is certainly deceptive to use Boethius and Cassiodorus as mainstays for the view that society was still secular and essentially unchanged. In his efforts to support the thesis of a continuation of the classical order, Pirenne had been blinded to the major cultural developments of the early Middle Ages and in turn has presented a distorted view of the period.

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., pp. 118-20.

Conclusions similar to those espoused by Pirenne can be found in the works of Joseph Vogt, Samuel Dill, Christopher Dawson, Heinrich Dannenbauer, H. O. Taylor and numerous others. While each of these works are in general agreement with regards to the basic tenets of the "saving philosophy," there are variances in their explanations as to how classical culture was preserved. To Joseph Vogt<sup>16</sup> and Samuel Dill<sup>17</sup> the preservation of the pagan sources was essentially a class phenomenon. As Vogt explains it, the ancient tradition had long been prevalent in the provinces and the educational standards imposed by this tradition continued uninterrupted into the fifth and sixth centuries.<sup>18</sup> The exalted position of the Roman aristocracy continued unimpaired throughout the difficult period which witnessed the triumph of Christianity and barbarism, and along with the endurance of the upper class went the endurance of the classical culture.<sup>19</sup> Both Vogt and Dill assert that the senatorial aristocracy continued to exist as a separate community, bound together by a common language, education, and cultural values.<sup>20</sup> Not only did

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<sup>16</sup>Vogt, Der Niedergang Roms, pp. 236-37. "As long as the senatorial aristocracy lived on so did the old culture."

<sup>17</sup>Dill, pp. 390-92. "It is important to realize in this age of decadence, the powerful and unchanging character of Graeco-Roman culture never relaxed its hold on the educated upper class."

<sup>18</sup>Vogt, Der Niedergang Roms, p. 236.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 246.

<sup>20</sup>Vogt, Der Niedergang Roms, p. 251; Dill, pp. 389-400.

this class remain as a reservoir of the classical order, but as various Germans came to fill high political offices the aristocracy also imparted to the intruders a knowledge and appreciation of the Latin sources with the result that they too became patrons of the ancient tradition. The prime example of this, says Vogt, is the case of Theodoric who, under the tutelage of Cassiodorus, became well versed in the pagan tradition and in turn required the same of his family and followers.<sup>21</sup> Vogt asserts that while the upper class supplied a considerable portion of those who filled high offices of the Church, "...these men remained as wedded to the literary tradition of the past as did the pagan nobles."<sup>22</sup>

Another approach that is employed by the continuation school, and which is by no means unrelated to that above, can be seen in the works of Christopher Dawson and Heinrich Dannenbauer. These two men are equally as vocal as the sources previously discussed in asserting the indebtedness of Western Europe to Athens for its cultural basis. According to Dawson, if Europe owes its political existence to the late Roman Empire and its spiritual unity to the Church, "...it is indebted for its culture to a third factor, the classical tradition."<sup>23</sup> Dawson believes it is indeed difficult for us to realize the extent of our debt, for the classical tradition

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<sup>21</sup>Vogt, Der Niedergang Roms, pp. 258-59.

<sup>22</sup>Vogt, Der Niedergang Roms, pp. 242-46; Dill, p. 292.

<sup>23</sup>Dawson, pp. 58-60.

has become so much a part of Western culture that we are no longer fully conscious of its influence on our mind. "The survival of classical literature," says Dawson, "not only made possible the rise of the modern European literature; it also formed the European habit of mind, and rendered possible that rational and critical attitude to life and nature which is peculiar to Western civilization."<sup>24</sup> It survived the fall of Rome and remained through the Middle Ages as the integral part of the intellectual heritage of the Christian Church and it arose with renewed strength to become the inspiration and model for the new European literature.<sup>25</sup> "It is almost impossible," says Dawson, "to overrate the cumulative influence of so ancient and continuous a tradition."<sup>26</sup>

In these words of Dawson we can see the subtle difference which distinguishes the works we are presently considering from those of Vogt and Dill. While the latter attributes the preservation of the classical tradition to the endurance of a particular class, the former gives credit to the Church by virtue of the union that was formulated between Christianity and the classical tradition.<sup>27</sup> According to

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>This division, as already stated, is somewhat artificial in that the two sometimes interact. However, the first group sees much of the saving efforts being exerted independent of the Church and Christianity while the latter does not separate the preservation of classical culture from the growth of Christianity.

Dawson and Dannenbauer, during the period which witnessed Rome's transformation from a Republic to Empire, classical education was rapidly diffused throughout the provinces with most of the cities becoming the centers of intense educational activity. The rhetorical ideal of education became dominant and the rhetorician soon became the idol of society.<sup>28</sup> In the fourth century however, the supremacy of the classical tradition seemed to be greatly challenged by the victory of a new religion.<sup>29</sup> The Church acknowledged no debt to the ancient order as the Bible, the basis of Christian thought and action, was so far removed in form and spirit from pagan literature that there appeared to be no room for mutual existence. Nevertheless, there was going on a process whereby the Church was preparing for the reception of the classical tradition.<sup>30</sup>

What Dawson and Dannenbauer are describing at this point is that period in the fourth and fifth centuries when most of the literary activity had fallen into the hands of the Church Fathers. According to Dawson, as early as the second century educated converts were beginning to address the cultivated public in their own language and trying to show that the doctrines of the Church were in harmony with the rational ideas of ancient philosophy.<sup>31</sup> Dawson and

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<sup>28</sup>Dawson, pp. 54-59.

<sup>29</sup>Dannenbauer, II, pp. 53-54; Dawson, pp. 54-60.

<sup>30</sup>Dawson, p. 62.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

Dannenbauer see as a result of this development a far reaching synthesis of Christianity and Hellenic thought, or, in other words, a bond between theology and philosophy.<sup>32</sup> The Fathers, e. g., SS. Jerome, Ambrose, and Augustine, were essentially Christian rhetoricians who shared the culture and tradition of their pagan predecessors.<sup>33</sup> With the emphasis which Dawson and Dannenbauer place upon this union between Christianity and the classical tradition, Athens is placed on a pedestal equal to that of Jerusalem and viewed as having played a comparable role in the shaping of the medieval mind.

Still another consideration of this problem which is not unlike Dawson and Dannenbauer can be found in the work of R. R. Bolgar. According to Bolgar, the continuation of classical culture is an inescapable fact. Because Latin was the official and indispensable language of the Church, study of the pagan sources could not be escaped.<sup>34</sup> While it is true, says Bolgar, that many of the early Christians showed a great deal of mistrust for all things pagan, the use of ancient literature could not be stopped.<sup>35</sup> Even the moderate position taken by St. Augustine, who advocated a regulated use of pagan works, did not do much to hinder the study of pagan sources.<sup>36</sup> In support of his claim, Bolgar placed a

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<sup>32</sup>Dawson, pp. 62-63; Dannenbauer, I, 142-48.

<sup>33</sup>Dawson, p. 56.

<sup>34</sup>Bolgar, The Classical Heritage, p. 58.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

great deal of emphasis upon the Irish and British monks who, he maintains, assimilated a considerable body of ancient knowledge in pursuit of their missionary goals.<sup>37</sup> In order that these monks could succeed in their efforts to convert and indoctrinate the barbarians, schools had to be started to facilitate the needs of both the teacher and student. In brief, if Christianity was to survive, Latin had to be taught and to aid in this process the monks employed a considerable number of classical works. Thus, according to Bolgar it was due to the linguistic needs of the Church that classical culture slowly became integrated into Western thought and became an integral part of Western culture.<sup>38</sup>

In the works of H. O. Taylor and David Knowles we find this union between Christianity and classical culture taken a step further. They maintain that pagan culture was actually essential in the shaping of Christian dogma.<sup>39</sup> Many pagan elements clothed in Christian terminology, say Taylor and Knowles, passed into the teachings of the Church and were ultimately accepted as doctrine.<sup>40</sup> The writings of Ambrose illustrate the use of Stoic reasoning as a basis of Christian

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., pp. 91-96.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., pp. 58, 91-96.

<sup>39</sup>Taylor, p. 71. "Greek philosophy likewise supplied the principles for the formation of Christian dogma." Knowles, p. v: "The purpose of this book is an endeavor to present medieval philosophy as a direct continuation of Greek thought."

<sup>40</sup>Taylor, p. 71; Knowles, pp. 30-31.

ethics,<sup>41</sup> while the works of Synesius of Cyrene and Dionysius illustrate how Neoplatonism was influencing the development of Christian doctrine.<sup>42</sup> According to Taylor such basic fundamentals of the Christian faith as the Trinity--Father, Son, and Holy Spirit--are actually a transliteration of the Neoplatonic trinity--spirit, mind, and body.<sup>43</sup> Even in areas where one would expect to find striking differences separating the Christian ideology from that of the pagans, e. g., monotheism as opposed to polytheism, Taylor finds continuity. He maintains the practice of polytheism, which was common in the ancient world, passed over into the Christian religion in the form of saints, angels and the Virgin Mary, who were used to replace the gods and goddesses of old.<sup>44</sup> Although both Taylor and Knowles assign to Christianity a significant place in the shaping of Western Europe, they also see the ancient tradition as being equally significant in the shaping of Christianity. To these two men Athens played a greater role than Jerusalem in the development of the medieval mind.

In summary we find that while the various adherents to the saving school may vary in their approach to the problem posed by the cultural transition, in their conclusions there is unanimity. It is the belief of this school that the

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<sup>41</sup>Taylor, p. 71.

<sup>42</sup>Knowles, pp. 30-31.

<sup>43</sup>Taylor, p. 79; Knowles, p. 39.

<sup>44</sup>Taylor, p. 99.

thought which was to characterize the Middle Ages was the outgrowth of what was saved from the classical world and was marked by little that was original.

In contrast to the views expressed by this first conventional school of thought stands the barbarization school. To expand upon the brief description given earlier of this school, we turn now to a consideration of the work of one of its latest adherents, Ferdinand Lot. While in the past we have been able to follow the work of Lot as a most accurate and authoritative source on the early Middle Ages, when we turn to the problem of the cultural transition his work must be studied with extreme caution. The reason for this note of caution is that Lot greatly minimizes the role of the Church as a cultural agent in the development of the Middle Ages and concludes that all culture, of any worth, came to an end with the fall of Rome.<sup>45</sup>

According to Lot, the most significant feature in the shaping of the classical tradition was the fusion between science and philosophy.<sup>46</sup> The Greek cosmologists, as a result of their speculative investigations, discovered a secret harmony that traversed the universe and came to believe that one might penetrate the secrets of nature and subject them to man's will.<sup>47</sup> This concept of perfection which the Greeks

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<sup>45</sup>Lot, pp. 135-70.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

saw existing in the natural world suggested to them that man was capable of duplicating this orderly procedure in his own human world.<sup>48</sup> This concept of perfection was eminent in the writings of Plato, who maintained that there was a connection between the things of this world and perfection. Aristotle added to this growing belief when he concluded that it was within man's rational powers to duplicate the system of nature.<sup>50</sup> Man could inaugurate perfection by simply employing those tools of logic which he possessed.<sup>51</sup> Thus, the ideal state could be created by simply cultivating and combining man's physical and mental abilities.

According to Lot, this highly advanced classical mind was subverted by the torrent of religiosity that swept across the West in the first and second centuries. Science and philosophy suffered from the mystical spirit which offered a more attractive solution to man's problems at a smaller intellectual cost.<sup>52</sup> With the ultimate victory of Christianity in the fourth century the subject matter of greatest concern to man became his relationship with God. As a result of this victory, maintains Lot, the literary achievements of the

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., pp. 167-68.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>As can be seen in Plato's Republic, the ideal state could be created by the cultivating and combining of man's physical and mental abilities.

<sup>52</sup>Lot, p. 170.

