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Colin McEvedy The Penguin Atlas of Medieval History



Maps devised by the author
and drawn by John Woodcock

Penguin Books



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INTRODUCTION

1 · The Area Covered

My idea in compiling this atlas has been to show the unfolding of medieval history in Europe and the Near East as a continuous story, an aim in contrast to that of most historical atlases, which illustrate discrete fragments of history and are intended primarily as works of reference. That the nations within this area have much history in common is an obvious fact which the purely national approach often ignores and the modern tendency for microscopic analysis tends to keep permanently out of focus. It is continually emphasized by the method of presentation here adopted and, if the result is at first sight a mere pictorial catalogue, a perspective emerges from the whole which establishes the relative proportions of different historical events.

There is no *geographical* detail on the maps – for example, the only English town shown is London – nor any dissection of political units – the Kingdom of France is simply the Kingdom of France and is never subdivided into Duchies, Counties, and so on. There is, however, much more chronological detail than is usual, each state being shown at many different points in time, and this, together with the constant scale, allows different epochs to be directly compared.

The thirty-eight maps that make up the atlas are arranged in five sections. The bulk of each section is made up of five or six maps showing the political state of the area at intervals that average forty years. Two more maps (indicated by the letters F and E after the date at the beginning of the text), corresponding in date to the last political one and showing respectively the extent of Christendom and the development of the economy, complete

the section. All the maps cover exactly the same area: Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East; the reasons for the choice of this area are fundamental to the whole atlas and require explanation at some length.

In the medieval period, the nations of Europe and the Near East formed a community, the members of which constantly reacted on each other but were almost completely cut off from the rest of the world by physical barriers. We can think of the Europe–Near–East area as a cul-de-sac, the rough outline of the sack being formed by the Arctic circle, Atlantic Ocean, and Sahara Desert (Figure 1). The southern limit can be carried around to the Arabian Sea and the lips of the sack drawn close together by bringing the upper down along the line of the Ural Mountains and the lower up the Suleiman Range. The mouth is thus reduced to the region of the Oxus and Jaxartes rivers (Russian Turkestan), and it can be said that all significant contacts between the Europe–Near–East area and the rest of the world took place via Turkestan. The apparent exceptions to this rule, the Norse, the Portuguese, and the Arab traders of the Saharan and spice routes, however stirring their individual sagas, never succeed in enlarging the European–Near–Eastern horizon during the period under consideration (360–1478).

A résumé of their achievements clearly demonstrates this. In the Atlantic the Norse discovered and colonized Greenland during the ninth century and they later reconnoitered a debatable amount of the coast of North America, which they termed Vinland, but these events were reported barely if at all in Europe, and the harsh conditions that eventually extinguished the Greenland colony did not encourage interest. The resources required for the sustained effort needed to breach the Atlantic barrier permanently were not in fact available until the fifteenth century, and the successful expedi-

tions of the 1490s lie outside our period. The discoveries made by the Portuguese before 1478 were relatively speaking unimportant – the Azores and the Atlantic coast of Africa as far as the Gulf of Guinea. The southern barrier, the Sahara, was not as formidable to the desert-bred Arab as it had been to the Romans, and shortly after the Islamic conquest of North Africa routes were opened up between Morocco–Algeria and the western Sudan, whose slaves, ivory, and gold provided the basis for a flourishing trans-Saharan trade. The contact between the two communities broadened briefly when the Murabits of Morocco turned south, shattered the Negro Empire of Ghana which had held much of the Niger and Senegal basins since the fourth century, and began the conversion of the population to Islam. After that, the link between the two communities became purely economic again and the native Islamic empire of Mali which replaced Ghana in 1240 pursued its history in effective isolation. To the east the spice route connecting India with Persia,

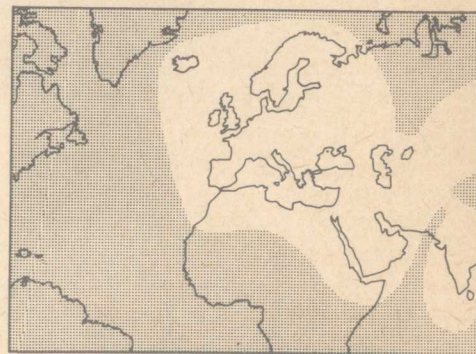


FIG. 1 The European–Near–Eastern community in medieval times, with the Indian and Central Asiatic (Nomadic) communities abutting it.

Arabia, and Egypt carried a far greater traffic than the Saharan route, but it also was responsible for the mediation of a politico-religious change on only one occasion. In 711, the Arabs sailed to Sind, the westernmost province of India and seized it for the Caliphate. Again the attempt to defy geography was only momentarily successful, and Sind, though effectively Islamized, was neither conscious of the temporal authority of the Caliph nor even remembered in Baghdad.

Granted that these incidents do not invalidate the essential circumscription of the Europe-Near-East area, there remains the mouth of the sack, Turkestan, where the settled agricultural communities of the Near East petered out and the Asiatic steppe, the domain of the nomad, began. The Indian cul-de-sac also opened on to western Turkestan (via the Khyber pass) and in antiquity,

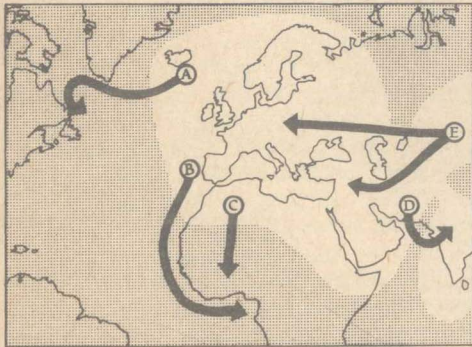


FIG. 2 Movements into and out of the European-Near-Eastern area

- A: Norse (ninth-tenth centuries)
- B: Portuguese (fifteenth century)
- C: Murabits (thirteenth century)
- D: Arabs (eighth century)
- E: Nomads (throughout the period).

when the nearer parts of Turkestan were more definitely settled and could be counted within the Near-Eastern area, it was possible for the Persian and Macedonian empires to include an Indian province. During the medieval period, when the nomads' hold on Turkestan was unbroken, the land route to India was never attempted by a western army. The third settled civilization, the Chinese, lay on the other side of the screen of nomads, far beyond the effective political reach of the times. Overland trade between the civilized three was considerable, especially when the nomads erected their larger empires and the caravans could journey in safety, but, as with the Saharan and spice routes, communications were really too tenuous to bear anything weightier than luxuries and gospels; the nomads effectively tied the mouth of the sack.

