The fall of the Roman Empire has been perhaps the most debated topic amongst historians. Many historians believe that the fall of Rome was simply a transition to the rule of Germanic tribes; others assert that it was due to military invasions. Regardless, it is indubitable that the Empire not only commanded a vast army but also needed to provide for its soldiers, whether monetarily or otherwise. Historians and economists have shown that the Roman economy suffered from significant monetary inflation, particularly in the latter half of the third century. This inflation was primarily due to the devaluation of currency. Moreover, the Roman Empire paid for its army partially through inflating the Empire’s currency. The practice of absolving military debt through inflation significantly contributed to, if not directly caused, the eventual collapse of the Roman economy.

Money is simply a commonly accepted medium of exchange within a given market. Guido Hülsmann lists several examples of items that have been used as a medium of exchange throughout history, including cattle, tobacco, and precious metals, with the latter being the most prominent in highly developed societies.\(^1\) In a free market, money itself should be a commodity. Further, Hülsmann states that the value of money is dependent on its nonmonetary value within that same economy.\(^2\) It follows that money, as just another commodity upon the market, is subject to market forces such as supply and demand.

The Roman Empire, which was a well-developed society even in comparison to the third world countries of today, adopted gold, silver, bronze and copper as media of

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1 Jörg Guido Hülsmann, *The Ethics of Money Production* (Auburn, AL: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2008), 22-23  
2 Jörg Guido Hülsmann, *The Ethics of Money Production* (Auburn, AL: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2008), 23
exchange. The monetary system of the Roman Empire under Augustus consisted of five different coins which were created from those four precious metals. The most valuable coin was the aureus, which was comprised of eight grams of pure gold. The denarius was made of three and nine tenths grams of silver; twenty five of these were equivalent to an aureus. The sestertius was worth one quarter of a denarius and consisted of twenty seven and three tenths grams of bronze. The dupondius, also composed of bronze, was half the value and weight of the sestertius. The least valuable coin, the As, was approximately ten and ninety two hundredths grams of copper; two Asses equaled a dupondius.  

Perhaps the most important monetary phenomenon is that of inflation. Hülsmann defines inflation as “an extension of the nominal quantity of any medium of exchange beyond the quantity that would have been produced on the free market.” It can occur through the debasement of currency, the issuing of fractional reserve certificates, or the minting of excess fiat money. Inflation erodes the purchasing power of money and results in the increase of the prices of goods and services on the market. The changes in the purchasing power of money are due to supply and demand. An increase in the supply of money relative to demand causes the demand for money to fall. It follows that, since money is now valued less, it takes more money to purchase a desired good or service.

Debasement of currency occurs via the reduction of the content of fine metal which a coin made from or simply by affixing a higher nominal value to a given coin. Doing this creates the false impression that the debased coin is a sound one. Until the

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4 Jörg Guido Hülsmann, The Ethics of Money Production (Auburn, AL: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2008), 85
5 Jörg Guido Hülsmann, The Ethics of Money Production (Auburn, AL: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2008), 89
advent of the printing press, this was the simplest and most effective way to inflate the money supply.⁶

Governments will engage in inflationary measures in order to benefit from it. Throughout the course of history, governments have been the main benefactors of inflation.⁷ One of the most common reasons to inflate the money supply is to gain revenue. This reason also is applicable when the government is burdened with a seemingly insurmountable debt. Rather than raise funds through means such as borrowing or taxation, a government will often inflate the money supply instead.

War, unsurprisingly, can lead to a massive national debt. The government will then try to eradicate the war debt through a variety of measures, including inflation. The link between military spending and inflation is widely acknowledged to exist by economists from many different schools of thought.⁸ The state does this through inflation in order to hide the expenditures from its citizenry, according to Joseph Salerno.⁹ It conceals costs to prevent the war from growing unpopular in the eyes of the public.¹⁰ Inflation also impacts the market in a gradual fashion whereas the effects of taxation or borrowing are seen immediately.