Patristic Age became wholly encumbered with theology and in the process failed to retain the high literary qualities of the preceding age.<sup>53</sup>

One of the fallacies with Lot's analysis of the cultural transition up to this point is that he has attempted to judge the merits of an age independent of its historical setting. What he has failed to see is that the ideas, institutions and behavior set forth by the Church were in many respects alternatives to an earlier program which had failed to work. We need not reiterate the material of the previous chapters to realize that the unbounded faith of the Graeco-Roman world in the ability of man to create an earthly paradise by the exercising of his natural talents had ended in failure. The result of this failure was that there emerged a significant ideological conflict between the Christian and pagan elements of society. "In simplified terms that conflict might be described in this fashion: the humanistic ideology of the Graeco-Roman world vied with the emotionally charged ideology of the mystery religions which maintained that man must accept the world that some deity had created, awaiting perfection in the hereafter and living in the present only in hope of catching a glimpse of the God whose thrall he was."<sup>54</sup> Thus, the preoccupation of the Church Fathers with theological

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<sup>53</sup>Lot, p. 158.

<sup>54</sup>Richard E. Sullivan, "Some Influences of Monasticism on the Fourth and Fifth Centuries," in Studies in Medieval Culture, II (Western Michigan University, 1966), 21.

matters was essentially the reaction to a Graeco-Roman experiment that had failed to materialize. The fact that there was a pronounced ideological difference between antiquity and the Middle Ages is true, but to maintain one is superior or inferior to the other, as does Lot, is to cloud the issue. Both were essentially efforts to provide man with the "absolutes" which he needs to give meaning, hope and tolerance to his present existence. For the Graeco-Roman world this was supplied by a faith in man and rationalism, while in the Middle Ages this was provided by a faith in God and the hereafter. To ask if one is superior to the other is to miss the historical significance of both.

Although the conclusions of Lot with regard to the literary activity of the transitional period may be open to question, it is not necessary to disregard his comments on the cultural issue in total. For example, after referring to his work concerning the quality of classical art following the fourth century, it would be impossible to maintain, as do Pirenne and other members of the saving school, that the ancient tradition continued to function uncontaminated by outside impurities. As Lot has illustrated, the greatest of the Roman arts, architecture, had already fallen into decay by the reign of Diocletian. The Roman genius which had long been evident in their highly skillful and decorative triumphal arch, public baths and amphitheatres, was no longer visible. According to Lot, by the fourth century the Romans began to sacrifice skill for grandeur. Evidence of this can be seen in

the colossal edifices constructed during the reigns of Diocletian and Constantine which tended to stress size rather than the aesthetic qualities of earlier periods.<sup>55</sup>

In regards to the architecture of the fourth century, such authorities on the subject as Charles R. Morey, H. P. L'Orange, J. M. C. Toynbee and Heinz Kahler reach conclusions similar to those of Lot. According to these authorities, by the fourth century Roman buildings, "lost their organic corporality, the clear articulation of their parts, and the functional relationship among them; they are gradually dissolved into a system of plain, simple walls."<sup>56</sup> The open villa-like palace architecture of earlier times became enclosed in fortress-like blocks.<sup>57</sup> L'Orange and Morey describe this change as development towards the fortified palace of the Middle Ages.

The fine arts also began to decay. According to Lot, after the second century there was a visible change in the style of the artists. This is evident from the inferior work produced in the area of plastic arts. The statues that were raised in this period lost all representational value in that only the heads presented individual features, while the

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<sup>55</sup>Lot, p. 136.

<sup>56</sup>The quote is from H. P. L'Orange, Art Forms and Civic Life in the Late Roman Empire (Princeton, 1965), p. 9. Similar comments can be found in J. M. C. Toynbee, The Art of the Romans (London, 1965), p. 79; Heinz Kahler, Rome and Her Empire (Holland, 1963), p. 186; Charles R. Morey, Medieval Art (New York, 1942), pp. 21-38.

<sup>57</sup>L'Orange, p. 73.

gestures and other details were all identical.<sup>58</sup> From the reign of Constantine on there was little of worth produced within the Empire. Even of Constantine himself, we do not have one reliable portrait as a result of the decline in plastic arts. As the art historians H. P. L'Orange and Charles Morey have pointed out, the various features of the subjects became frozen in an expressive Medusa-like mask.<sup>59</sup> According to these two authorities, there was a weakening of individualizing facial features as such features as wrinkles, furrows and locks of hair became more and more symmetrized according to the vertical axis of the face.<sup>60</sup> There is no longer the emphasis on individual features, but a mechanical and permanent expressive mask.

The decorative arts were also experiencing significant change during the third and fourth centuries. Lot has described what happened to the decorative arts during this period as a "recrudescence of the Oriental influence." This Oriental influence was finding expression in the colorful ornaments and style which was finding acceptance in the West during this period.<sup>61</sup> Evidence of this can be seen in the change from the long accepted laurel as the ceremonial head-dress of the Emperors to a jewelled crown copied from the models of the

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<sup>58</sup>Lot, p. 137.

<sup>59</sup>Morey, pp. 38-39; L'Orange, pp. 100-11.

<sup>60</sup>L'Orange, p. 115.

<sup>61</sup>Lot, pp. 140-41.

Persian kings. The monarch's raiment became covered with precious gems and the throne adorned with the colorful goldsmith's work.<sup>62</sup> Each of these changes, Lot interprets as being evidence for the loss of a superior culture.

In contrast to Lot's contention that the change in classical art was due to a loss of skill, stands the conclusions of Charles Morey. Morey believes it is a mistake to attribute the artistic changes which occurred in late antiquity to a decline in ability. According to this authority, "the cause for the changes in the various areas of classical art is to be sought in a shift in point of view from a materialism which took a positive joy in nature to one that could find no peace in physical experience and sought beatitude in a world to be."<sup>63</sup> This change in attitude, which Morey believed to be expressing itself in art, will be the subject of primary concern in the following pages.

In a brief summary we find that both the barbarization and saving schools are too rigid in their approach to present an accurate analysis of the cultural conditions during the transition period. While the barbarization school credits the thinkers and writers of the Patristic Age with leading a revolution against the pagan world, the saving school views the same men as being responsible for the preservation of the ancient tradition. It is true that most of the spokesmen of

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<sup>62</sup>Lot, pp. 140-41.

<sup>63</sup>Morey, p. 39.

this age had been trained in the methods of the ancient tradition, i. e., rhetoric and grammar; however, the literature which they produced bears evidence of being the result of a spiritual experience which is not in accord with the classical tradition.<sup>64</sup> One need not be a theologian to examine the works of SS. Augustine, Jerome or Ambrose and see that their interest of greatest concern was theological and not classical.<sup>65</sup>

Essentially then, what the Patristic Age represents in the broad scope of history is neither a period of barbarization nor saving, but an age of compromise. As Etienne Gilson, E. K. Rank, Charles Norris Cochrane, M. L. W. Laistner and Richard E. Sullivan have suggested, the Church Fathers were able to expedite the cause of Christianity by using the literary devices at their disposal and frequently employing portions of the pagan sources to support their views.<sup>66</sup> In the words of Gilson, "There was a basic harmony between Platonism and Christianity which made it possible for the Fathers to use the former to their established end."<sup>67</sup> "Plato," says Gilson,

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<sup>64</sup>Kornemann, Gestalten und Reiche, pp. 394-97; Rank, Origins of the Medieval World, p. 100.

<sup>65</sup>The literature of the Patristic Age was concerned primarily with dogmatic treatises, exegesis, homiletics and apologetics. The heresies of the fourth and fifth centuries served to stimulate a great deal of writing. See M. L. W. Laistner, Thought and Letters in Western Europe (Ithaca, 1931), pp. 56-69.

<sup>66</sup>E. K. Rank, Founders of the Middle Ages (Cambridge, 1929), pp. 34-37; Etienne Gilson, History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages (New York, 1955), p. 93; Sullivan, p. 22; Laistner, p. 54.

<sup>67</sup>Gilson, p. 93; Rank, p. 36; Cochrane, Christianity and Classical Culture, pp. 377, 432-36.

"offered himself as an ally to Christianity on several important points: the doctrine of a maker of the universe; of a providential God; of the existence of an intelligible and divine world; of the spirituality of the soul and of a life beyond the grave."<sup>68</sup> Thus, the Fathers could at times use pagan sources to pave the way for the acceptance of their message which was based upon the doctrine of salvation by faith in Jeasus Christ.<sup>69</sup> As Cochrane has pointed out, the Christian often used the same word for Trinity as the Greeks, but never in the same secular sense.<sup>70</sup> It was this flexibility of the Christian writers and their ability to adapt pagan style and techniques to spiritual ends which helped to hasten the Christian victory.<sup>71</sup> Nevertheless, as Laistner has stated, this compromise did not eliminate the basic differences between the conflicting ideologies.<sup>72</sup> In essence, what this compromise did produce was a paradoxical situation in which man's action became quite timorous as the fundamental concepts of each system became rather obscure.<sup>73</sup> Although the fundamental

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<sup>68</sup>Gilson, pp. 93ff.

<sup>69</sup>Gilson, p. 93; Rand, pp. 34-36; Sullivan, p. 22; Cochrane, p. 377; Laistner, p. 54.

<sup>70</sup>Sullivan, p. 22; Cochrane, pp. 361-62; Laistner, pp. 55-56.

<sup>71</sup>Laistner gives numerous examples of Christian adaptability; see especially pp. 49-54. Sullivan, p. 22.

<sup>72</sup>Laistner, p. 54.

<sup>73</sup>Sullivan, p. 22.

contradiction between the two conflicting ideologies was obvious, the Christian victory over the pagan world was not yet complete. For this we must turn our attention to yet another element of the Christian community.

As the saving school has so accurately pointed out, the Patristic Age was a period when the great centers of learning were still located in the major cities. This was important in that it meant much of the intellectual activity of the Church Fathers retained a strong classical bent. What the saving school does not stress, however, is the great changes that were being effected in Roman city life during the fourth and fifth centuries. As we have seen in earlier chapters, the political and economic order of Rome was already in the throes of chaos. City life was becoming idle and lifeless. The numerous reforms of the emperors, as will be recalled, did not succeed in reviving city life, but actually served to sap the remaining vitality and in the end brought to the forefront a new agrarian community. As Pierre Riché<sup>1</sup> has tried to demonstrate in his work, Education et culture dans l'Occident barbare (VI-VIII siècles) the disruption of urban life and the influx of barbarians into the West brought a significant alteration in the established modes of education.

According to Riché<sup>1</sup>, along with the abandonment of the urban centers by students, there was also a general decline in the level of competence and interest on the part of the remaining intellectuals.<sup>74</sup> Evidence of this can be seen in

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<sup>74</sup>Pierre Riché<sup>1</sup>, Education et Culture dan l'Occident bar-  
VI-VIII siècles (Paris, 1962), pp. 44-49, 89.

the steadily declining number of scholars who were capable of reading Greek or understanding the philosophical treatises of the East. Although a few scholars, such as Boethius and Cassiodorus, did try to preserve an interest in Hellenism, their efforts fell far short of the desired goals.<sup>75</sup> The decline which was beginning to effect the traditional educational practices of Rome was complicated even more by the appearance of the barbarians. Being composed primarily of peasant and warrior classes there was little hope that this new element within the West would be motivated or capable of continuing such an illustrious tradition as Rome had once possessed. The presence of the barbarians in the West had yet an even greater influence upon the dislocation of the classical tradition.<sup>76</sup> The Church, which in the fourth and fifth centuries had retained a notable portion of the classical style and educational practices, i. e., rhetoric and dialectic, began to simplify its educational procedures and make them more elementary with hopes of converting the invaders to the orthodox faith.<sup>77</sup> Although more will be said concerning the education of the barbarians in the following chapter, we can conclude at this point that due to internal and external pressures which plagued the West in the fourth and fifth centuries, the intellectual life was significantly altered.<sup>78</sup> In brief, we can see that

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid., pp. 83-86.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., pp. 119ff.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., pp. 86-89.

the disruption of city life, the influx of barbarians and the general decline in the interest of many of the scholars in the traditional order all combined to produce a significant change in the cultural life of the West. To understand what happened in the wake of these changes, we turn now to a consideration of the works of Richard E. Sullivan, Jean LeClercq and William C. Bark.<sup>79</sup>

During the period in which the Church Fathers were exercising dominance over the intellectual activities, there arose a new movement in Christendom which we know as monasticism. It is with this movement that cultural life within the West finally solidified and the new theocentric ideology gained dominance over the classical humanistic ideology.<sup>80</sup>

That the city-state stood at the pinnacle of classical civilization is a fact which is accepted by most scholars. With man in the ancient world being encouraged to function as an active participant within society, the city provided him with the greatest opportunity for achieving honor, rank, wealth and serving others which were the paramount objectives of the classical world. In brief, the city-state represented the one arena in which man could hope to find a materialization of what the classical world considered to be the good and virtuous life.

