

**The decline of the West**

The BARBARIAN tribes first crossed the Rhine in AD406. There had been regular raids for as long as the Empire had existed, but now the worn out Roman army and its inefficient leaders couldn't resist any longer. German tribesmen poured into the Empire looking for land to settle in. In 410 they reached Rome itself, and stripped it of many of its treasures.

The government in Rome sent a famous message to the British leaders. The British had appealed for help to fight off barbarian tribes who were making regular raids on the English coast. The British got the message back, 'You must look to your own defences.' In other words, the Romans meant 'We've got enough problems of our own in Rome. Please look after your own problems yourselves.'

In 476 the last western Emperor, Romulus Augustulus, lost his power. A barbarian King, Ordo vocar, took over Italy and ruled his kingdom from Rome. Throughout Western Europe the Roman influence gradually, rather than suddenly, gave way to the new influence of the barbarian tribes.

1. Compare Source 8 with Source 3 on the previous page. Describe the changes that have happened in 100 years.

▼ **SOURCE 8** What had happened to the Roman Empire by AD476

► **SOURCE 9** This ivory box, showing an attack on a Roman-held town, was made by Frankish craftsmen in the fifth century

2. Look at Source 9. Can you find:
- the Frankish attackers
  - archers falling from the walls of the town
  - townspeople sheltering in a church.



**The survival of the East**

After the Emperor Constantine moved the capital of the Empire to Constantinople in AD330, the Eastern Empire was wealthier and more populated than the West. The Pope, head of the Christian Church (now the official religion of the Empire), was in Rome, but the important affairs of the Empire were dealt with from Constantinople. And although the Eastern Empire suffered economic problems and barbarian attacks as well, it survived for a further 1000 years. It remained a powerful force around the Mediterranean until it was overrun by invaders in 1453.

The story of the Eastern Empire, under its new name, the Byzantine Empire, will be picked up again in the third unit in this book.

1. What date would you choose as the date of the end of the Roman Empire? Here are some possibilities. You might want to add a different date altogether.

**395:** when the Empire officially split in two  
**410:** when Rome was sacked by barbarian invaders

**476:** when the last western Emperor was removed

**1453:** when the Eastern Empire was destroyed.

Take a vote in the class to see which is the favourite date.