Inflation has been used to finance the war effort in many different circumstances throughout history. During World War I, the belligerent nations left the gold standard and

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⁶ Jörg Guido Hülsmann, The Ethics of Money Production (Auburn, AL: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2008), 90
⁷ Jörg Guido Hülsmann, The Ethics of Money Production (Auburn, AL: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2008), 103
⁹ Joseph T. Salerno, Money, Sound and Unsound (Auburn, AL: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2010), 244
¹⁰ Joseph T. Salerno, Money, Sound and Unsound (Auburn, AL: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2010), 245
began inflating the monetary supply to finance the war.\textsuperscript{11} The United States have gone through a period of higher inflation after entering each of its major wars. In the three years after World War I, World War II, the Korean War, and Vietnam War, the inflation rate was over twice as high as it was in the three years preceding the wars.\textsuperscript{12} Inflation also occurred at a high rate following the French Revolution.\textsuperscript{13}

Understanding the theory of bimetallism is instrumental to comprehending the economy of the Roman Empire. As previously mentioned, the Roman Empire utilized five different types of coins from gold, silver, bronze, and copper. The aureus and denarius, made of gold and silver, respectively, were the primary coins used by Romans. Bimetallism occurs when the state sets an arbitrary exchange rate between the two types of money.\textsuperscript{14} Eventually one type of metal becomes undervalued in relation to the other type of metal. If the state stipulates a legal exchange ratio, the overvalued money drives out the undervalued money. Augustus’ regulations fixed the exchange rates between gold and silver through mandating that one aureus was equivalent to twenty five denarii. Although this was the actual exchange rate at the time of Augustus, the market ratio between gold and silver changed over the course of the Roman Empire. This can also happen when the metal of old coins is worn away. The phenomenon in which bad money drives out good money is known as Gresham’s Law.

\textsuperscript{11} Joseph T. Salerno, \textit{Money, Sound and Unsound} (Auburn, AL: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2010), 253
\textsuperscript{14} Murray N. Rothbard, \textit{Man, Economy, and State with Power and Market} (Auburn, AL: Ludwig von Mises Institute), 899
The Roman Empire possessed an extremely powerful economy for its time even from its outset. The per capita GDP of the Roman Empire under Augustus is estimated by Ello Lo Cascio and Paolo Malanima to have been approximately $940 in 1990 United States Dollars, which is equivalent to $1,542.96, according to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics.\textsuperscript{15,16} The International Monetary Fund shows that the per capita GDP of Rome was just six dollars lower than the 2009 per capita GDP of Mongolia, nearly fifty percent higher than the per capita GDP of modern day India, and over nine times greater than the per capita GDP of Burundi in 2009.\textsuperscript{17}

The Roman Economy was also both far-reaching and productive, according to archaeological records. Even in the earliest days of the Roman Empire, there was a great assortment of goods—even items that were relatively unimportant in daily life—available on the marketplace.\textsuperscript{18} Historian Bryan Ward-Perkins wrote that “painstaking work by archaeologists” has shown that the Roman economy was sophisticated to the extent that a peasant in northern Italy “might eat off tableware from the area near Naples, store liquids in an amphora from North Africa, and sleep under a tiled roof.”\textsuperscript{19} He goes on to write that “the Roman economy was characterized, not only by an impressive luxury market, but

\textsuperscript{17} International Monetary Fund, \textit{Data and Statistics} (online), http://www.imf.org/external/data.htm (accessed September 21, 2010)
\textsuperscript{18} Bryan Ward-Perkins, \textit{The Fall of Rome} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 87
\textsuperscript{19} Bryan Ward-Perkins, \textit{The Fall of Rome} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 87-88
also by a very substantial middle and lower market for high-quality functional products.”

Most of the knowledge about the state of the Roman economy has been inferred from archaeological records, as there are few written records which exist from this time period. Pottery was found to have been heavily distributed across the Roman Empire even in the first century. The mass distribution of pottery implies that the early Roman Empire had an abundance of merchants, substantial infrastructure and capital goods—ports, boats, roads, carts—and that shipping costs were low enough to allow for trade throughout the Roman Empire to be a profitable venture.

Imperial finances were administered through three separate venues: the Fiscus, the Patrimonium, and the Res Privata. The Fiscus featured money that was collected from the various Roman provinces through taxation. The princeps was in control over the allocation of funds within the Fiscus. The Fiscus could never be used by the emperor for personal reasons. The second institute of public finance in the Roman Empire was the Patrimonium. The Patrimonium was a branch of financial administration which dealt with the personal funds of the emperors. The property within the Patrimonium included state property—mainly acquired via confiscation—and the princeps’ personal estate. The final branch was the Res Privata, which was a subset of the Patrimonium which specialized in property confiscation. The Res Privata rose to prominence after the accession of

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Severus, who confiscated large quantities of property from the followers of Albinus and Niger.  