As was previously noted, (see Chapter IV) by the fourth

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<sup>79</sup>Bark, Origins of the Medieval World, pp. 112-14; Sullivan, p. 22; Jean LeClercq, The Love of Learning and the Desire for God (New York, 1961), pp. 19-43. Each of these sources reveal a particular role which the monastery played in the victory of the theocentric ideology over the humanistic ideology.

<sup>80</sup>Sullivan, p. 22; Bark, pp. 107-11.

century A. D. a large segment of Roman society no longer found satisfaction in the pursuit of an active civic life. Many citizens, such as the curiales, were actually trying to escape some of the burdens of the city by establishing residence in the rural countryside. With regard to this early movement however, one should be careful to note that the exodus of these individuals was fundamentally an effort to alleviate existing imperial pressures and by no means represents a renunciation of the institution itself. For the bulk of Roman society, the city was such an integrated part of their social, political and cultural life that few would have even entertained the notion of a permanent and complete withdrawal. It was not until the advent of monasticism in the West that man, for the first time, willfully withdrew, both in body and spirit, from the confines of the city. Without hesitation, reservation or compromise, the monk was demonstrating his denunciation of the classical values, ideas and institutions. Although a number of the early Fathers had tried to regulate the interaction of Christians with the pagan world, the monk's renunciation of the key institution of the classical world possessed a note of finality that far exceeded the views and actions of even the most conservative Fathers.<sup>81</sup> The withdrawal of the monks from the corporate life to the cloister represents a willful renunciation of the once actively sought benefits provided by Roman citizenship.<sup>82</sup> As Richard Sullivan has described it,

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<sup>81</sup>Sullivan, p. 22.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., pp. 22-23.

"Only the monk voluntarily and joyfully accepted what had long been one of the most severe and degrading punishments that the classical society could inflict--ostracism or exile from one's city."<sup>83</sup> While the Patristic Age may be viewed as a period of compromise and represent the efforts of the early Christians to function within the ancient city-state structure, the action of the monk was quite otherwise. As a result of his renunciation of the classical institution in deed and word, the monk severed the tie between a meaningful human existence and the city.<sup>84</sup> According to Sullivan, the major importance of this act was that, "The stark simplicity of the ascetic image sapped the humanistic ideal of its remaining vitality and oriented society around a consistent view that again permitted creative action."<sup>85</sup>

Turning now to a more constructive contribution of monasticism we find that the monk also played a vital role in the creation of medieval culture. Until the appearance of Jean LeClerc's The Love of Learning and the Desire for God, the role of monasticism in medieval cultural development was usually viewed in a subordinate capacity. It was generally assumed that the cultural transition was an event which was dependent largely upon chance. Various elements of the classical heritage were said to have survived to influence medieval

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<sup>83</sup>Ibid.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

culture by virtue of an unexplainable chain of events which permitted certain manuscripts to survive. Allowing for some of this, as we examine the work of LeClercq we discover that the survival of particular classical sources depended to a major degree upon men conscious of their task and not simply to fortune.<sup>86</sup>

Although the primary objective of the monastic order created by St. Benedict was to draw men closer to God, there was also a vital intellectual aspect to the monastic life as well. With reading and meditation being one of the prescribed methods whereby a monk could progress in his quest for God, the monasteries possessed libraries and educational programs to assist the monk in this endeavor.<sup>87</sup> In contrast to the Patristic Age, where there appears to have been little unity concerning the quality or quantity of pagan works which could be incorporated into the Christian tradition, the monks developed rigid standards by which the profane learning was judged. Although the issue has not yet been fully researched, it appears that the monasteries created rather rigid standards based upon the Scriptures to serve as their guidelines.<sup>88</sup> Evidence of this can be seen in the fact that the education

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<sup>86</sup>LeClercq, pp. 19-43.

<sup>87</sup>LeClercq, pp. 22-23; P. Riche', "Les Foyers de Culture en Gaul Franque de VIe au IXe Siècle," in Early Medieval Society, ed., Sylvia Thrupp (New York, 1967), 230-33.

<sup>88</sup>LeClercq, pp. 22-23; P. Riche', Early Medieval Society, pp. 230-33.

of the monks was heavily oriented toward the Bible which in turn colored their outlook toward classical learning. Needless to say, men seeking material that would assist in their quest for God would discard much they found in classical sources because it could not be supported by Scriptures.<sup>89</sup> Thus, as a result of the rigid standards established by the monks for judging the value of classical authorities, they were to play a vital role in determining what survived to affect medieval culture. As Sullivan has suggested, in contrast to the traditional picture of a monk working diligently to salvage certain documents from the barbarians, "he is better cast as a determined soul destroying much of classical culture because it did not fit his ideas about the nature and ends of cultural life."<sup>90</sup>

While we see in the work of Sullivan and LeClercq the role which the monks played in the creation of this new way of life, the investigations of William C. Bark carry us a step further. Bark is concerned with the manner in which these new Christian precepts were spread throughout the Western world. To Bark, the role of the monk is best characterized as that of a cultural pioneer.<sup>91</sup> By the end of the fifth century the established order which had previously held the Western provinces together had slowly fallen away. There

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<sup>89</sup>Sullivan, p. 63.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>91</sup>Bark, p. 107.

were new wildernesses to contend with, savages to tame and a new way of life to create. With most of Europe assuming the characteristics of an agrarian society, it obviously became impossible for the old modes of propagating culture through urban centers to continue to operate.<sup>92</sup> Thus, the Church, which was considerably more unified than the State, assumed the responsibility for the cultural development of the West.

According to Bark, due to the conditions existing in Western Europe during the fifth and sixth centuries, there was only one way to extend knowledge and establish a new culture and that was by sending agents out to live and work in the agrarian communities. The problems that confronted these cultural pioneers as they embarked upon the new frontier were obvious. A small number of men had to contact a greater number of men scattered in rural communities and from their centers of worship and instruction give visible evidence of the superiority of their way of life. According to Bark, this end could be realized only by the monks living with the peasants and sharing in their labors.<sup>93</sup> It was by virtue of their technical and intellectual abilities, says Bark, that the pioneering monk was able to prove the superiority of his way of life and in the process impart unto the West a unity and uniqueness which set it apart from the rest of the world.

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<sup>92</sup>Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>93</sup>Bark, p. 112; Riche', Early Medieval Society, pp. 230-33.

While the sources which we have examined in the above pages by no means represents a definitive coverage of the cultural transition, they are sufficient for us to reach several conclusions. First, it is obvious that the conventional views which stress either a barbarization or a saving of classical culture are no longer adequate to explain the actual conditions that existed during the transition period. The way of life that emerged in the fourth and fifth centuries was in many respects new and original. The old humanistic ideology which had been propagated in a city-state atmosphere had now given way to the theocentric ideology of the Church. It was a new way of life and a new set of values to direct men living in a new agrarian community. It was the beginning of a Western European civilization.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE MEROVINGIAN DYNASTY

With the closing of the sixth century the omens which warned of a changing world were clearly distinguishable within the dismal life of the Empire. The once robust political, economic, social and intellectual forces that had served to motivate and regulate action in the classical period, now lay dormant in this new and changing world order. Those ideas and institutions which had once kindled a fiery patriotism within the citizenry of antiquity were gradually yielding to a new set of stimulants that were being inspired and propagated under new leadership, namely the Roman Catholic Church. No longer were the minds of men concerned with the same thoughts and energies of men in the Graeco-Roman world.

While much of the material examined heretofore has dealt primarily with the death of an old order which had proven to be no longer workable, this is not where the emphasis should come to rest. The importance or significance of this epoch-making age of transition is not to be found in death, but life. As Michael Rostovtzeff has expressed it in his work, The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire, in the formula, "the decay of ancient civilization," the emphasis is not to be placed upon "civilization," but upon the

term "ancient."<sup>1</sup> Civilization did not come to a halt with the fall of Rome, but was merely diverted into new channels which ultimately resulted in the emergence of a set of institutions and ideas so intimately interwoven and so unique in their orientation to permit scholars to speak of the emergence of a Western European civilization.

In the previous five chapters the subject of greatest concern has been the later Roman Empire and the decline which began to express itself in the institutions and ideas of that age. As we have seen in the above material, the emphasis which scholars have traditionally placed upon these events range from a catastrophic interpretation which claims that all life of any value came to an end during these barbaric years to an opposite pole of analysis which asserts that the Graeco-Roman tradition continued uninterrupted into the seventh and eighth centuries. Although these two schools of thought, with varying slants, of course, have tended to dominate medieval historiography since the fifteenth century (see Chapter I) there has developed in recent years a new school of thought which has exerted extensive efforts to dispel the inaccurate, but enduring, influence of the two previously mentioned schools. Although we have already seen evidence of their efforts with regard to the changes that were taking place in the late Empire (Chapters II-V) as we extend our investigation of the

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<sup>1</sup>Rostovtzeff, The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire, p. 109.

early Middle Ages chronologically from the sixth into the eighth century, the efforts of this modern school can be more fully realized. Thus, the primary objective of this chapter will be to examine the basic institutions of the Germanic kingdoms, which had come to hold sway in the West, in an effort to test further whether or not this period represented either a continuation of the classical tradition or a "dark age" unworthy of scholarly attention. By focusing our attention upon these particular issues not only will it permit us to see the approach employed by this new or modern school of thought, but it will likewise permit us to see the true nature of the heirs of the Roman Empire.

Repeatedly in the preceeding chapters we have seen the early Middle Ages presented by such men as Henri Pirenne and Alfons Dopsch as a continuation of the classical tradition. These men could see a remaining vitality in the forces of antiquity and an inherent genius in the Germanic people which permitted the old order to continue long after the Germanic invasions. If considerable doubt has already been cast upon their theses, as we turn to a more detailed analysis of the post-invasion period, the validity of their claims will become even more questionable.

Looking once more at the works of some of the representatives of this new or modern school of thought, e. g., Henrich Dannenbauer, Ferdinand Lot, Eugene Ewig, Marc Bloch, William C. Bark, Richard E. Sullivan, and others, it soon becomes apparent that the most dismal aspect of Western European

life in the late sixth and early seventh centuries was the decay of governmental institutions and the ensuing reign of violence.<sup>2</sup> By the end of the sixth century, four Germanic groups had come to control Western Europe: the Anglo-Saxons in Britain, the Franks in Gaul, the Visigoths in Spain, and the Lombards in Italy. In the words of Richard E. Sullivan, "The political history of these states in the early Middle Ages presents a grim record of war, court intrigue, and grave injustice."<sup>3</sup> Although the developments within the various kingdoms was by no means uniform, the Franks in Gaul under the Merovingians might well serve to illustrate the fate of the Germanic states within the territory of the now moribund Empire.

Although the history of the Merovingians was filled with such atrocities as to warrant the use of the appellation, "the dark age," by some historians, there did occur in their early history certain religious and political developments that were essential in the shaping of Western Europe. It was the rise of Clovis to the Merovingian throne, at the early age of fifteen, that heralded the beginning of the one spot

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<sup>2</sup>Moss, The Birth of the Middle Ages, p. 195: "The second half of the sixth century was filled with pestilence and famine, murder and sudden death." Richard E. Sullivan, Heirs of the Roman Empire (Ithaca, 1960), p. 37: "The political history of Western Europe in the early Middle Ages presents a grim record of war, court intrigue and grave injustice." Dannenbauer, Die Entstehung Europas vom der Spatantike zum Mittelalter, I, 149-50; Lot, The End of the Ancient World and the Beginning of the Middle Ages, pp. 328-31.