If the nomads had been content with a static role, there could be no objection to the treatment of the Europe-Near-East area as an isolated entity; unfortunately their part was far from passive, and their aggressions brought a common factor into the history of China, India, Europe, and the Near East. Huns, Turks, and Mongols are part of the story of each. The Near East and India, sharing adjacent openings on to Asia, often shared the same storm from the Steppe; the power of the Kushans, White Huns, and Timurids for example, originally centered on the Oxus basin, extended simultaneously into the Near East, Asia proper, and India; and though China was further away, the exceptional empire – the Turkish in the sixth century and the Mongol in the thirteenth – could bear on both China and the Europe-Near-East area at the same time. But if there is an intrusive element in the history of all three, India, China, and the Europe-Near-Eastern powers could only affect each other indirectly by some effort against the interposed nomads (for example,

Chinese attacks weakened the Turkish Khanate in the seventh century and thus eased the Arab conquest of Transoxiana), and as long as notice is taken of the doings of the nomads in Turkestan and of their Chinese and Indian interests the Europe-Near-East area can I think be fairly considered *in vacuo*.

The area within the sack as defined in Figure 1 contains a lot of dead space; the area taken as the base map for this book (it is superimposed on the first in Figure 3) eliminates most of this. On the northern and western borders the sacrifice of northern Scandinavia, Iceland, the Canaries, and the Atlantic coast of Africa allows a great reduction in area without more than insignificantly affecting the historical comprehensiveness of the map. A more drastic economy has been made in the south – the exclusion of the Eastern Sudan, Abyssinia, and the southern third of the Arabian peninsula. Nubia and Abyssinia are natural backwaters and, in the medieval period, they were further isolated by their Christian faith, which made them alien to their Moslem neighbours. The petty Nubian principalities were finally destroyed by the Mamluks in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; Abyssinia lost her coastline to the Arabs in the tenth century but was otherwise left alone. The Arabs colonized the coast as far south as Zanzibar during the tenth and twelfth centuries but never reached or knew of Madagascar. (Below Zanzibar, the southward current was considered too fast to allow a return journey.) To leave out such areas is reasonable enough. The Kingdoms of South Arabia, staging posts on the limb of the spice route that went to Egypt and East Africa, are also little loss, for the desert effectively cut them off from the other Middle-Eastern countries. But from the desert itself came one of the most vital of medieval forces, Islam. The exclusion of part of its birthplace is justified by the attitude of Islam

itself, no more tied to Arabia than Christianity to Palestine. Within thirty years of the Prophet's death, Arabia had become a mere province of the Empire of Damascus, and it then reverted to its original conditions of unorganized nomadism. The Islamic powers were neither interested in the affairs of such a desolate border territory nor, except in so far as they concerned the Mecca pilgrimage route, aware of them. Under the circumstances two thirds of Arabia really seems quite enough.

The eastern border cuts off some of Persia in the south and, because of the exigencies of the projection, includes an unnecessary part of Siberia in the north. The excluded part of Persia is mostly desert and plays a passive role in history, nearly always as a province of the state controlling the parts visible on the map. The middle section of the eastern border extends beyond the upper and lower part to show the Turkestanian neck; the name in the overlap is thus that of the temporary stopper of the European-Near-Eastern bottle.

2 · The Shadings Used

In the political maps the language of the dominant people in any state can be deduced from the shading of the state or the type of border around it. A classification by language is at first sight a poor substitute for the real requirement, a classification by race. This ideal has not been attempted, partly because so far no system based on physical characteristics has progressed much beyond the white-brown-yellow-black division of common observation. The apparently more scientific investigations, such as skull measurement and blood group determination, are only of real use in the study of small isolated populations and tend to

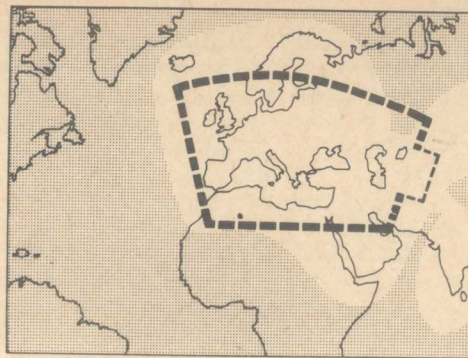
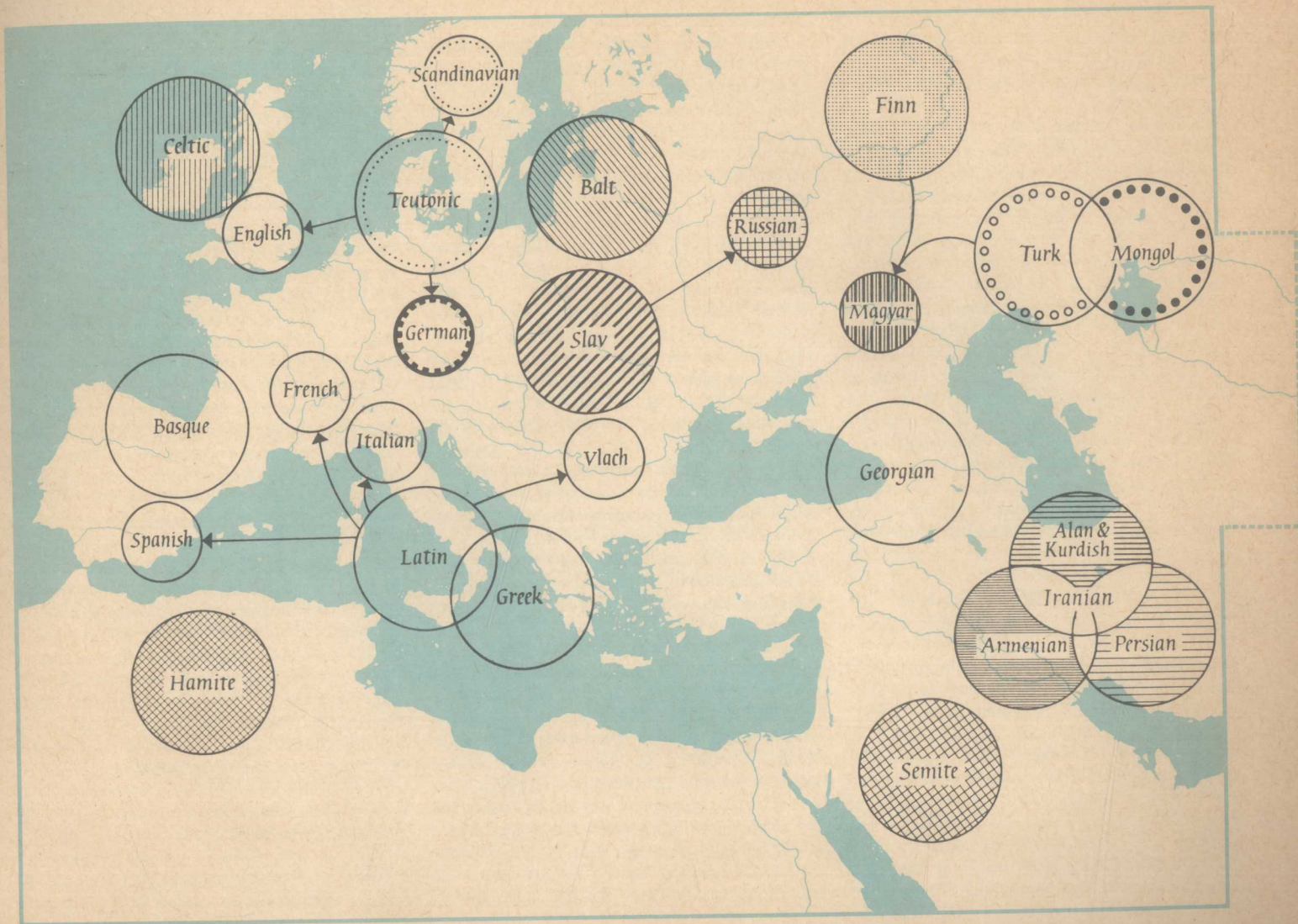


