

## THE ROMAN EMPIRE BREAKS UP

When we refer to the "break up" of the Roman Empire, we do not mean that the Romans ceased to exist in western Europe. It means that Rome no longer controlled its empire, and even the government in Rome was no longer operating under the control of the Romans. The average Roman now had to live and work under greater hardships. Conditions in the west became chaotic since there were no Roman government forces to make and enforce laws, administer justice, control or direct trade with the East, or to maintain and repair roads and bridges; however, their system of law remained just as ours would if our governments in Ottawa and Quebec were not functioning. Daily life continued as usual so that many of their institutions and customs were preserved with few changes into the Dark Ages.

One institution which was maintained was the large landed estate (Latifundia) which had developed towards the end of Roman times when rich and powerful Romans bought the lands of the heavily taxed free farmers of Rome. The workers and their children were forced to remain on the estates by a decree of the Emperor Constantine. In the Dark Ages these estates became self-sufficient farming units which produced almost all the food, tools and goods needed. These estates, and others which were established in north western Europe, developed into feudal MANORS.

Another aspect of Roman life which continued for hundreds of years after the fall of Rome was the continued use of the Latin language. The early Christians of Europe used it in their church services, and when they conducted business with other Christian churchmen in Europe and the East.

The Roman skills in engineering and architecture were continually used by the Church of Rome in its construction of the many churches needed as its membership increased. Later, in medieval times, a new type of architecture was developed.

The skills the Romans had in the administration of their empire were also carried forward into the period of the Middle Ages. The Christian church in Rome expanded very quickly and found it needed to set up an organized administration so that the church could be effectively administered by the Pope in Rome.

Some Roman laws continued to survive in western Europe and even now they are part of the laws of modern nations.

Romans may have ceased to operate a vast empire after the fall of Rome, but many of their ideas, customs and institutions were carried forward into the next period of history - the Medieval Period.

1. Name some services formerly provided by the government which Romans no longer had after the fall of Rome.
2. Why did Roman institutions and ideas continue to survive?
3. If there was no government to mint coins, how do you think people paid for the goods they needed?
4. If most people lived on large, self-sufficient estates, what do you think the effect would be on trade and commerce?