<sup>3</sup>Sullivan, Heirs, p. 37.

of glory that was to be experienced by the Merovingians. While Clovis proved to be a capable leader in a very difficult age, his reign is remembered primarily by two events which have inspired some scholars, such as Ferdinand Lot and R. H. C. Davis, to label his kingship as one of the epoch-making reigns in the history of Western Europe.<sup>4</sup>

The first of these events, which proved to be immeasurably significant for the Church, was the conversion of the pagan king to the orthodox form of Christianity. As was noted in an earlier chapter, one of the major problems plaguing the embryonic Church in its newly acquired role as guardian of the West was the widespread acceptance of Arianism among the Germans. It was not until the conversion of Clovis that the Church had the benefit of a strong political leader to champion the cause of the orthodox faith. So great were the problems encountered by the Roman Church prior to the conversion of Clovis that the noted Catholic historian, Henri Daniel-Rops, has proclaimed in his work, The Church in the Dark Ages, that, "...apart from the conversion of Constantine, the baptism of Clovis was the greatest event in the development of the Christian West."<sup>5</sup>

The actual conversion of Clovis to the orthodox faith

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<sup>4</sup>Lot, p. 317; R. H. C. Davis, A History of Medieval Europe from Constantine to St. Louis (London, 1957), p. 109.

<sup>5</sup>Henri Daniel-Rops, The Church in the Dark Ages (New York, 1959), p. 180; There is general agreement among most medievalists on this point. Lot, p. 317; "It is impossible to overestimate the significance of this event."

has given rise in recent years to a notable debate among scholars concerning the events which preceded this act. For those scholars who accept the traditional account of this event, as it is recorded in the writings of Gregory of Tours, the scene for the conversion of Clovis is placed on the field of combat.<sup>6</sup> Being confronted by a numerically superior foe and the definite possibility of being annihilated, Clovis vowed that if the God of his Christian wife Clotilda would deliver him victorious, he would accept the faith.<sup>7</sup> Experiencing a sound victory over his foe, Clovis remained true to his word as he, along with his followers, were lowered into the waters of Christian baptism.

For those individuals who adhere to the account rendered by Gregory, e. g., Joseph Vogt, Henri Daniel-Rops, Christopher Dawson, Gustav Schnurer, the conversion of Clovis was quite important to the Church as it provided an avenue through which the Church could advance against the predominance of Arianism.<sup>8</sup> The importance of this interpretation lies in the fact that it subsequently affects the manner in which one views the second important accomplishment of Clovis:

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<sup>6</sup>Among the adherents to this interpretation are such men as, Daniel-Rops, p. 189; Dawson, The Making of Europe, p. 94; Vogt, Der Niedergang Roms, p. 266; Gustav Schnurer, Church and Culture in the Middle Ages, pp. 238-40.

<sup>7</sup>Daniel-Rops, p. 189; Dawson, p. 94; Vogt, p. 266; Schnurer, pp. 238-40.

<sup>8</sup>Vogt, Der Niedergang Roms, p. 266; Dawson, p. 94; Schnurer, pp. 238-40.

the unification of Gaul. For those who accept the account as it is recorded in the work of Gregory, the numerous military campaigns which were undertaken by Clovis following his conversion and which ultimately ended in the unification of Gaul are viewed as crusades directed at the annihilation of Arianism in the West.<sup>9</sup>

Among those who refuse to accept Gregory's appraisal of the conversion of Clovis stand such men as Ferdinand Lot, J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, Henrich Fichtenau and J. B. Bury. Each of these men maintain that the victory of Clovis over the Alemans had nothing to do with his conversion and Wallace-Hadrill even asserts that Gregory placed the conversion of the pagan king about ten years too soon.<sup>10</sup> The reason for Gregory's predating of this event, says Wallace-Hadrill, was his desire to present Clovis as a crusader diligently advancing the goals of the Church.<sup>11</sup> According to Lot and Wallace-Hadrill, the conversion was the result of constant prodding by his wife Clotilda, while Bury and Fichtenau conclude that it was a shrewd political move and little more.<sup>12</sup> As Bury has stated it, the conversion of Clovis, "was the crown of a

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<sup>9</sup>Daniel-Rops, p. 192; Dawson, p. 94; Vogt, Der Niedergang Roms, pp. 266ff.

<sup>10</sup>J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, The Barbarian West 400-1000 A. D. (London, 1952), p. 69; Lot, p. 317; Heinrich Fichtenau, The Carolingian Empire (Oxford, 1957), p. 2; J. B. Bury, The Invasion of Europe by the Barbarians (London, 1927), pp. 240-41.

<sup>11</sup>Wallace-Hadrill, p. 69.

<sup>12</sup>Lot, p. 317; Wallace-Hadrill, p. 69; Bury, The Invasion of Europe, pp. 240-43; Fichtenau, p. 2.

consistent, calculated policy which displays Clovis' high intelligence and statesmanlike perception."<sup>13</sup> By attributing the conversion to what could be termed as "Maciavellian precepts," Bury and Wallace-Hadrill conclude that the campaigns of Clovis were not religiously inspired, but rather were a manifestation of his desire for land and booty.<sup>14</sup>

While the actual events leading up to the conversion of Clovis may be open to dispute, the significance of this act is not. On the other hand, however, if it is a fact generally agreed upon that the baptism of Clovis represented a major event in the history of the West, this agreement pertains primarily to the general event itself and not to the specific results. Viewing the works of Christopher Dawson and Joseph Vogt, both of whom devote a great deal of attention to the cultural transition and likewise tend to support the philosophy of the saving school (see Chapter V) we find that they view the conversion of Clovis as an important step in the preservation of the classical culture.<sup>15</sup> As noted earlier, the saving school attributes to the Church a central role in both the preservation and transference of the classical tradition to the medieval world. As Dawson has put it, "The only obstacle to block the union between the Roman world and

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<sup>13</sup>Bury, The Invasion of Europe, p. 243.

<sup>14</sup>Wallace-Hadrill, p. 70. Lot does not agree with Wallace-Hadrill on this point, only on the events leading up to it.

<sup>15</sup>Dawson, p. 94; Vogt, Der Niedergang Roms, pp. 266ff.

the barbarians was the difference in religion."<sup>16</sup> With the conversion of Clovis, not only was an alliance between the Church and the Frankish kingdom inaugurated, but it ultimately gave rise to the restoration of the Empire under Charlemagne.<sup>17</sup> What Dawson and Vogt assert is that with the conversion of Clovis the preservation of the classical culture was guaranteed.<sup>18</sup> Although it is true, says Vogt, that the classical literary heritage was corrupted during the latter days of the Merovingian dynasty, the union that was formed between the Church and state provided for the maintenance of the classical tradition.<sup>19</sup>

While Dawson and Vogt see in the conversion of Clovis important cultural repercussions, Ferdinand Lot, J. B. Bury, and Henrich Fichtenau believe the political consequences of this event were the most important.<sup>20</sup> With his baptism the Church came to look upon Clovis as a second Constantine which, in the words of Lot, "...won for the cruel and cunning barbarian the sympathy and adoration of the episcopate."<sup>21</sup> Having

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<sup>16</sup>Dawson, p. 94.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Vogt, Der Niedergang Roms, pp. 280-81: "Viewed as a whole, these beginnings of Frankish culture confirmed that the cultural heritage of antiquity was accepted and handed on." Dawson, pp. 94ff.

<sup>19</sup>Vogt, Der Niedergang Roms, pp. 280-81.

<sup>20</sup>Lot, p. 318; Bury, The Invasion of Europe, pp. 240-43; Fichtenau, pp. 2-3.

<sup>21</sup>Lot, p. 318; Fichtenau, p. 2.

won the support and favor of the Church, Clovis was free to advance upon his Arian neighbors with ease. As a result, say Lot and Fichtenau, the Frankish king rapidly established himself as the most powerful monarch in the West.<sup>22</sup> Following his decisive victories over the Burgundians and Visigoths in 506 A. D., it was evident that the whole of Gaul was soon to fall under the control of the Franks. Lot maintains this ultimate conquest of Gaul gave rise to a state more original in its political orientation and more vigorous in stature than any of the other barbaric kingdoms that arose out of the disintegration of the Roman world.<sup>23</sup> Thus, to Lot, Bury and Fichtenau, the most important result of the conversion of Clovis was the ultimate unification of Gaul and the unique political institutions that developed under the hegemony of the Franks. It is to this political order that attention must now be given.

The history of the Merovingian kingdom is not easily reconstructed due to the fact that it does not fit into the traditional concept of kingdom. Although a number of the sources which have been examined in the preceeding chapters have argued that the barbaric kingdoms were modeled after the Roman government, only a cursory glance soon indicates that the unsophisticated heirs were incapable of filling such an

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<sup>22</sup>Lot, p. 318; Fichtenau, p. 2.

<sup>23</sup>Lot, p. 318; Fichtenau, p. 2.

illustrious mold.<sup>24</sup> As Richard Sullivan has pointed out in his, Heirs of the Roman Empire, "The ambitious monarchical regimes of the sixth century were little more than facades hiding a wide variety of grave political ills."<sup>25</sup> Although the ambitious kings did incorporate into their regimes various imperial methods and terminology, as shall soon be evident, it was more than time alone which separated the Merovingian kingdom from the period of the Pax Romana.<sup>26</sup> Once the ancient facade is rent, what remains is a political order which bears little resemblance to that of Rome.<sup>27</sup>

While it is true that within the Germanic territories of the West monarchy was universal, as Wallace-Hadrill, Moss, Dannenbauer, Fichtenau, Davis, and others have tried to illustrate, it is bordering on fantasy to equate Clovis and his successors to a Diocletian or Constantine.<sup>28</sup> In contrast to the Roman order which rested on a rather sophisticated concept of state, law and government, the Frankish rule was a

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<sup>24</sup>Evidence of this can be seen repeatedly in the work of those who adhere to the continuation thesis. For a good example see Bury, pp. 251-52.

<sup>25</sup>Sullivan, Heirs, p. 39.

<sup>26</sup>Davis, pp. 111-17; Fichtenau, p. 9; Moss, p. 203.

<sup>27</sup>Dannenbauer, Vom der Spatantike zum Mittelalter, II, 145-47; Lot, pp. 316-22; Sullivan, Heirs, pp. 38-39; Moss, p. 203; Fichtenau, p. 9; Davis, pp. 111-15.

<sup>28</sup>Dannenbauer, II, 145-47; Lot, pp. 316-22; Sullivan, Heirs, pp. 38-39; Moss, p. 203; Fichtenau, p. 9; Davis, pp. 111-15.

personal lordship resting on a military basis.<sup>29</sup> The highest quality which a Frankish king could possess was military prowess and the more ruthlessly he demonstrated this quality, the more extensive was his authority. In light of this fact there is some validity in the claims of such men as Wallace-Hadrill, Davis and Moss, that the Frankish monarchs could more accurately be styled as "chieftains" than as kings.<sup>30</sup> Clovis actually ruled over a united Gaul by virtue of conquest and those individuals who fell under his jurisdiction were treated as "subjects" not as "citizens." As a number of authorities have noted, the primary objective of the Merovingian government was the personal satisfaction of the monarch and the kingdom existed only for his exploitation.<sup>31</sup> The kings treated the kingdom as their private estate and the subjects, says Dannenbauer, "...as sheep to be sheared."<sup>32</sup> The concept of public welfare was not an inherent notion among the Merovingian monarchs and as a result the kings seldom initiated any collective programs for the benefit of their subjects. This rather primitive notion of kinship is in itself enough to suggest to the cautious scholar that parallels between the late Roman political order and the early medieval are, at best, quite tenuous.

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<sup>29</sup>Davis, p. 111; Fichtenau, p. 8.

<sup>30</sup>Wallace-Hadrill, p. 68; Moss, p. 65.