FIG. 3 The area covered by the base map used in this book.

give the same answer each time when applied to larger groups within the white race, the only one with which we are concerned. For that matter, anyone who in this day and age goes around measuring heads in the expectation of broadly applicable results invites a similar investigation, for, leaving apart the fact that skull shape is by no means entirely genetically determined, it is obvious that the concept of originally 'pure' races miscegenated by movements taking place in historic times is as obsolete as it is ancient. It must be replaced, as has the related doctrine of special creation of animal species, by a theory of continuous evolution. A pure race in such a view is simply one which has been isolated for sufficient time for a number of special characteristics to develop and within which there is the continual mixing necessary to spread these characteristics evenly throughout the population. But during any isolation more useful peculiarities than the merely physiognomical will appear: dialects progress in time to new languages and a small variation in the

pattern of a cooking-pot can be the first step toward a new culture. These changes of language and behaviour are susceptible to a far more rewarding analysis, for they give an indication of the ancestry of a group as well as a very sensitive index of its peculiarity. Bearing in mind that language, race, and culture are a single complex, the linguistic classification will be seen to be as valid as, and far more useful than, the purely physical.

By the late fourth century the inhabitants of the Roman Empire were predominantly Latin-speaking in the west, Greek-speaking in the east. Beyond the frontiers were 'barbarians' with languages belonging either to the Indo-European group to which both Latin and Greek belong, or to one of the other 'White' language groups, Hamito-Semitic (North African-Arabian) and Ural-Altaic (Asian). The languages of importance at the beginning of the medieval period are shown, together with their characteristic shadings or borders, in the larger circles in the map on the opposite page, which is the linguistic key for the atlas. Among the Indo-European tongues, Latin and Greek are left plain, Celtic is vertically lined, Teutonic given a dotted periphery, Slav and Balt diagonally lined in opposite senses, and Iranian horizontally lined. Within the Iranian group, Alans and Kurds are closely shaded, Persians broadly; the Armenians display a very close version of the Iranian type (see Map 362), for, although linguistically they deserve a pattern of their own, they were ethnically strongly Iranized and their aristocracy was entirely Persian. History has never been fair to the Armenians and it is too late to start being so now. The Hamites and Semites, for the purpose of this book synonymous with Berbers and Arabs, are cross-hatched, the Semites having the wider mesh. The Altaic Mongols and Turks have a border of circles, solid in one case, open in the other; the Uralian



Finns are stippled. It is not known which of the Altaic languages was spoken by the Huns, and the choice of the Mongol rather than the Turkish symbol in their case (see Map 362) is entirely arbitrary.

The ethnic structure of the Roman Empire is a matter of Ancient History and, as by the language test each half was effectively homogenized in the fourth century, no dissection is undertaken here. But in some provinces the people did resist the assimilation process – one example is Britain, which remained Celtic-speaking to the end of the Empire; another is the region of the western Pyrenees, where the Basques clung to their native tongue, as indeed they still do today. Basque is believed to be related to the Georgian languages of Transcaucasia, which are equally non-Indo-European and unclassifiable; if it is, the two peoples may be the remnants of a once widespread population – a fourth 'White' language group – whose decline antedates our earliest records. The Basques, who make their first appearance on Map 476, have a great respect for their own antiquity, saying that when God needed some bones with which to make the first man, He took them from a Basque cemetery, and it would require a striking pattern to do justice to their oddity. But like the Georgians, present on Map 362 as the free tribes of Abasgians and the Kingdoms of Iberia and Lazica, they played only a minor role in medieval history so, rather than overstress their importance, I have left them plain.

The smaller circles in the map on p. 5 show the patterns used for languages which differentiated during the course of the period covered by the atlas. Spanish appears after the fall of Visigothic Spain (Map 737), French and Italian after the collapse of the Frankish Empire (Map 888), and Vlach in the fourteenth century (Map 1360), all these being Latin-derived languages and therefore

unshaded. After Map 998 the continental Germans are all enclosed within the castellated border of their medieval Empire and dots became the distinguishing mark of the Scandinavians. The Normans lose these dots as they are assimilated, but for diagrammatic reasons the English do not regain theirs even when they have absorbed their French aristocracy; the evolution of Teutons (dots) into English (plain), Scandinavian (dots), and Germans (castellated) therefore lacks all visual logic. Similarly when the Magyars appear (Map 737) there is no sign of their parentage – basically Finnish with a Turkish element added – in their pattern of vertical stripes, and the Russians, when the time comes to differentiate them from the other Slavs (Map 998), are given a completely new pattern, and not one evolved from the Slavs oblique shading. In both cases the choice of a contrasting symbol has been dictated by the desire to maintain the clarity of the maps at a time when the history is getting increasingly complicated. As a last inconsistency the dotted border is also used for the crusader states, Baltic, Levantine, and Aegean; although Teutons monopolized the Baltic crusades, those in the Mediterranean were dominated by the French and Normans and the use of dots cannot be justified ethnically or linguistically. The crusader states needed a unifying characteristic however, and dots provide a satisfactory echo of the *Völkerwanderung* of the fifth and sixth centuries.

