**Reading A**

The Germanic invaders of the western empire seized or extorted through the threat of force the vast majority of the territories in which they settled, without any formal agreement on how to share resources with their new Roman subjects. The impression given by some recent historians that most Roman territory was formally ceded to them as part of treaty arrangements is quite simply wrong. Evidence shows that conquest or surrender to the threat of force was definitely the norm, not peaceful settlement.

The city of Rome was repeatedly besieged by the Goths, before being captured and sacked over a 3-day period in August 410. During one siege the inhabitants were forced to progressively reduce their rations and eat only half the previous daily allowance, and later as scarcity continued, only a third. When there was no means of relief, and their food was exhausted, plague not unexpectedly succeeded famine. Corpses lay everywhere. The eventual fall of the city, according to another account, occurred because a rich lady ‘felt pity for the Romans who were being killed off by starvation and who were already turning to cannibalism’, and so opened the gates to the enemy.’

Unsurprisingly, the defeats and disasters of the first half of the 5th century shocked the Roman world. This reaction can be charted most fully in the perplexed response of Christian writers to some obvious and awkward questions. Why had God, so soon after the suppression of the public pagan cults (in 391), unleashed the scourge of the barbarians on a Christian empire; and why did the horrors of invasion afflict the just as harshly as they did the unjust? The scale of the literary response to these difficult questions, the tragic realities that lay behind it, and the ingenious nature of some of the answers that were produced, are all worth examining in detail. They show very clearly that the fifth century was a time of real crisis, rather than one of accommodation and peaceful adjustment.” It was an early drama in the West, the capture of the city of Rome itself in 410, that created the greatest shock waves within the Roman world. In military terms, and in terms of lost resources, this event was of very little consequence, and it certainly did not spell the immediate end of west Roman power.

The pagans now, not unreasonably, attributed Roman failure to the abandonment by the State of the empire’s traditional gods, who for centuries had provided so much security and success. The most sophisticated, radical, and influential answer to this problem was that offered by Augustine, who in 413 (initially in direct response to the sack of Rome) began his monumental City of God.” Here he successfully sidestepped the entire problem of the failure of the Christian empire by arguing that all human affairs are flawed, and that a true Christian is really a citizen of Heaven. Abandoning centuries of Roman pride in their divinely ordained state (including Christian pride during the 4th century), Augustine argued that, in the grand perspective of Eternity, a minor event like the sack of Rome paled into insignificance.

1. **According to Ward Perkins, what was the main cause of the fall of the Roman Empire?**
2. **Using prior knowledge, explain ONE piece of historical evidence; not provided in the text that can support Ward-Perkin’s interpretation.**
3. **Explain ONE social, economic, or political factor; not explicitly referenced in the text; that led to the decline and fall of the Roman Empire.**

**Reading B**

Roman military dominance over the Germanic peoples was considerable, but never absolute and unshakeable. The Romans had always enjoyed a number of important advantages: they had well-built and imposing fortifications; factory-made weapons that were both standardized and of a high quality; an impressive infrastructure of roads and harbors; the logistical organization necessary to supply their army, whether at base or on campaign; and a tradition of training that ensured disciplined and coordinated action in battle, even in the face of adversity. Furthermore, Roman mastery of the sea, at least in the Mediterranean, was unchallenged and a vital aspect of supply. It was these sophistications, rather than weight of numbers, that created and defended the empire …

The West was lost mainly through failure to engage the invading forces successfully and to drive them back. This caution in the face of the enemy, and the ultimate failure to drive him out, are best explained by the severe problems that there were in putting together armies large enough to feel confident of victory. Avoiding battle led to a slow attrition of the Roman position, but engaging the enemy on a large scale would have risked immediate disaster on the throw of a single dice …

In my opinion, the key internal element in Rome’s success or failure was the economic well-being of its taxpayers. This was because the empire relied for its security on a professional army, which in turn relied on adequate funding. The 4th-century Roman army contained as many as 600,000 soldiers, all of whom had to be salaried, equipped, and supplied. The number of troops under arms, and the levels of military training and equipment that could be lavished on them, were all determined by the amount of cash that was available. As in a modern state, the contribution in tax of tens of millions of unarmed subjects financed an elite defense corps of full-time fighters. Consequently, again as in a modern state, the strength of the army was closely linked to the well-being of the underlying tax base. Indeed, in Roman times this relationship was a great deal closer than it is today. Military expenditure was by far the largest item in the imperial budget, and there were no other massive departments of state, such as ‘Health’ or ‘Education’, whose spending could be cut when necessary in order to protect ‘Defense’; nor did the credit mechanisms exist in Antiquity that would have allowed the empire to borrow substantial sums of money in an emergency. Military capability relied on immediate access to taxable wealth.