<sup>31</sup>Dannenbauer, Vom der Spatantike zum Mittelalter, II, 146; Sullivan, Heirs, p. 40; Lot, p. 347; Moss, p. 202; Davis, p. 115.

<sup>32</sup>Dannenbauer, Vom der Spatantike zum Mittelalter, II, 146.

Also in contrast to the Roman order stands the primitive administrative machinery employed by the Germanic kings in their efforts to "exploit the state."<sup>33</sup> As Davis, Moss and Lot have pointed out, the highly developed and specialized bureaucracy which the Romans had used in their administration of Gaul was replaced in the course of the sixth century by a body of personal servants who surrounded the king in the form of chamberlains, seneschals and marshalls.<sup>34</sup> The administration of the kingdom was thus centered around the king's person and the kingdom itself was run as a personal household.<sup>35</sup> Even the local administration, while bearing some resemblance to that of Rome, was in practice quite different. One notable change can be seen in the duties of the count--the officer in charge of the local affairs in Gaul. In contrast to the Roman order, the counts did not govern the land by any single law.<sup>36</sup> He was charged to judge every subject according to his own law, Franks by Frankish law, Romans by Roman law, and Burgundians by Burgundian law.<sup>37</sup> This inevitably led to a considerable amount of confusion in mixed cases. Also in the imperial administration, military power was always separated

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<sup>33</sup>This, of course, is in contrast to those sources which maintain that the Germans continued to use the Roman institutions. For examples see, Dawson, p. 95; Vogt, p. 271.

<sup>34</sup>Lot, p. 350; Moss, p. 203; Davis, pp. 115-16.

<sup>35</sup>Davis, p. 116.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

from civil lest the military should become abusive. Under the Merovingians, the count united both in his own person.<sup>38</sup> He functioned as tax collector, judge and commander of the troops all at the same time. Although a number of the individuals employed in the local posts were Roman in origin and used Roman terminology to describe their positions, the nature and function of the Frankish administration was as alien to the Roman political order as was their concept of kingship.

While the conquest of Gaul gave birth to a state which was more original in its political orientation than any of the other barbaric kingdoms, its policy was too primitive and administration too tenuous to permit any lasting success. Strangely enough, it was the reign of Clovis that witnessed both the origin and zenith of the Merovingian dynasty. The inherent weaknesses of the Merovingian kingdom were too substantial to permit an orderly continuation by the frail successors of the more capable Clovis. As most of the adherents to the transitional thesis have pointed out, with the exception of an occasional capable leader, such as Dagobert (629-39), the history of the Merovingians is quite bloody.<sup>39</sup> In the words of Moss, "The period immediately following the death of Clovis was one marred by murder, court intrigues and revolt."<sup>40</sup> While Clovis had reigned with absolute authority,

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Davis, p. 111; Moss, p. 193; Sullivan, Heirs, p. 38; Lot, p. 329; Bark, Origins of the Medieval World, p. 14.

<sup>40</sup>Moss, p. 193.

by the end of the seventh century the power of the Merovingian kings had dwindled to nothing.<sup>41</sup>

The causes of this decline were certainly numerous, but primarily the Merovingian kings proved to be incapable of jettisoning their primitive concept of state. Perpetuating an ancient Germanic custom, they treated the state as private property to be divided among the male heirs which in turn led to constant fraternal wars.<sup>42</sup> As Heinrich Fichtenau has noted, the century following the death of Clovis witnessed no less than twenty-nine major feuds among the royal family.<sup>43</sup> Any hope of stability could be little more than an idle dream as long as the ruling family was feuding. From the death of Clovis in 511 A. D. to the reign of Dagobert in 629 A. D., the kingdom was united only twice and even then it was due more to fortune than to enlightened leadership.<sup>44</sup> As a result of this barbaric spirit which continued to prevail among the Merovingians in the seventh century, it is futile to argue, as does the continuation school, that there was any significant continuation of the Roman political order.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Sullivan, Heirs, p. 39; Dannenbauer, Vom der Spatantike zum Mittelalter, II, 147.

<sup>42</sup>Fichtenau, p. 8; Davis, p. 111; Lot, p. 346; Dannenbauer, Vom der Spatantike zum Mittelalter, II, 172-75.

<sup>43</sup>Fichtenau, p. 8.

<sup>44</sup>It was united briefly under Lothar I in 558 A. D. and under Lothar II in 613; Davis, p. 111.

<sup>45</sup>Davis, p. 115.

The same primitive concepts which saturated the political views of the Merovingians can also be found prevailing in their economic outlook. As was previously demonstrated, the continuation school believes that the maintenance and administration of an effective economic order never posed any real problem for the extremely capable Germans. Yet examining the facts of the period, it becomes evident that not only were there little economic resources inherited by the barbarians, but that which they did inherit soon slipped away as a result of their inability.<sup>46</sup> To the Franks a treasury was the personal possession of the monarch and was used for such purposes as to avoid immediate danger or to take revenge.<sup>47</sup> Such a use of finances as this does not suggest in any form a high understanding of economic principles.

According to such authorities as Wallace-Hadrill, Bark, Lot, Moss and others, not only did the Franks illustrate a profound misconception of the uses of a treasury, but when it was being rampantly exhausted they showed even less knowledge of how to replenish it.<sup>48</sup> Within an agrarian society such as that which existed in the late sixth and seventh centuries, the land tax constituted the chief source of income. Yet, in spite of their inheritance of a well organized land tax system, the Merovingians proved incapable of maintaining it.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Moss, p. 65; Lot, p. 351.

<sup>47</sup>Bark, p. 14.

<sup>48</sup>Bark, p. 14; Lot, p. 351; Moss, p. 203.

<sup>49</sup>Bark, p. 14; Lot, p. 351; Moss, p. 203.

They made little use of this major source of income and let it slip away. Wallace-Hadrill maintains that one should not be surprised by this development. According to this authority, the barbaric chieftains did not continue the Roman tax because it was not their customary way of replenishing a treasury. They much preferred plunder to taxation.<sup>50</sup> The failure of the Merovingians to maintain the tax system proved to be a fatal blunder, both politically and economically, for it led inevitably to the impoverishment of the monarchy and a breakdown of its power.

In addition to the loss of revenue from the land tax, the Merovingians also suffered economically from the lack of commercial activity in the seventh century. As was previously noted (see Chapter III), by the sixth century Western Europe suffered from a desperate economic depression which had its origin in the fourth century. As a number of adherents to the transitional thesis have tried to point out, "While Diocletian and Constantine had been able to restore a sound coinage and fix prices, they had been unable, in the midst of their reforms, to retain an active commercial program."<sup>51</sup> In contrast to this view, however, stand the conclusions of such men as Henri Pirenne and Heinrich Dannenbauer who credit the Arabs with being responsible for the disruption of East-West trade. According to Dannenbauer, the commercial exchange

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<sup>50</sup>Wallace-Hadrill, p. 81.

<sup>51</sup>Moss, p. 205.

between the Eastern and Western portions of the Mediterranean continued to thrive throughout the sixth century and it was not until the Arabs effected their triumph over the East that the trade was ended.<sup>52</sup> Dannenbauer sees in the Arabic victory an event of vital significance as he maintains it marked the beginning of the Middle Ages.<sup>53</sup> He maintains that it was not until the East-West trade was destroyed by the Arabs that the monarch's last source of revenue was destroyed and in the process the nobility was vaulted into a political position superior to the impoverished king.<sup>54</sup> While there may not be unanimous agreement concerning the cause of the economic duress of the seventh century, there is a general concensus that it tended to alter the political order in Gaul as royal authority began to wane.

The history of the Merovingians in the seventh century was characterized by a steady decline of royal authority and a corresponding increase in the power of the aristocracy.<sup>55</sup> The results of this transition of power was that there emerged in Western Europe a unique political and social organization which sharply distinguished it from the rest of the Mediterranean world. While the details of this transition are

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<sup>52</sup>Dannenbauer, Vom der Spatantike zum Mittelalter, II, 140-44; see especially p. 144.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Dannenbauer, Vom der Spatantike zum Mittelalter, II, 140-44.

<sup>55</sup>Lot, p. 354; Wallace-Hadrill, p. 84; Sullivan, Heirs, pp. 40-41; Fichtenau, pp. 10-11; Davis, p. 122.

not easily discerned, it can basically be attributed to the primitive political and economic views of the Merovingians. For an absolute form of government such as that fostered by the Merovingians to exist, it must offset its absolutism by providing society with some measure of constructive programs. Needless to say, the Frankish kings provided no such services.<sup>56</sup> As a result of their failure to provide society with any public services there never developed among the general populace any sense of civic responsibility or national duty. This in turn meant that the kings had to depend upon fear and rewards as a means of attracting individuals into the service of the state. By resorting to measures such as these to maintain their unstable positions, the kings slowly undermined their own authority and at the same time enhanced that of the nobility.<sup>57</sup>

The fact of a rising aristocracy, which we have already seen gaining prestige in the late Roman Empire, was accelerated under the Germanic kings primarily because the kings lacked sufficient revenue and political finesse to maintain themselves securely in office.<sup>58</sup> The century of fraternal

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<sup>56</sup>Sullivan, Heirs, p. 40; Lot, p. 354; Davis, p. 122.

<sup>57</sup>Davis, p. 122; Fichtenau, p. 8; Sullivan, Heirs, p. 41; Bark, p. 15; Lot, p. 356; Dannenbauer, II, 140-42.

<sup>58</sup>Dannenbauer, Vom der Spatantike zum Mittelalter, II, 140-42; Sullivan, Heirs, p. 41; Alexander Bergengruen, Adel und Grundherrschaft im Merowingerreich (Wiesbaden, 1958), pp. 174-75.

wars which had raged in Gaul from the death of Clovis to the reign of Dagobert had been a tremendous economic burden for the impoverished monarchs. To maintain an effective army during this period, especially a cavalry, was a financial investment which few individuals, including the kings, could afford.<sup>59</sup> With the monetary surplus in Western Europe being almost nil, there was only two ways that a person could maintain a core of knights. He could either support them in his own household, providing them with food, clothing and equipment, or he could give them a landed estate and have them maintain themselves.<sup>60</sup> The latter of the two was the most popular and is best described as feudal.<sup>61</sup> As a result of the financial hardship involved in maintaining an army, the kings had but one recourse open to them and that was to turn to the nobility for assistance. In return for their service to the monarchs, the nobility was awarded additional grants of land from the king's personal holdings and the right to govern its estates in an autonomous fashion.<sup>62</sup> Thus, the

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<sup>59</sup>Davis, p. 124.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., pp. 123-24.

<sup>61</sup>This particular use of the word "feudal" reveals primarily the legal aspects of the term and is covered in great detail in the work of the late Marc Bloch. Marc Bloch, Feudal Society, trans., L. A. Manyon (Chicago, 1961). For a less technical use of the term see F. L. Ganshof's Feudalism (New York, 1961) which treats feudalism in a political and social sense.

<sup>62</sup>Lot, p. 56; Sullivan, Heirs, p. 41; Fichtenau, p. 10; Dannenbauer, Vom der Spatantike zum Mittelalter, II, 152.

royal authority, once so powerful, was slowly being dissipated. The kings were no longer the sole source of authority as the various regions of the kingdom developed their own circle of powerful magnates to whom they turned for protection and security. As Heinrich Dannenbauer has expressed it, "Was der Konig verloren hatte, hatte der Adel gewonnen."<sup>63</sup>

Although the kings took precautions to try and ensure the loyalty of the nobility, i. e., through the process of commendation, they were not successful in arresting the ambitions of the local lords. Evidence of this can be seen in the dissipation of royal authority within the various regions of Gaul. As the power of the kings began to wane, the counts, who were the royal representatives in the provinces, came more and more under the influence of the landed magnates.<sup>64</sup> This development moved with such rapidity in the seventh century that by 614 A. D., the nobility had come to control these offices altogether. Lothar II, upon his rise to office, agreed that in the future no count would be appointed without the approval of the local magnates.<sup>65</sup> Thus, the Merovingian kings had become little more than a faithful servant of their powerful followers.