Besides giving an overall linguistic picture and the division into states, the maps also indicate in an approximate manner the degree to which the various political entities were internally organized. At the tribal level there is no bounding line around the shading, and only when the tribe evolves a stable Kingship is it given an outline; if it becomes an Empire the line is thickened. The exceptions to this rule are the Scandinavian

Kingdoms, which are never outlined.

For Kingdoms it would have been useful to give both the dynasty and the country ('Norman Kingdom of England') or, in the case of Islamic dynasties, which are usually coupled with their capital, the name of this as well as the dynastic title ('Umayyad Emirate of Cordova'). Considerations of space prohibit the use of these full titles, and I have named the western Kingdoms of early days by their founder tribes, and, after the fall of the Frankish Empire, by their country (Frankish Kingdom, Kingdom of France). The eastern states are referred to simply by dynasty except when a dynasty has several branches, in which case they are distinguished by their capital towns (Buwahids of Baghdad, Hamadan, and Isfahan).

The names of the Turco-Mongol dynasties seem to cause more difficulty than can be explained by their exotic spelling and pronunciation. The important point to remember is that a dynasty, such as the Seljuk, must be distinguished from a people, such as the Ghuzz, just as the Hohenstaufen must be distinguished from the Germans. In the transliteration of Islamic and Turco-Mongol names I have been eclectic, trying to follow in the majority of cases the versions favoured by modern scholars, but retaining inconsistencies hallowed by time. For instance I have allowed Murabit and Muwahid to replace Almoravid and Almohad but retained Ottoman and Ghuzz in place of the more exact forms Osmanli and Toquz-oghuz. In the case of linguistic groups with a distinctive shading, the names are omitted after a few appearances.

3 · Limitations

The reader of any historical atlas should be warned against allowing his critical faculties to

be disarmed by the apparent objectivity of a map. The shape of a coastline, the site of a town, these are facts and subconsciously influence us into accepting as true other matter which is in fact presented in a highly subjective manner. The thickness of a line, the sizes of lettering, etc., all emphasize certain features of what is, really, part map and part picture. I had hoped to keep opinion confined to the commentary accompanying these maps, but I must admit that this has been impossible. The best I can claim is that the uncertainties posed have been resolved in the maps with the maximum objectivity I can command. There has, of course, been no attempt to keep opinion out of the commentary, in fact although there is no wilfully unfair selection of facts, at times one can perhaps discern the subtle bouquet of prejudice.

The varying length of time that separates each map is an obvious example of the type of treatment that can easily progress to partiality. It would be best to have maps at fixed intervals and not to be swayed into compressing or extending the interval by a desire to show an Empire at its absolute peak or a situation at its most critical. However, to keep a fixed interval and yet tell the story of the Middle Ages would require a large number of maps, possibly three times as many here. The unequal distribution I have adopted is simply a consequence of the need to economize.

In the case of vassal states, no method of treatment could claim to be exact, for there is a series of possible positions that shade into one another. A vassal can effectively be the province of the larger state with only a nominal autonomy or be in fact independent, merely recognizing the formal suzerainty of an impotent monarch. It may pay only a token amount of tribute and yet consider itself a part of the larger whole, while on the other hand a defeated state may be paying a crushing

blackmail without surrendering any of its sovereignty. In such cases, whether to show a state as independent or as a vassal or to incorporate it within an Empire without distinguishing it at all must be a personal decision with which others might easily disagree. A special border (· · · · ·) is used for fiefs held by one sovereign power within the territory of another (for example by the King of England within France) or for those held by a non-sovereign power with lands in more than one state (for example the Duke of Burgundy with lands in both France and Germany). No other fiefs are shown.

Even in the apparently factual reporting, there are debatable points, for medieval history as a study is not without its controversies. Where the borders are uncertain, or, as is even more often the case, were never more than extremely vague, I have tried to indicate this by keeping them geometrically simple. Compared to the majestic lacunae in our knowledge of medieval economics, however, the political uncertainties are few and far between, and in the series of maps dealing with the economy of the Europe-Near-East area much of the information presented is suppositious in the extreme. So that the pattern of urbanization can be seen, only towns of a certain size are shown. A simple black circle represents a town with a minimum of twenty-five thousand inhabitants, the addition of an outer ring to the circle shows that the number of inhabitants is at least three times the minimum, i.e. a seventy-five thousand or more. So far so good; but unfortunately the data required is almost entirely lacking. The final result rests on a few facts, a deal of assumption, and frankly a deal more guess-work. In most cases the size of a town's population in medieval times can only be a matter of opinion. However, with more confidence than I would have in argument over a particular town, I can say that I believe the overall picture

to be sufficiently true to justify the scheme.

4 · Background Notes

The medieval period opened with the fall of the Mediterranean Empire of Rome in the West and its replacement by a new superficially Germanized society, which gradually evolved the feudal state. With the slow conquest of the Eastern half of the Empire by Islam, which also overran the African provinces of the West, and with the integration of the Slavs into Christendom, the emphasis in the Christian world shifted northwards. Thus at the end of the Middle Ages, while the Latin (Catholic) Church easily outshone the Greek (Orthodox), both were confined to continental Europe. A string of Islamic nations ringed the Mediterranean, their bulk appearing to prevent Christendom from ever expanding again in spite of an increasing Christian preponderance in wealth and technology.

At intervals throughout the ten centuries that separate the sack of Rome from that of Constantinople, waves of nomads appeared from Asia to terrorize their enemies, the agriculturalists and town dwellers. Their devastations did much to undermine the prosperity of Islam and to prevent Russia from developing in step with the rest of Europe, but by the end of the period they were clearly the losing side.

Many subjects deserve fuller discussion than can be given in the commentaries that accompany the maps, but in this brief summary of the Middle Ages three subjects in particular demand additional treatment. Without some understanding of the fall of the Western Roman Empire, the evolution and decay of feudal society, and the recurrent nomadic invasions, the course of medieval history would appear erratic and meaningless.