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**Reading C**

Invasions were not the only problem faced by the western empire; it was also badly affected during parts of the 5th century by civil war and social unrest.

We know that what the empire required during these years was a concerted and united effort against the Goths (then marching through much of Italy and southern Gaul, and sacking Rome itself in 410), and against the Vandals, Sueves, and Alans (who entered Gaul at the very end of 406 and Spain in 409). What it got instead were civil wars, which were often prioritized over the struggle with the barbarians.

As we have seen, the revolts by the Bacaudae in the West can partly be understood as an attempt by desperate provincials to defend themselves, after the central government had failed to protect them. Roman civilians had to relearn the arts of war in this period, and slowly did so. As early as 407-8 two wealthy landowners in Spain raised a force of slaves from their own estates, in support of their relative the emperor Honorius. But it would, of course, take time to convert a disarmed and demilitarized population into an effective fighting force.

Interestingly, the most successful resistance to Germanic invasion was in fact offered by the least Romanized areas of the empire: the Basque country; Brittany; and western Britain. Brittany and the Basque country were only ever half pacified by the invaders, while north Wales can lay claim to being the very last part of the Roman Empire to fall to the barbarians-when it fell to the English under Edward I in 1282. It seems that it was in these ‘backward’ parts of the empire that people found it easiest to re-establish tribal structures and effective military resistance.

Unlike the Romans, who relied for their military strength on a professional army (and therefore on tax), freeborn Germanic males looked on fighting as a duty, a mark of status, and, perhaps, even a pleasure. As a result, large numbers of them were practiced in warfare-a very much higher proportion of the population than amongst the Romans. Within reach of the Rhine and Danube frontiers lived tens of thousands of men who had been brought up to think of war as a glorious and manly pursuit, and who had the physique and basic training to put these ideals into practice. Fortunately for the Romans, their innate bellicosity was, however, to a large extent counterbalanced by another, closely related, feature of tribal societies-disunity, caused by fierce feuds, both between tribes and within them.

The different groups of incomers were never united, and fought each other, sometimes bitterly, as often as they fought the `Romans’– just as the Roman side often gave civil strife priority over warfare against the invaders.” When looked at in detail, the ‘Germanic invasions’ of the fifth century break down into a complex mosaic of different groups, some imperial, some local, and some Germanic, each jockeying for position against or in alliance with the others, with the Germanic groups eventually coming out on top.

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**Reading D**

How did the East Survive? The eastern half of the Roman empire survived the Germanic and Iiunnic attacks of this period, to flourish in the 5th and early 6th centuries; indeed it was only a thousand years later, with the Turkish capture of Constantinople in 1453, that it came to an end. No account of the fall of the western empire can be fully satisfactory if it does not discuss how the East managed to resist very similar external pressure. Here, I believe, it was primarily good fortune, rather than innately greater strength, that was decisive.

The Cost of Peace. The new arrivals demanded and obtained a share of the empire’s capital wealth, which at this date meant primarily land. We know for certain that many of the great landowners of post-Roman times were of Germanic descent, even though we have very little information as to how exactly they had obtained their wealth at the expense of its previous owners.

The Germanic settlers rapidly used their power to acquire more wealth.

The Germanic peoples entered the empire with no ideology that they wished to impose, and found it most advantageous and profitable to work closely, within the well-established and sophisticated structures of Roman life. The Romans as a group unquestionably lost both wealth and power in order to meet the needs of a new, and dominant, Germanic aristocracy. But they did not lose everything, and many individual Romans were able to prosper under the new dispensation.

In the case of the Anglo-Saxons and others who bordered Roman territory by land or sea, the number of immigrants was probably substantially larger, since here the initial conquests could readily he followed up by secondary migration. However, except perhaps in regions that were right on the frontiers, it is unlikely that the numbers involved were so large as to dispossess many at the level of the peasantry. Many smallholders in the new kingdoms probably continued to hold their land much as before, except that much of the tax and rent that they paid will now have gone to enrich Germanic masters.

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