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<sup>63</sup>Dannenbauer, Vom der Spatantike zum Mittelalter, II, 152.

<sup>64</sup>Davis, p. 122; Fichtenau, p. 9; Wallace-Hadrill, pp. 84ff; Lot, p. 358; Bergengruen, pp. 174-75.

<sup>65</sup>Fichtenau, p. 9; Davis, p. 122; Lot, p. 358; Bergengruen, pp. 174-75.

The course of Frankish history in the second half of the seventh century revolved around local politics which found nobles pitted against nobles and provinces against provinces. The three areas of greatest activity during this period were those of Austrasia, Neustria and Burgundy as they each tried to gain dominance over the other two.<sup>66</sup> These local conflicts have a dual interest for the present work because it is here that the power of the aristocracy can be fully realized and it is also here that the final acts of Merovingian dominance in the West were played out. Strangely enough, in both cases a leading role was assumed by the kings highest officials in the West, the mayors of the palace.<sup>67</sup> The position of the mayors had become one of paramount importance in the seventh century primarily because of the economic factors that came to surround the post. With the mayors being entrusted with the supervision of the royal lands and society resting upon a natural economy, it was only natural for the power and prestige of this office to mushroom. To fully understand however, how the mayors came to surpass even the kings in power and authority, their rise must be viewed in light of the bond which developed between the aristocracy and the mayors.

Throughout the second half of the seventh century there

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<sup>66</sup>Fichtenau, p. 11; Wallace-Hadrill, p. 85; Davis, pp. 122-23; Sullivan, Heirs, p. 57; Lot, p. 360; Bergengruen, pp. 180-81.

<sup>67</sup>Lot, p. 360; Fichtenau, p. 11; Davis, p. 122; Wallace-Hadrill, p. 84; Sullivan, Heirs, p. 57.

was a perpetual state of war between the nobles of Neustria, Austrasia, and Burgundy.<sup>68</sup> These were not national wars, but rather encounters between associations of nobles. For example, the nobles of Austrasia who had associated themselves with the mayor of the palace of Austrasia were pitted against those nobles in Neustria who had associated themselves with the mayor in Neustria. The chief reason for the bond between the nobles and the mayors was because at this early date the noble's rank and position were not yet hereditary and thus the support of the mayor was needed to protect their interest.<sup>69</sup> The best way to ensure the support of this important royal official was to commend oneself to him and become his vassal. It was through their use of feudal practices that the mayors soon commanded the loyalty of a large body of knights and in the process even outstripped the king in power.<sup>70</sup> By the beginning of the eighth century the Austrasian mayors had been so successful in their systematic exploitation of royal lands and in battle against the other mayors that they were on the threshold of assuming the crown from the weak Merovingian dynasty. While the bond between the aristocrats and the mayors played a large part in weakening the authority of the Merovingian kings, these feudal ties would not have been possible

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<sup>68</sup>Davis, p. 123; Fichtenau, p. 11; Wallace-Hadrill, p. 84; Lot, pp. 360-63.

<sup>69</sup>Davis, p. 123.

<sup>70</sup>Sullivan, Heirs, p. 57; Davis, p. 123; Fichtenau, p. 11; Wallace-Hadrill, p. 85; Bergengruen, pp. 80-81.

if the Merovingian government had not proved itself inefficient, unjust and unscrupulous.

With the breakdown of central authority and the stagnation of the economy, the populace turned to the country villa as their means of livelihood and protection.<sup>71</sup> According to Marc Bloch, in the early Middle Ages Frankish Gaul was divided into a large number of villas which he defines as being, "...estates so organized that a large part of the profits from the soil accrue directly or indirectly to a single master...."<sup>72</sup> Looking briefly at the composition of the villa, it seems that the land was divided into two distinct parts which were linked together by close ties of interdependence. On the one hand there was the "demense" which constituted the lord's personal holdings and on the other was the mansi which were made-up of small plots held by the lord's tenants.<sup>73</sup> Although the "demense" was composed of houses, farm-buildings, forests and arable land, one should be careful not to create a too compact picture of the lord's holdings. Although there are no maps to illustrate the exact layout of the "demense," it appears that the lord's portion of the estate was usually divided into several fields which were intermixed with the

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<sup>71</sup>Marc Bloch, Les caracteres originaux de l'histoire rurale francaise (Oslo, 1931), p. 67; Latouche, The Birth of Western Economy, p. 100; Sullivan, Heirs, p. 42; Dannenbauer, Vom der Spatantike zum Mittelalter, II, 144-45; Moss, p. 205.

<sup>72</sup>Bloch, p. 67.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., pp. 67-72.

tenant's holdings.<sup>74</sup> This arrangement was to assist the tenants who were responsible for tilling the lord's land. Scholars are not altogether certain as to what percentage of the total estate was given over to the "demense," but it probably consisted of about one quarter to a half of the arable land.

In dealing with the large estates we are concerned with some sizeable tracts of land which obviously required a large labor force. When the need for laborers is viewed in light of the conditions which existed during the seventh century, it is not difficult to understand how it was acquired. As Marc Bloch has stated, "The unrest, the habitual use of force, the insecurity which compelled everyone to seek a protector more powerful than himself and the abuse of power fostered by the absence of government served to draw an ever-increasing throng of peasants into the bonds of the villa."<sup>75</sup> In return for his service, the peasant was given protection, a means of livelihood, and justice.<sup>76</sup>

As a result of the disruptive elements that were present in Gaul during the sixth and seventh centuries, there emerged a social order which was composed primarily of only two classes, the landlord and serf. By the end of the seventh century, life in Western Europe, politically, socially and economically, was intimately tied to the Private estates.

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., p. 81.

While no one could deny that in comparison to the city-state structure of the Graeco-Roman world this system was primitive, it did have a few redeeming features. What the state under the weak Merovingian kings had been unable to provide for society, the more powerful nobles could. In the words of Richard E. Sullivan, "The powerful nobles, each entrenched in a small area, could protect and control the population in their immediate localities."<sup>77</sup> Primitive, disunified, and unsophisticated though this new system may have been, it did provide a basis for the restoration of order.

While the medievalist is justified in presenting early medieval society as being predominantly agrarian, he must be careful in the process of not painting too black a picture of the cities. Although it is true that the cities suffered an eclipse from the fourth to the seventh century and no longer held the same significance for society, they did not vanish altogether. To understand the status of the cities during the period of Germanic dominance in the West, attention will be given to the works of Eugene Ewig and Robert Latouche.

Looking first at the work of Ewig, we find that he attributes the survival of the towns to two important factors: the presence of royal officials and the continuation of religious activity.<sup>78</sup> Concerning the first factor, Ewig maintains

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<sup>77</sup>Sullivan, Heirs, p. 42.

<sup>78</sup>Eugene Ewig, Trier im Merowingerreich (Trier, 1954), pp. 80-83; Ewig, "Residence et Capitale dans le haut Moyen Age," in Early Medieval Society, ed., Sylvia Thrupp (New York, 1967), p. 164.

that, "...the kings of the early Middle Ages were not nomads and to present it as a period of itinerant courts is too crude a formula."<sup>79</sup> In developing his thesis that the Germanic kingdoms were not lacking in royal centers, he asserts that in the formation of a capital the presence of a royal administration is more important than the king's presence. Although the kings spent a great deal of time in their rustic villas, the presence of the royal representatives was sufficient to maintain the royal capital and preserve the political significance of the cities.<sup>80</sup> The second factor which Ewig maintains helped preserve the cities was the fact that they remained centers of ecclesiastical activity. The bishops continued during the seventh century, as in the Empire, to conduct a great deal of official business from the city. Thus, to Ewig, the presence of the counts and bishops within the cities prohibited the total annihilation of urban life.<sup>81</sup>

Robert Latouche would agree with Ewig that the Church was an important factor in the preservation of the cities, but he does not see the same importance in the royal administration. In his own words, Latouche maintains that, "Religion and ecclesiastical activity saved the life of a host of cities, the existence of which was threatened by Merovingian apathy

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<sup>79</sup>Ewig, "Residence et Capitale dans le haut Moyen Age," p. 163; Trier im Merowingerreich, p. 80.

<sup>80</sup>Ewig, Trier im Merowingerreich, p. 80.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., pp. 80-83, 314-15.

and the general stagnation of the economy."<sup>82</sup> The reason Latouche does not attach a great deal of significance to the Germanic occupation of the cities, is because he believes their interest was more military than political. "If the barbarians held on to the cities," says Latouche, "it was because they were strongholds."<sup>83</sup> By inheriting the palaces built by the Roman governors in the capital cities of the provinces, the barbarians acquired a fortress in times of attack and a storehouse for the booty taken in wars. According to this authority, it was not political interest on the part of the kings that preserved the city, but rather, "...the establishing of bishoprics, the building of cathedrals and the exhibition of venerable relics in a sanctuary, which provided the spark that assured the continuity of the city."<sup>84</sup> Thus, while Latouche is not in complete agreement with Ewig, it is apparent that the cities did manage to linger on in the West until the revival of economic activity in the tenth and eleventh centuries gave them a new lease on life. Had this preservation not occurred, the development of Western Europe would have perhaps been much slower.

In addition to the role which the Church played in the preservation of urban life, it also had a major role in the

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<sup>82</sup>Latouche, p. 105.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., p. 108.

developing of cultural life in the West. As Europe began to assume an identity unique unto itself, it was obvious from its agrarian orientation that it was impossible for the old mode of propagating culture through the cities to continue to function. With the breakdown of the central government, the responsibility for this task, as was demonstrated in the preceding chapter, passed to the more powerful and better organized Roman Catholic Church.<sup>85</sup> Because of the magnitude of the task, it is beyond the scope of this present work to present either a detailed analysis of the role which Christianity played in the development of Western Europe or to examine the vast amount of literature which has been devoted to the issue. It can be demonstrated, however, in a more general analysis that the role which the Church assumed in this historical process went even further in giving to the West an orientation and identity which clearly distinguishes it from the rest of the world. Thus, the primary aim in dealing with the Church will be to illustrate further that the rise of Western Europe was neither a continuation of the classical tradition nor the result of a catastrophic event which brought an end to civilization, but rather an original and uniquely oriented society which evolved out of an older order which had ceased to function.

Being confronted with the onerous task of preserving and stimulating civilization, the Church in the West, during

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<sup>85</sup>Bark, p. 110.