THE FALL OF ROME

The final end of the classical world is a subject which for most people has a tragic aspect and this reaction is worth some analysis. Both the sheer size of the Empire, never equalled in the West before or since, and the many characteristics, absent in the Dark Ages, which our civilization shares with the Roman in the fields of culture, law, and administration, contribute to this feeling. But were the victories of the Germans really a disaster for mankind? Such a view is best examined by considering what would have happened if the Empire had survived – by considering China, for example, where, although individual Empires existed only for a span, it was fundamentally the same Empire that was recreated each time. The result was a tendency to stagnation or at least the mere reshuffling of elements that had been created in the early days of Chinese history. The concept of a few eternal verities may be attractive, but there is a lot to be said for searching for new truths even at the expense of the old. Rome had given all it had to give, and, though considerable flexibility was still exhibited in some ways, late Roman society lacked vitality. At the end, the talents were not multiplying, they were simply buried.

This brings us to a problem that can be considered in more concrete terms; why did the Western Empire fall when it did? The immediate answer is, of course, the advance of the Huns, which frightened the Germans into doing what they had long had the capacity to do, for both in numbers and in arms they were by then superior to the legionaries who manned the frontiers. The decline in the Empire's total population may have been absolute or merely comparative to barbarian increase. It may have been due to the fact that a sizeable proportion of the masses were slaves (slaves had a notoriously low reproduction rate),

or to a high death rate in the urban proletariat, which must have been decimated by endemic and epidemic diseases. But whatever the extent or the reason, the manpower situation of the Empire certainly deteriorated *vis-à-vis* the German, and this deterioration was exaggerated by the specialization of Roman society. While every adult male German was a seasonal soldier, each Roman legionary represented the defence effort of some tens or even hundreds of civilians. Though professional soldiery has advantages of discipline and experience and can usually be relied on to defeat several times their number of amateurs, their capacity for doing so is heavily dependent on their being well equipped, and it so happened that, at the moment when sheer numbers were beginning to tell against them, the legionaries found that their methods and equipment were hopelessly obsolete. The German soldier of the end of the fourth century had a better sword made of better steel, and the Goths had learnt the latest techniques of cavalry warfare from the nomads of the Russian steppe. The Romans were left dependent on discipline and generalship, and when these failed, as fail they must in the long run, on the hiring of Germans to fight Germans. This last could only be a stop-gap, for an indispensable soldier will set up on his own if even his most irresponsible demands are not met. In the end, the Western Empire was destroyed by the arms of the professional German soldiery that imperial necessity had created.

But if all this is true, why did not the East fall as well as the West? The answer here goes back to Julius Caesar, who, by conquering Gaul out of personal ambition, carried the Roman eagles into continental Europe. The Greeks and Carthaginians had colonized and economically unified the Mediterranean littoral, providing the basis for its political unification as achieved by Rome. Julius

Caesar marched beyond the confines of this natural unit and introduced Mediterranean culture into France and England. There it flourished in an etiolated manner while the political climate was favourable. But when the Roman frontiers ceased to expand and defence costs began to rise, the slender trade of the north-west dried up in the hotter taxation, and the people left the cities, the foci of the tax man's attention. The West soon proved completely unable to pay its way. Once the division of the Empire became a reality and the West was deprived of the support of the far wealthier, far more urbanized East, it collapsed almost spontaneously. The East was just rich enough to buy off invaders and hire guards. Thus it survived ingloriously for a century and by Justinian's time had rebuilt a native army on new lines.

The relation of towns and trade to taxation potential is a vital one and the absence of sizeable towns and of organized trade routes in the West is a striking feature of Map 528E. The greater wealth of the townsman has less to do with his importance to the exchequer than his accessibility and his payment in cash, for the cost of collecting taxes in money is minimal. To gather a percentage of the produce of scattered, unco-operative peasantry, to transport it to where it can be marketed or utilized without exorbitant wastage, yields a very poor return. In the West, taxation killed the towns and trade and finally alienated the rural population. The house was ready to fall when someone knocked at the door.

FEUDAL SOCIETY

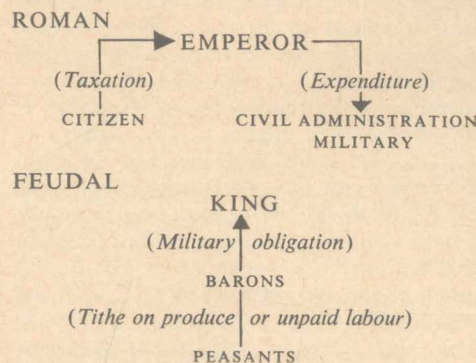
To escape the rapacity of the Roman tax collector, peasants in the later days of the Roman Empire often put themselves under the protection of the biggest of the local landowners. In return for the title to the peasant's land, the landowner

guarded the civil interests of his client and as far as possible shielded him from taxes. This seems a hard bargain from the peasant's point of view, for he surrendered his freehold and became a tenant whom the landlord could evict at will; and it is a telling measure of the burden of taxation that in the last century of the Western Empire the freeholding peasantry voluntarily liquidated itself. The landlord gained all round. He tended to take his increasing rent in produce where possible, for the less money there was about, the less the tax-gatherer took. It became necessary for him to live on his land and not in a distant town, and he soon came to administer the everyday life of his estate and its practically rightless peasantry as though the central authority did not exist.

The Germans who overran the West were fighting men, owing allegiance to the head of their band which they had expressed in an oath at the beginning of the campaign. In an era of continuous warfare, it might have been given to the same man for many years and there was a growing tendency for the successful leader of a tribal group of war-bands to become accepted as a permanent King. Previously, the Kingship had been a temporary post, created only to answer a sudden emergency, and even when it became life-long it was not at first a prerogative of any one house. The rules of succession evolved slowly as an inflexible system proved the simplest method of avoiding a sanguinary contest at the coronation. By then, the Germans were largely settled on Roman land and the members of war-band had become landowners. They still owed an obligation of military service in time of trouble to the chief of the old war-band and he to the King. The peasants passively accepted the arbitrary rule of the new landowner and paid him rent in kind or in labour in return for his protection. They probably found him cheaper to support than a Roman

whose standard of living was related to city life; his protection extended into the military sphere where the Roman had been impotent.