Augustus, the first emperor of the Roman Empire, ruled from 27 B.C. to 14 A.D. Augustus was a proponent of free markets. He encouraged citizens to invest in infrastructure, reduced food subsidies, regularized tax rates, and reduced customs rates to approximately five percent. Taxes were assessed to individuals based upon the value of their property under Augustus; taxes were levied at a rate between 0.01 and 0.03 percent. Provinces also assessed a wealth tax of approximately one percent. The taxes were used primarily to pay for the military. Tiberus (14-37 A.D.) continued Augustus’ policies and wished to create a middle class through principles of free trade.

As the Roman Empire began to acquire more territory, the Empire’s demands for more revenue grew. Currency debasement began under Nero (54-68 A.D.) when he lowered the quantity of silver in the denarius to ninety percent. By the end of the reign of Trajan in 117 A.D., the denarius was composed of only eighty-five percent silver.

From a military standpoint, Rome had always been dominant over barbarian tribes. This does not imply that they were always victorious, however. The Roman military had several advantages over the barbarians, such as weapons of high quality, extensive military training, organization, infrastructure, and fortifications. While the

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Romans did not always have an advantage in terms of numbers, they consistently had the upper hand in battle because of their technological and strategic innovations.²⁶

The years from 161 to 305 were some of the most tumultuous in Roman history both economically and militarily. This period spans from the accession of Marcus Aurelius until the abdication of Diocletian and Maximian. Within this period, inflation ran rampant and the Roman Empire nearly collapsed. The main reason the government continued to inflate the money supply was in order to fund the military, which almost persistently fought throughout this period.

Marcus Aurelius came to power in the Roman Empire in the year 161. Upon his accession, he named Lucius Verus, his brother through adoption, a fellow ruler. Verus served as Marcus’ co-ruler until the former’s death in 169. Though the two were equal in title, Verus primarily deferred his power and judgment onto Marcus.²⁷ Marcus spent the majority of his time as Augustus defending the Roman Empire from external enemies. From 161 to 165, Rome was at war with the Parthians. Rome suffered losses in Armenia and Syria before defeating the Parthians in Armenia, and capturing the Parthian capital and Selucia. Though the Romans were able to permanently remove the Parthians from Armenia and northern Mesopotamia by 166, the Roman army suffered many casualties.²⁸ Despite the military victory, the Roman army returned from the East with a sickness that devastated the Empire. This pandemic, which is believed to be smallpox, killed approximately five million people.

Marcus quickly had to react to developing tensions in the north of the Empire prior to the situation in the east being fully resolved. In the northern part of the Empire, several barbarian tribes, most notably the Marcomanni, Quadi, and Iazyges, tried to push their way into Roman land. Rome was defeated in battle by the barbarians in both Noricum and Pannonia.

The Roman Empire had a difficult fighting back at this time because of the plague and the sheer monetary cost of the Parthian War. Thus, Marcus had to raise money in a way that historian Arthur Boak called “heroic.” First, he auctioned off his imperial treasures. Subsequently, he drafted gladiators, slaves, and hire mercenaries to boost the decimated Roman troops. However, Marcus also debased the currency even further; the silver content of the denarius slipped to just seventy five percent. After recruiting troops which he paid through personal and inflationary means, Marcus pushed the barbarians out of Roman territory. He defeated the Quadi in 172 and defeated the Marcomanni in the subsequent year.

By 175, Marcus had negotiated peace treaties with the Marcomanni, Quadi, and Iazyges. Meanwhile, there were uprisings in Gaul, Mauretania, and Egypt. In 177, Marcus appointed his sixteen-year-old son Lucius Aurelius Commodus as Augustus.

From 178-180, Marcus and Commodus again fought the Marcomanni and Quadi. On March 17, 180, Marcus died. His death made Commodus the sole Augustus.

After his father’s death, Commodus soon declared peace with the barbarian tribes in the north. Commodus proved to be a paranoid and altogether poor emperor; he was

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known for being not only selfish but also turned against the senatorial class.\textsuperscript{31} An economic depression set in under Commodus’ watch. This was partially due to his personal extravagant spending, which led to the creation of criminal gangs throughout Italy and Gaul. These gangs were so strong in Gaul that they began warring with the Roman government and captured major cities.\textsuperscript{32} Another reason given for the depression is the continuing devaluation of currency. The denarius was now between seventy two and seventy three percent silver.\textsuperscript{33} Commodus had continued to debase the denarius, which created a discrepancy between the value of the denarius and the value of the aureus.\textsuperscript{34} Commodus was assassinated in January of 193.

A period of turmoil followed the assassination of Commodus. Publius Helvius Pertinax was selected to become princeps by the Praetorian Guard. The senate approved of his nomination, but Pertinax was overthrown and murdered three months after his accession. His assassination was fueled by his harsh treatment of the Praetorian Guard and the poor state of the Roman Treasury.