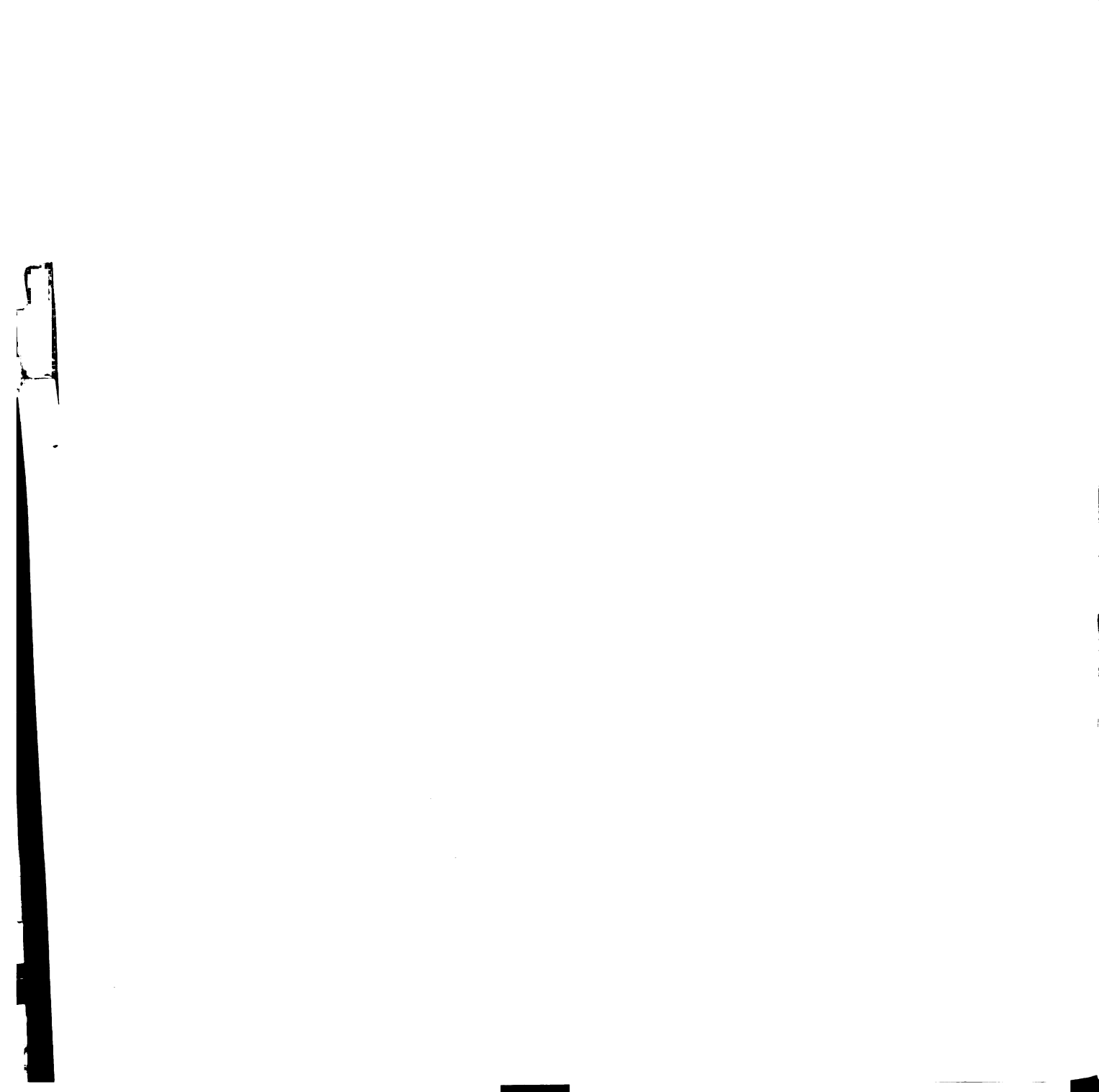
the seventh century, found itself in a position quite unlike that of other periods. From the end of the fifth century the Church in the West could no longer depend upon the support of a strong government. Thus, the task which befell Christianity had to be undertaken with the bishops assuming an active role within the secular life of the West and in the process running the risk of becoming worldly themselves.<sup>86</sup> The clergy was able to involve itself with political and economic duties only by neglecting religious responsibilities. The office of the clergy soon came to possess so much secular authority and wealth that vicious struggles erupted over the episcopal sees. The results of these developments were that there emerged a group of Church officials in the West who were not overly concerned with spiritual matters, who were ignorant of the doctrine's of the Church, and whose personal life was not in keeping with the expected habits of a priest.<sup>87</sup>

During this period in which the clergy became secularized as a result of its all too frequent contact with the world, there were positive developments taking place that were of extreme importance. As was illustrated earlier in the above material, the sixth and seventh centuries was a period in which the kings had little interest in the welfare of their subjects. Had it not been for the Church, the weak and helpless would have been totally neglected. The sick

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<sup>86</sup>Latouche, p. 89; Sullivan, Heirs, p. 44.

<sup>87</sup>Sullivan, Heirs, p. 45.



would have been uncared for and education practically non-existent. Without the Church, the conscious of Europe would have been much slower in awakening to the benevolent duties of man.<sup>88</sup>

In addition to the concern which the Church expressed for the physical welfare of society, it likewise continued with its spiritual activities among the pagans. As Pierre Riche' and Rolf Sprandel have tried to demonstrate in their works, it was the missionary efforts of the Irish and Anglo-Saxon monks that finally civilized the barbarians and established in Western Europe what these men call a "religious culture."<sup>89</sup> According to Riche', by the seventh century the Merovingian court had become a center of this religious culture. The development of this phenomenon in the West, says Riche', was initiated through the efforts of St. Columban.<sup>90</sup> As a result of St. Columban's spirituality, the Franks were easily won over by his message and, "...the court then served as a

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<sup>88</sup>Daniel-Rops, p. 203; Dawson, p. 180.

<sup>89</sup>Rolf Sprandel, Der merovingische Adel (Freiburg, 1957), pp. 14-19; Pierre Riche', "Les Foyers de culture en Gaule franeque du VIe au IXe siecle," in Early Medieval Society, ed., Sylvia Thrupp (New York, 1967), p. 230; Daniel-Rops, p. 230; Dawson, p. 174; Bark, p. 110. Bark advances a thesis which presents the missionary endeavors of the Church as a pioneering adventure. While the technique employed by Bark does point-up the superior technological abilities of the monks, this desire to create frontiers for the monks to conquer tends to diminish their most important task, that of converting the pagans and improving spiritual life.

<sup>90</sup>Riche', p. 230; Sprandel, pp. 14-22.

relay station to spread the ideas of the Irish monks."<sup>91</sup> It was through the efforts of these men that a spiritual revival spread to the whole of Gaul. By 640 A. D., there had emerged in the Merovingian kingdom, a network of monasteries based upon the Benedictine Rule and aimed at developing a religious culture. Riche' stresses the point that what emerged in Europe during the seventh century was a religious culture and not humanistic.<sup>92</sup> The monasteries created by the Irish monks were instructing their followers in spiritual matters and asceticism, not the liberal arts. In the second half of the seventh century the Irish monks were joined in their missionary efforts by the Anglo-Saxons and the two working jointly made possible the creation of new cultural centers throughout Europe. So significant were the efforts of these missionaries that Riche' maintains by the end of the seventh century, Europe was already approaching the "Carolingian Renaissance."<sup>93</sup>

Although the missionary endeavors of the Church produced fruitful results in the seventh century, they have often been criticized by Protestant historians for the methods which were employed.<sup>94</sup> Using the conversion of Clovis as a guide, the missionaries would concentrate their energies upon the

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<sup>91</sup>Riche', p. 230; Sprandel, pp. 14-22.

<sup>92</sup>Riche', pp. 230-32.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., pp. 232-33.

<sup>94</sup>Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, IV, (New York, 1894), p. 18.

leaders of the various pagan groups which in turn meant if the leader could be converted his followers would join him in the waters of baptism. While it is true that the methods employed by the Church could be termed as "wholesale conversion" and that the conversion usually resulted in little change of life, such a criticism tends to overlook a more significant factor.<sup>95</sup> It was these missionaries working in remote areas that were able to breakdown the barbarism of the invaders and provide Western Europe with a common element around which it could rally. It was primarily through the efforts of the missionaries that Western Europe began to spread and develop. The presence of a common, unifying element which had been lost in the disruption of the Roman city-state was being restored in the form of Christianity and the Roman Church.

While the material presented above has only touched upon the major trends of the Merovingian period, it is sufficient for us to conclude that those schools of thought which present the early Middle Ages as either a continuation of the classical order or as a "dark age" unworthy of scholarly attention are not sufficient to describe the true conditions of the age. It is true that monarchy was universal in the West during the post invasion period, but it was not of the Roman variety. It was so weak, disorganized and primitive that any comparison to Rome is futile. The most vital element of political authority during this period rested not with a king

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<sup>95</sup>Schaff, p. 18.

and his court, but rather with the more powerful nobility. It was only at the hands of the nobles that society received the peace and protection which the state could no longer provide. Economically, the story is the same. With the disruption of trade and the breakdown of direct taxation, the West came to depend for its material existence upon the self-sufficient manor. While there may have existed a very limited traffic in luxury items, for the basic necessities of life man had to rely upon his own resources and individual ability. Even in the intellectual life, as was demonstrated in Chapter Five, there was a significant alteration. While there did remain a residue of classical culture in the intellectual activity of the West, the Church and monastic scholars had inevitably selected those aspects of classical culture that suited their religious and moral convictions. Yet, even within this politically disorganized, economically impoverished and culturally barbaric world there developed a newly oriented way of life that provided a basis for unity and action. As we have seen illustrated above, there was developing during this period a Christian culture that served to influence and direct both the physical and spiritual needs of society. As a result of the multifarious duties assumed by the Church during the seventh century, there developed a way of life in the West which provided the hope, meaning and possibility for individual action and participation which had been lost in the decline of the Roman Empire.

In closing there is one additional comment which should

be made concerning the methodology of this particular chapter. The careful reader has probably been able to detect that the treatment of the sources in this chapter has not been in keeping with the basic organization of the work as a whole. The reason for this alteration in methodology is because there do not exist any works which offer a definitive study of Merovingian history. Neither the catastrophic, continuation nor transitional schools have been really interested in the Merovingian age and this lack of interest has been reflected in the fact that there still does not exist an adequate synthesis of the period. Although a great deal has been written on the Merovingians, it has been devoted primarily to specific problems and not to total coverage. Thus, a history of the Merovingians which looks at the period in its own right instead of from the perspective of the fall of classical civilization is yet to be written.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

As we come to the end of this project which has touched upon six centuries of historiography and six centuries of actual historical events, perhaps the most valuable conclusion that can be derived from such a study as this is that the present should not worship nor be dominated by the shrines of past history. True historical study involves a double operation of both raising questions and seeking answers. The success and usefulness of history rests with the historian who seeks his answers by a systematic method, carefully probing and free from blinding prejudices. The dangers that are engendered when a scholar is dominated by the past can be seen in the works of both the "barbarization" and "continuation" schools. As the preceeding pages have tried to demonstrate, the "barbarization" school, having succumbed to the brilliance of classical civilizations, was incapable of rendering an impartial evaluation of the early Middle Ages, while the "continuation" school, operating under a linear concept of history, was primarily concerned with discovering the various links which connected the Middle Ages to the late Empire.

The beginning of the Middle Ages to a scholar who has lost the ability to probe carefully his material and has

succumbed to the forces of blind prejudices, was a catastrophic event heralded by the onslaught of external forces, i. e., barbarism and Christianity, and characterized by the destruction and replacement of a superior civilization by an inferior way of life. As the present work has tried to demonstrate, individuals who adhere to such an interpretation stand as a man who, "...sees through a glass darkly..." failing to conceive the fatal internal maladies plaguing the ancient world. The magnitude of the political, social and economic problems which confronted the Empire passed unnoticed by the "barbarization" school and without recognition of these internal weaknesses it is impossible to render an adequate analysis of the nature and significance of the early Middle Ages.

While the "barbarization" school was concerned primarily with showing the vastness of the chasm which separated the rational world of antiquity from the ignorance and superstition of the Middle Ages, the "continuation" school maintains that no break occurred between late antiquity and the Middle Ages and as a result of this view expended a great deal of time and energy constructing threads of unity between the two periods. For the members of the "continuation" school, the garment of Clio is truly a seamless web. It is not difficult to understand how the theory of continuity became so popular for it links the present in a chain with the great men of the past. It makes us partakers in the greatness of Rome and Athens; defendants, so to speak, of the Hellenic culture and the Roman Empire. Thus, to the "continuation" school

the Middle Ages stand as the key link between the classical and western culture. Such an analysis as this raises the Middle Ages to a new dignity, providing the highest justification for their intensive study through the sense of unbroken purpose which it engenders.

One of the underlying assumptions of the "continuation" school and one which is basic to its thought, involves the notion that the torch of civilization is constantly passed from one cultural group to another. Consider for example the idea that the foundation of Western thought and letters has been handed down in unbroken succession from Rome. While at first glance such a theory as this seems possible, a closer examination of the late Empire will prove otherwise. As has been illustrated in the text of this work, by the third century what is known as the classical tradition had fallen into decay. The once admirable spirit of rational inquiry, so vigorous six centuries earlier, had given way to superstition and mystery cults. The creative literary activity was lost and the arts were in a state of decline. Even the city-state, which can be termed as the physical embodiment of the classical spirit, was vanishing. The cosmopolitan society of the ancient world with its sophisticated political structure and diverse economic system, was yielding, at least in the Western portion of the Empire, to small agrarian communities bound by local horizons, governed by local lords and dependent for their existence upon a couple inches of top-soil and a regular rain fall. The ancient world, by the third century, was

falling into decay and with it the classical tradition was becoming extinct.