The society formed by this fusion of late Roman and German systems is called feudal. It is essentially a replacement of law and money by obligation and tithe. The original Roman ideal of government and the feudal one can be schematically compared thus:



The difference between the two is, however, greater than this, for whereas the government was only a part of the Roman's life, feudalism permeated a medieval man's existence. The Romans distinguished, as we do now, between freeholder and tenant. To a Frenchman of the eleventh century, everyone, baron or peasant, held his fief¹ as a tenant, for to keep it he had to render dues of some sort (produce, labour, military service) to his overlord. Yet on the other hand, while he rendered his dues, he could not be evicted from his fief and he could pass it on to his heirs, so that in some ways he held it outright. There was thus a complete fusion of economic and political obligation in the reciprocal relationship of fief-giver and holder, lord and vassal.

'Barons' in the feudal diagram requires subdivision, for the oath taken by the smallest barons (knights) referred to their local leader, his to a provincial superior, and only the biggest barons owed allegiance direct to the King. Also the military obligation was purely defensive, and if a King wished to wage offensive war he had to attract followers by a promise of plunder or position. At home, quarrels between barons were continuous and often settled by force, though there was a tendency to request the arbitration of the King. A powerful personality at the top could make the whole system seem more closely knit than it was, but a King's actual power depended on the size of the royal domain – the land owned directly by him or by his own knights.

It will be seen that the great thing about feudalism was its cheapness. Though the justice administered within its framework was of a very inferior sort it did protect the peasant at minimal cost. Ultimately, the peasant depended on the good nature of his baron, and one has to have considerable faith in mankind to hope for a disinterested decision when, for example, a rent tribunal is composed entirely of landlords. But the later history of the Roman Empire had proved that justice can cost more than it is worth, and the feudal system came as a relief to a poverty-stricken Europe. By Carolingian times, it had begun to be formalized² and was working fairly well.

1. Usually land, but not always. A court or military appointment could equally be a fief, and once you start to think in this weird way it is difficult to draw the line anywhere.

2. The earlier German Kingdoms in Western Europe still possessed a considerable amount of the Roman machinery of government and for a long time Kings' representatives (counts) were appointed for each administrative district. As the appointment soon became hereditary and the local barons could obtain from the King an 'immunity' which guaranteed their independence, count became merely another feudal title.

However, from its particulate nature, feudalism was unsuitable for large Empires and the final Carolingian flowering was bound to wither. In fact, in this the feudal system was self-correcting, for if there were two or more sons the King's inheritance was always divided between them.

For reasons of economy, the Byzantines too toyed with feudal institutions. They set up peasant communities on state land which returned military service instead of rent. On occasion they even swallowed their feeling that it was dangerous to give the civil and military administration of an area to a single man and split the Empire into baronial-type units. But the magnates were always subject to a strict state control, and in the end the Empire always reverted to a tax-paying peasantry and a professional army.

The feudal system began to decline when, around 1000, Europe became sufficiently wealthy to afford a limited return to centralized government. The two Norman Kingdoms led the way, the Norman genius being assisted by the previous history of the lands they conquered. In England, the Roman element had been nearly exterminated in the slow Anglo-Saxon advance and the land repopled by immigrants from Germany. The result was a society akin to the primitive German, and though later influences from the continent caused a superficial feudalization there was never the same outlook as there was in France. The Normans who won England, being few, could only hope to hold their prize if they observed a military discipline and, although he utilized feudal forms, William in fact organized the new state in a manner that made him the effective authority throughout the land. Southern Italy had been recently Byzantine when seized by Guiscard and it was easy for him to revive the machinery of autocracy, though again the terminology was largely feudal. The small size of these kingdoms suited them for

the role they played in re-introducing centralization. They did not strain the simple communications of the times, and they showed that, on such a scale at least, the new method of government was economical and efficient. As the national income in the West continued to rise and money returned to a dominant place in everyday life, the deficiencies of feudalism became more obvious. It became harder to bear with the local eccentricities that were its inevitable adjunct, to circumvent its inflexibility, and to counter its basic lawlessness. The merchants and the peasants found their champion in the King, who, by hair-splitting insistence on his feudal rights and by revival of decayed precedent, often managed to wear down the unsubordinate baronage or to drive them to a revolt in which they could be destroyed. Royal propaganda encouraged the growth of national as opposed to provincial patriotism; it appealed to the memory of Roman greatness and Roman law. To the end of the Middle Ages, however, the size of the area in which such a process could be more than temporarily successful remained limited. France corresponded to the maximum. The German Empire was well above it and ultimately the centrifugal forces split it into a maze of big and little fiefs whose histories of devouring and dividing are like the circular stories of pond life.

Merchant and monarch were both concerned to limit the power of the baronage and, as this task required their active alliance, the basic fissure between the interests of the two rarely showed during the Middle Ages. When the feudal system produced a complete fragmentation of authority, and where the towns were large and rich, the richest and most powerful merchants could set up an oligarchical government of their own. The republics of Novgorod and Venice are examples of the type of urban plutocracy that resulted, and

there were others in Germany, Italy, and north Russia. Even in the bloom of their prosperity, such city states were always liable to capture by an indigenous or foreign despot, and of them all only Venice, the wealthiest and the best defended by nature, managed to preserve her freedom.

The oligarchy was as far along the road towards democracy as medieval man ever saw. In most countries, the vast mass of the population was peasantry, sullen and asking only to be left alone. Extreme wretchedness occasioned a few hopeless risings (France 1357, Germany 1450) of blind bestial fury; in England, the only disturbance was a riot for better wages (1381) which was as politically dumb as these. Similarly, the only explosions of the urban proletariat came in times of depression and, though in this case revolts in Flanders (1328) and Florence (1379) did lead to the temporary erection of 'popular' governments, these failed because the miseries they were supposed to alleviate were caused by economic factors rather than misrule. There was never any spontaneous emotion in favour of democracy in the Middle Ages and it was only in the sickness of the state that such aberrations were seen.

THE NOMADS

Although nomadism is a more primitive state than agriculturalism it is scarcely less specialized, and in the medieval period nomad societies often possessed a culture comparable in level of attainment to that in the contemporary settled communities. Flocks of sheep, goats, and horses provide all the raw materials necessary for a simple life and a good many luxuries too. Indeed, in wealth the nomad often exceeded the agriculturalist, for, if his pasture was poor in quality, it was nearly limitless in extent, and while he could keep moving his herds could be of great size.