After the death of Pertinax, the Praetorian Guard sold the office to Marcus Didius Julianus in exchange for 25,000 sesterces each.\textsuperscript{35} The corrupt way in which Julianus took power upset the army serving in the east and in the north. Publius Septimius Severus, a
prominent general of the army, refused to accept Julianus as a valid emperor and consequently stormed Rome. The senate ordered that Julianus was to be executed. Severus then became emperor.

Severus replaced the entire Praetorian Guard upon his accession. His reign was not secure even though his nomination for emperor was endorsed by the senate. Pescennius Niger had gained recognition by the eastern provinces while Clodius Albinus, a military leader in Britain, was also known to have had his eye on the principate. In order to avoid a crisis in Britain, Severus named Albinus as his successor.

The situation with Niger was not as easy to resolve as the dilemma with Albinus. Niger was in a position in which he could have easily cut off the flow of Egyptian resources—primarily grain—to Rome. This would have greatly harmed the Roman people and suffocated the scuffling Roman Economy. Severus subsequently waged war against Niger and defeated him in the spring of 194 at Issus. Severus then invaded Mesopotamia to put down a revolt at Osrhoene. In 196, Albinus again tried to claim the office of the principate. Albinus had gathered the support of some senators and named himself as the Augustus. Severus went to the frontier on the Danube to fight off Albinus’ forces. Albinus committed suicide in February of 197. However, this civil war had a large effect upon the Roman economy. The most prosperous city in the west of the Empire, Lugdunum, was completely destroyed. Military conflicts continued in 197 against the Parthians. The Second Parthian War raged until 199, when Roman forces destroyed the Parthian capital.
Severus had increased the size of the army to include three newly created legions. The payment of his troops during this time period increased by thirty three percent; this was not to reward them for winning the Second Parthian War so much as to adjust their pay due to inflation. Inflation had occurred fairly steadily from Augustus’ accession to the time of Severus’ rule at a rate of seven tenths of a percent per year; prices under Severus were approximately double what they were in the time of Augustus. He had reduced the silver content of the denarius to between fifty and sixty percent. He also tried to rectify the empty treasury which he inherited through confiscating the property of Albinius’ supporters.

In this time, there were signs of the imminent collapse of the economy. The army became increasingly large and therefore became significantly more expensive to maintain. The army had to build new roads for transportation and also had to build more bases; this greatly contributed to the increase in military expenditure. The army also was responsible for constructing a large amount of infrastructure and other public goods such as temples, baths, and theaters. Additionally, the army raised funds via taxation for healthcare and education. This increase in expenditure rendered the treasury bankrupt.

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The cost of government had simply grown too large to be paid for through the simple measure of taxation.\textsuperscript{41}

Moreover, the Roman Empire was reluctant to increase taxes in order to fund the military. This results from many riots that occurred in the very early Roman Empire from taxation, the most notable one being in Judea in 66. Rather than increase taxation, the emperors devalued currency in order to pay off the military debt.\textsuperscript{42}

Severus fought in one last battle. His two sons, Caracalla and Geta, accompanied him into a battle against the Caledonians in Britain in 208. Before his death in 211, Severus named his sons as his successors. Caracalla arranged to have his brother Geta murdered in 212. He raised the pay of soldiers by fifty percent in order to gain their favor.\textsuperscript{43} He, however, did not continue to debase the denarius to pay them; the silver content of the coins was fifty one percent.\textsuperscript{44} Caracalla attempted monetary reform through reducing the weights of the coins so as to restore the twenty five-to-one ratio between the denarius and the aureus.\textsuperscript{45} He also tried to introduce a new coin into the monetary system, but this effort failed to eradicate the inflationary tendencies of the Roman economy.\textsuperscript{46}

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In 213 Caracalla fought the Alemanni and in 214 went to the east to fight the Osrhoene and Armenians. He fought through the year 216 but was assassinated in 217 before he could carry out another assault on the region. Caracalla’s assassin, Marcus Opellius Macrinus, took control of the principate for one year prior to his own assassination, which was carried out by forces loyal to the Severan Dynasty.

Elagabalus was then named emperor by the Roman senate. He spent the majority of his time as ruler trying to convince the Roman people to adopt the sun god as their deity. His grandmother, realizing his ineptitude, forced Elagabalus to adopt his cousin, Severus Alexander, as Caesar. He balked at the proposition and was executed by the Praetorian Guard in 222.