One of the primary points which this present work has tried to demonstrate is that the external stimulus exerted upon one civilization by another does not mean there was a passing on of an inheritance. The driving force in any civilization comes from within that particular civilization; the spirit is within. It is the contention of this work that each civilization is inspired by a different spirit and each pursues different goals. It is for this reason that the historian who is concerned primarily with constructing lines of continuity or comparing one civilization to another may soon find himself in perilous waters. In the final analysis the historian may find it much more profitable to seek to determine what a particular civilization set out to achieve, how they tried to achieve it, and why they failed than to view the past as unbroken chain of events. It is only through such an approach as this that an adequate analysis of the nature and significance of a particular age can be rendered.

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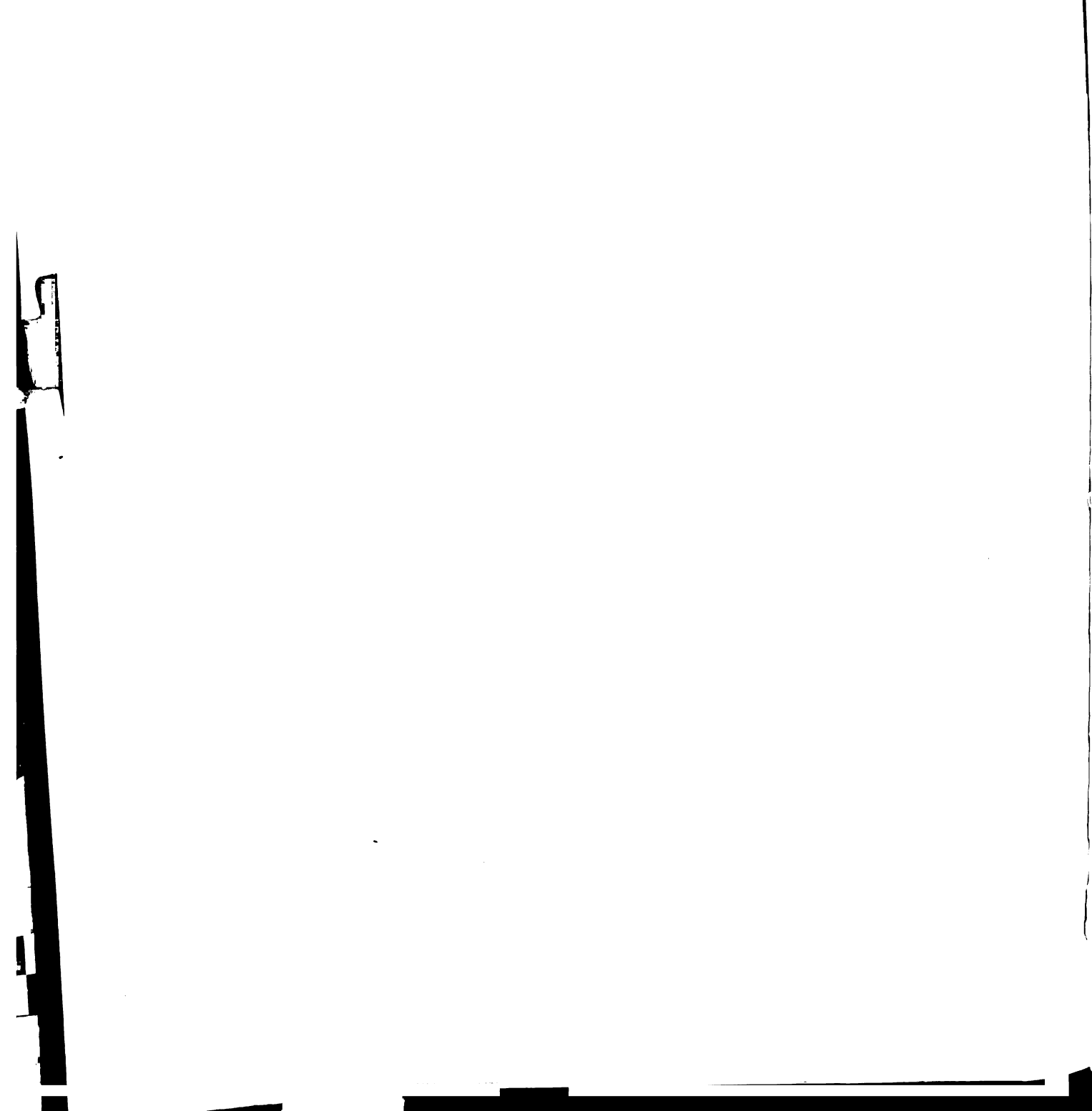
Emile ou de l'Education (Paris, 1939) are excellent representatives of the age. In understanding the significance of these four men in the development of historiography, the reader will be greatly assisted by Ferdinand Schevill, Six Historians (Chicago, 1956); F. E. Manuel, The Age of Reason (New York, 1951); Romain Rolland, French Thought in the Eighteenth Century (New York, 1953); J. M. Brumfitt, Voltaire: Historian (Oxford, 1957) and F. C. Green, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Cambridge, 1955).

The historical literature of the nineteenth century was dominated by the romanticists and nationalists. In addition to the general works on historiography already cited evidence of the style and thought employed by these two schools of thought can be found in Jules Michelet, History of France, trans., G. H. Smith (2 vols.; New York, 1857) and E. A. Freeman's, History of the Norman Conquest of England (Oxford, 1867-69). Also from the nineteenth century there emerged a number of historical works which had been influenced by contemporary scientific advancement. W. E. H. Lecky, History of European Morals (New York, 1894) and Otto Seeck, Geschichte des Untergang der antiker Welt (6 vols.; Berlin, 1891-1920) reveal the influence which the biological theory of evolution had upon sociological writing. In addition to the advancements listed above, the nineteenth century also holds an important place in the development of critical historical scholarship. At the pinnacle of this development stands, Leopold von Ranke's, History of the Latin and Teutonic Nations,

1494-1514 (London, 1915).

The medieval literature of the twentieth century can be divided into two general classifications. The first group, which maintains that the early Middle Ages were characterized primarily by a continuation of the classical tradition, is represented by such works as, Henri Pirenne, Mohammed and Charlemagne (New York, 1939); Heinrich Dannenbauer, Die Entstehung Europas vom der Spatantike zum Mittelalter (2 vols; Stuttgart, 1959); Grundlagen der mittelalterlichen Welt (Stuttgart, 1958); Alphons Dopsch, Economic and Social Foundations of European Civilization (New York, 1937) and Joseph Vogt, Der Niedergang Roms (Zurich, 1965). In opposition to this view of the continuation of the classical tradition are such works as Ferdinand Lot, The End of the Ancient World and the Beginning of the Middle Ages (New York, 1931); H. St. L. B. Moss, The Birth of the Middle Ages (Oxford, 1935); Otto Seeck, Geschichte des Untergangs der antiker Welt (Berlin, 1910); Kurt Pfister, Der Untergang der antiker Welt (Leipzig, 1941) and William C. Bark, Origins of the Medieval World (Stanford, 1958). On the question of the transition from antiquity to the Middle Ages in general, Paul E. Hubinger's Zur Frage der Periodergrenze zwischen Altrtum und Mittelalter (Darmstadt, 1968) which covers the major schools of thought in Germany from the late nineteenth century to the present, is exceptionally valuable.

In developing the "transitional" thesis for the early Middle Ages, the twentieth century writers deliberate at



considerable length upon the various institutions of antiquity and the Middle Ages. Concerning the economic institutions, in addition to the six previously listed works, valuable insight is to be gained from M. Rostovtzeff, The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire (Oxford, 1926); Robert Latouche, The Birth of Western Economy, trans., E. M. Wilkinson (New York, 1961); Gunnar Mickwitz, Geld und Wirtschaft im römischen Reich des vierten Jahrhundert (Helsingfors, 1923); Johannes Sundwall, Westromische Studien (Berlin, 1915), and Solomon Katz, The Jews in the Visigothic and Frankish Kingdoms of Spain and Gaul (Cambridge, 1937). For detailed information concerning the role of the merchants in the early Middle Ages, the works of Norman H. Baynes, "The Decline of Roman Power in Western Europe," The Journal of Roman Studies, XXXIII (1943) pp. 29-35; H. St. L. B. Moss, "Economic Consequences of the Barbarian Invasions," Economic History Review, VII (1937), 206-16; and Archibald Lewis, Naval Power and Trade in the Mediterranean, A. D. 500-1100 (Princeton, 1951) are excellent.

Concerning the social transition, Samuel Dill, Roman Society in the Last Century of the Roman Empire (London, 1905) is dated, but still useful. Also quite useful on this subject are F. F. Abbott and A. C. Johnson, Municipal Administration in the Roman Empire (Princeton, 1926); A. H. M. Jones, The Late Roman Empire, I, (Oxford, 1964); A. E. R. Boak, Manpower Shortage and the Fall of the Empire (Ann Arbor, 1955); Moses I. Finley, "Manpower Shortage," The Journal of Roman Studies, XLVIII (1958) 156-64; M. Rostovtzeff, Studien zur Geschichte

des romischer Kolonates (Berlin, 1910); and J. S. Reid, Municipalities of the Roman Empire (New York, 1913).

A comprehensive treatment of the intellectual and cultural history of the transition period can be found in H. O. Taylor, The Classical Heritage of the Middle Ages (New York, 1901); David Knowles, The Evolution of Medieval Thought (New York, 1962); R. R. Bolgar, The Classical Heritage (New York, 1954); Christopher Dawson, The Making of Europe (New York, 1932); Joseph Vogt, Der Niedergang Roms (Zurich, 1965); Richard E. Sullivan, "Some Influences of Monasticism on the Fourth and Fifth Centuries," Studies in Medieval Culture, II, (Western Michigan University, 1966), 19-34; and E. K. Rand, Founders of the Middle Ages (Cambridge, 1929).

In reference to the general conditions prevailing in Western Europe after the Germanic invasions, Richard E. Sullivan presents in his Heirs of the Roman Empire (Ithaca, 1960) a very lucid account. For additional detail on the post-invasion period, this work can be supplemented by, R. H. C. Davis, A History of Medieval Europe from Constantine to St. Louis (London, 1957); J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, The Barbarian West, 400-1000 A. D. (London, 1952); Marc Bloch, Les caracteres originaux de l'histoire rurale Francaise (Oslo, 1931); Marc Bloch, Feudal Society, trans., L. A. Manyon (Chicago, 1961); Eugen Ewig, Trier im Merowingerreich (Trier, 1954); Eugen Ewig, "Residence et Capitale dans le haut Moyen Age," in Early Medieval Society, ed. Sylvia Thrupp (New York, 1967), 163-73; Pierre Riche', Education et Culture dans l'Occident

barbare, VIe-VIIIe siècles (Paris, 1962); Pierre Riché, "Les Foyers de culture en Gaule franque du VIe au IXe siècle," in Early Medieval Society, ed. Sylvia Thrupp (New York, 1967), 221-236; Charles Norris Cochrane, Christianity and Classical Culture (New York, 1957); Etienne Gilson, History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages (New York, 1955); M. L. W. Laistner, Thought and Letters in Western Europe (Ithaca, 1931); Rolf Sprandel, Der Merovingische Adel (Freiburg, 1951); and Alexander Bergengruen, Adel und Grundherrschaft im Merowingerreich (Wiesbaden, 1958).

Since the ecclesiastical affairs loom so large in the history of the early Middle Ages, they should be carefully noted by the student. The writings of Henri Daniel-Rops, The Church in the Dark Ages (New York, 1959); Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, IV (New York, 1894); Philip Hughes, A History of the Church (3 vols.; New York, 1935-47) Vols., II-III give an interesting synthesis of the importance of the Church in the Middle Ages. Also helpful is the more specialized work of Cuthbert Butler, Benedictine Monachism (New York, 1962).

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