The ability to move far and fast was the key-

note of the nomad's existence and the root of his success in war. Napoleon's dictum of military 'momentum' states that the real strength of an army is the product of its size and speed. Nomad armies, in which every man was not only horsed but had a spare mount in tow, could move at a speed that for the era was phenomenal. Because of this mobility they gave a totally misleading impression of enormous numbers, and the word horde, originally a term for a Turko-Mongol regiment, came to mean an innumerable swarm. This erroneous impression was strengthened by the nomads' locust-like capacity for thorough destruction which stemmed partly from the harshness of steppe and desert life, partly from their compelling hate and fear of the ever-multiplying peasants. Terror spread before a nomad advance and did much to prepare the way for victory.

There is another analogy with locusts which is worth pursuing: locusts usually live out their lives as solitary grasshoppers in the areas of scrub which are scattered through the desert. A succession of good years causes an enlargement of the scrub islands and consequently of the locust population; if the next year is catastrophically bad, the islands shrink to a fraction of their original size and the locusts are crowded together. The sight of hundreds of others of his kind, milling about in front of him, stimulates the individual locust to metamorphose. When the change to the migratory form is complete, the whole swarm rises in a cloud from the island they have eaten bare and sets out for pastures new.

How big a part such purely climatic causes played in initiating nomadic movements is debatable. Attempts have been made to relate the history of Asiatic movement to a cyclical desiccation of the continent, but probably the mechanism of explosive migration is much too sensitive to be a guide to long-term fluctuations. It is obvious,

however, that physical factors of this type were responsible for much of the unrest that at times took hold of the nomadic world and which is usually described in purely political terms.

Of the four great nomadic nations, the Arabs, Berbers, Turks, and Mongols, the first two have histories which are part of the greater story of Islam. Their successes led them to give up nomadism and settle on the lands they had conquered and though occasionally new tribes (Murabits, Qarmatians) swept from the desert to overthrow the Empires established by their forebears, there was never any attempt to impose the desert way of life on the settled communities of the Near-East area. The Turks and Mongols were far more intolerant and nearly always ignored the habits of the populations they made themselves masters of. They regarded irrigation works and other means of increasing the fertility of the land as impediments to grazing and only desired to turn the soil back to pasture. They had a simple answer to the problem of surplus population which such a drop in productivity entailed.

The military prowess of the Turko-Mongols and the habitually ruthless way in which it was exploited brought considerable gains to the nomadic world. The Huns, Avars, and Magyars in turn brought the Hungarian steppe within the Asiatic orbit, the Seljuks did the same for Anatolia, while the borders of the steppe were nearly always under nomad domination and the writ of the great Khans extended far beyond. Yet at the end of the Middle Ages, the struggle was going against the nomad simply because pastoralism can support only a small population. As is most evident in the struggle between China and the nomads on her northern border, it was the reproductive superiority of the agriculturalist that won the day. The expanding mass of Chinese continually overflowed the wall that had been built to keep the

Tartar out, and no massacre could more than momentarily stop the numerical aggression of the peasantry. The nomad might appear in hordes before the eyes of the terrified; to the nomad, the constant multiplication of his enemies was a sober fact that in the end must squeeze him out of existence. When the townsmen's technology ended the military superiority of the nomad, the battle had already been won. Hungary had been incorporated into Christendom and the Turks of Anatolia were tilling the fields they had desolated. Ottomans and Timurids, the last Turkish conquerors, built their armies around an infantry core.

*

This book does not pretend to be one of original scholarship or research; it is a compilation. In the often tedious work involved in bringing it to press I have been much assisted by the encouragement of my brother Brian McEvedy, by the informed and erudite comment of Peter Fison, by the secretarial efficiency of Kate McKinnon Wood, and by the general and essential aid furnished by my wife.

A NOTE ON MOUNTAINS AND TERRAIN

Rivers, the only physical features shown in the base map of this book, are often chosen by man as his boundaries, but mountain barriers impose themselves on political geography and consequently deserve at least equal attention. Unfortunately they are impossible to display unobtrusively and have had to be relegated to this map in company with an equally necessary indication of the general character of the terrain.

The simplest and most convincing examples of mountain frontiers are the Pyrenees and Alps, which partially seal off the Iberian and Italian peninsulas. Minor ranges isolate Bohemia; the Carpathians give Hungary a natural border in the east; the Byzantines were able to recuperate from the defeats of the eighth century by sheltering behind the Taurus. Some ranges of equal height were of less importance. The Atlas merely parallels the edge of the Sahara; the Iranian plateau rarely appears in political isolation because its master characteristically dominated neighbouring entities such as Mesopotamia; though Epirus occasionally escaped the rule of Constantinople thanks to the mountains between them, frontiers within the Balkans are more often the result of conflict between a sea power and a land power (Byzantines versus Slavs and Bulgars; Venetians versus Byzantines and Ottomans) than the outlines of natural territorial units; similarly the Apennines never perturbed the habitually transverse division of Italy. But a look through the book will enable the reader to make his own deductions.

In early medieval times, the contrast between Europe, with the major part of its land potentially arable, and the lands of the south Mediterranean littoral and Near East, with only occasional strips of good land, was less striking than it might seem.

The area actually under cultivation in the West was only a fraction of the possible, the rest being forest, and at any one time half the cleared land was lying fallow. In Egypt and Mesopotamia the rivers brought not only water but fertilizing silt, and in the strong sun the yields were enormously higher¹ and populations correspondingly denser. After 1000, forest clearance in Europe tipped the balance towards Christendom (previous to that date it probably only equalled the abandonment of exhausted land); whereas the population of the near East at the end of the medieval period was probably less and certainly no more than it had been in Roman times, the western provinces showed an increase of the order of 50–100 per cent and Eastern Europe, one may guess, an even greater rise. The conifer forests of northern latitudes remained, of course, entirely virgin and insignificantly inhabited.

1. In Mesopotamia over-irrigation had its dangers as it could in time raise the water table, which is saline, to a level at which crops were affected. It has been suggested that this, rather than Hulagu's visitation, was the cause of Mesopotamia's decline in the late medieval period.



Augustus, the first Roman Emperor (27 B.C. – A.D. 14), either considering that the Empire had reached its natural limits or embittered by his own failure to subdue Germany, advised his successors against further expansion, and this advice was, by and large, followed. The conquest of Germany would have eliminated a dangerous enemy and shortened the Roman line, but it was never attempted again, though in the century following the death of Augustus the Romans had a clear military superiority. The few extra provinces which were acquired in this period were of little value and with one exception had been lost again by the date of the first map in this series. The exception was Britain, whose conquest, begun by Claudius (41–54), was probably necessary to protect the coast of France. (It also meant that the Romans had practically completed their conquest of the Celts. Of Spain, North Italy, France, and the British Isles, only Ireland and Pictish Scotland remained free.) The Empire was on the defensive after the death of Trajan (98–117), but for a long while it maintained its territory and, repulsed in their many attempts to break through the Rhine–Danube frontier, the teeming Germans turned east for the needed *Lebensraum*. Prominent in this movement were the Goths, who in the third century reached the Black Sea where they established two confederacies, that of the Visigoths (West Goths) and that of the Ostrogoths (East Goths). The Ostrogoths adopted a nomadic way of life, suited to the steppe, between the Dnieper and the Don, which was the centre of their power, and became masters of a vast tract of country which reached back to their original Baltic homelands. Then as now the Slavs formed the basic population of Eastern Europe and European Russia; only the few who fled northwards among the Finnish peoples and preserved their freedom are visible in this map. As the Ostrogoths at the

peak of their power, under the near-legendary king Ermanarich, advanced beyond the Don, they came into contact with the Alans, an Iranian people nomadizing in the Caucasus, and with the Huns, who were the vanguard of the Asiatics.

The Goths were the strongest of the Germans and the most adventurous; in Germany itself there was no nation of comparable power. The tribes were antagonistic to each other and disunited within themselves. Only in times of crisis did a tribe elect a king; it was the political and organizational superiority of the Romans which was the most important factor in the preservation of the Empire in later centuries. The Frankish and Alemannian confederations were the most troublesome; the tribes not actually on the frontier were little known, although the Angles and Saxons raided the coasts of Britain and France. The Frisians, however, who were the main power in the North Sea, were friendly to the Romans.

The Eastern frontier of the Roman Empire was protected in its northern part by the buffer states of Lazica,¹ Iberia, and Armenia, but in Mesopotamia the Roman and Persian Empires were in direct contact. Persia, traditionally hostile, was the only state that rivalled Rome in stability and civilization; between the two there were frequent if typically indecisive wars. East of the Persians were the Kushans, holding the valley of the Oxus and extending into both central Asia and India.

The Arabian and African frontiers of the Roman Empire correspond with the edges of the Arabian and African deserts. The Arabs and Berbers who inhabited these inhospitable places were a nuisance to the Empire but never more than a local danger.

If the frontiers of the Roman Empire had changed little in three and a half centuries, the Empire itself was very different from that of Augustus. The requirements of the military,

always burdensome, had become crushing as the population and power of Rome's enemies had increased. Towards the end of the third century, the Empire had nearly disintegrated under the attacks of Germans and Persians, and, although it was saved, the reorganization by Diocletian (284–305) created what was really a new Empire. Theoretically at least, the whole economy was frozen and then taxed to the limit to provide for the increasingly expensive professional soldiery. Defence became the prime concern and in consequence a good general was the best Emperor. As a corollary of this, the separate frontiers required separate commands, and it was usual to divide the Empire into western and eastern halves in line with the division between Latin and Greek speaking populations. The victory of Christianity, which further transformed the Empire, is dealt with in a separate section.

In contradiction to these various trends, the year 362 saw the Empire united and officially reverting to paganism under the Emperor Julian. A competent general, he had decisively defeated the last Franco–Alemannic invasion of France, though he allowed some of the Franks to settle in Belgium, retaining their tribal organization while acknowledging the supremacy of Rome (358). This formula (the term '*foederatii*' was later used to describe such tribes) had already been applied to the North British and was to be used increasingly in the next fifty years; but Julian probably regarded it as a temporary expedient, necessary because first internal dissensions and then Persian attacks required his presence and army in the East.

1. Lazica and Iberia were the twin Kingdoms of the Georgians, and had been virtually christianized. The more primitive Abasgians, also of Georgian stock, remained heathen.

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A.D.362



Julian's expedition against Persia ended in disaster. He himself was killed and the army only extricated after his successor had signed a treaty by which the Empire ceded the Eastern half of Roman Mesopotamia, while Iberia and Armenia became Persian vassals (364). By and large the Romans kept these terms, though they found it difficult to resist interfering in Armenia. In the end the kingdom was divided between the two with the Persians getting four-fifths of the country (387). The Romans accepted this bad bargain with relief, for it was by this time essential to have peace on the eastern frontier. Their misfortunes there were only a moon-cast shadow of what was taking place in Europe.

In 372, the steady eastward expansion of the Ostrogoths provoked an explosive reaction from the Huns of the Volga steppe. Ermanarich saw his armies swallowed up by the nomad hordes and his great empire crumble away. The Huns rolled forward to the Danube, crushing the Visigoths and enslaving the Gepids, who had the misfortune to occupy the Hungarian steppe (375). There they settled down with their flocks, lords of a pasture that stretched back to the Caspian. In three years they had obliterated a century of German expansion.

While the Gepids remained where they were as vassals of the Huns, the Goths and Asding Vandals applied to the Roman Empire for sanctuary. The Romans allotted them lands along the Danube frontier, but acted so overbearingly that by 378 the Visigoths had broken out in revolt against their new masters. The army that the Eastern Emperor led to quell the revolt was annihilated by the Gothic cavalry at Adrianople. Cavalry had demonstrated that it was the decisive arm and the legions were never resurrected; as the Romans had little cavalry, their army was from now on largely composed of German or Hunnish mercenaries,

and it was not long before barbarian generals were wielding considerable political power in consequence of this dependence. The Visigoths, unable to take fortified towns, could not pluck the fruits of their victory and were temporarily pacified by a mixture of diplomacy and blockade (382). They broke out again in 396 to be similarly re-settled, this time in Epirus (north-west Greece), a position from which they could advance on either half of the Empire. In 402-3 they invaded Italy only to be beaten back by the skill of Stilicho the Vandal, who commanded the army of the West. While they recovered in Yugoslavia, Stilicho was able to defeat a formidable coalition of Ostrogoths, Quadi, and Asding Vandals (405), but to defend Italy he was forced to strip the Rhine frontier of troops. The next year, a coalition of Marcomanni, Quadi,¹ and Asding and Siling Vandals, together with a clan of Alans who had fled from the Hun-dominated Caucasus, moved westward towards the now defenceless province of France. On the last day of 406 they crossed the frozen Rhine at Mainz.

1. The German tribes along the upper Danube, the Alemanni, Marcomanni, and Quadi, were known collectively as Suevi. In following the fortunes of the coalition of 406 in subsequent maps, the term is used to denote the Marcomanno-Quadic contingent.