Severus Alexander’s time as emperor was peaceful up until the latter four years of his reign. In 230 and 231, Artaxerxes of the Persian Empire began to invade Roman Mesopotamia. Alexander unsuccessfully attempted to negotiate peace with Artaxerxes. Alexander technically lost the war against the Persians, but the Persians had lost so many men that they could not take advantage of their victory. Upon returning to Rome in 233, he learned that the barbarian tribes in the north were applying pressure to the Roman frontier. He negotiated peace with the tribes, but the military lost respect for Alexander for doing so. The leader of the rebellion, Gaius Julius Verus Maximinus, had Alexander executed and took power.

The fifty years following the accession of Maximinus were even more brutal than the years leading up to Alexander’s assassination. The Roman Empire descended into a

period of military anarchy which has become known as the Crisis of the Third Century. From 235 to 275, there were twenty-six leaders who came to be recognized as emperors.\textsuperscript{49} Moreover, the Empire was thoroughly devastated by not only internal power struggles but also by invasions from the north and the east. The tumultuous political period was accompanied by an economic decline as commerce decreased, devaluation of currency continued, industry became less productive. Additionally, an epidemic ravaged the Roman populace. All of these factors combined to make this half century perhaps the bleakest era in Roman history to this point.

Roman defenses collapsed along several of the Empire’s borders. Barbarian tribes such as the Saxons, Franks, Alemanni, Marcomanni, Quadi, Sarmatians, Carpi, Vandals, Heruli, and Goths applied significant pressure to the imperial army from the north. In the eastern part of the Roman Empire, the Persians once again acted as belligerents against Roman forces.

Though Maximinus defeated the Alemanni in 235, the northern frontier was threatened and invaded on many occasions by the Goths, Sarmatians, and Carpi. Those three tribes almost consistently were defeated by the Roman defense, but were reluctant to try to make peace with the Roman Empire.\textsuperscript{50} Moreover, the Goths insisted upon receiving money annually from Rome as a subsidy. The Goths were found to have been a formidable enemy; the emperor Decius and his son were killed in a massive defeat against Gothic forces in 250. This defeat at the hands of the Goths showed that there was little that the defense of the Roman Empire could do against the northern barbarians.

\textsuperscript{50} Arthur E. R. Boak, \textit{A History of Rome to 585 A.D.} (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955), 403
Goths soon began to move eastward and began to attack Asia Minor and the Aegean beginning in 253. The Goths and Heruli ravaged Greece prior to being defeated by the Emperor Gallenius. Claudius, who became the ruler after Gallenius, defeated the Goths and in doing so prevented the Goths from significantly intruding upon Roman territory for over a century. Gallenius also was preoccupied during his reign with fighting the Frank and Alemanni, who were invading Rome via the Rhine River. The Alemanni made it all the way into Italy, but were defeated by Gallenius’ troops before they could reach and destroy Rome. The Persians began to attack the Roman Empire again in 237. They invaded Syria and were promptly driven out by Emperor Gordianus III. In 252 the Persians began raiding Syria and Mesopotamia. The Emperor Valerian defeated them in 257 and two years later in 259, but was captured by the Persian King Shapur in 260. The Romans resisted the Persian raids and ended fighting with the Persians for a significant length of time.

The silver content of the coins continued to be reduced during the Crisis of the Third Century. By 268, the denarius had a silver content of just two hundredths of a percent. Through examining wheat prices, one can infer that inflation was fifteen thousand percent over the course of the third century.\(^{51}\) Since the denarius was virtually worthless at this point, the economy was forced into readopting barter trade.\(^{52}\)

The period of military, political, and economic turmoil slowed down after the accession of Aurelian in 270. Aurelian defeated several barbarian tribes, including the Vandals and Sarmatians. He then brought the eastern part of the Empire out of conflict

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with the Carpi and reunited it with the western section of the Empire. He also ended conflict in Gaul. His actions which revived the Roman Empire earned him the nickname *restitutor orbis*—the Restorer of the World.\(^{53}\)

From an economic standpoint, Aurelian attempted to revive the silver standard, albeit based upon the sestertius rather than the denarius. Unfortunately, his effort to rebuild the value of Roman currency did not work.\(^{54}\) This can be attributed to the fact that the Roman populace was hoarding old coins because of their relatively high silver content.\(^{55}\) Before he could take further action against the severe devaluation of currency, Aurelian was murdered by some officers in the military.

Aurelian was replaced by Marcus Claudius Tacitus, who passed away after six months of uneventful rule. After Tacitus’ death, Marcus Aurelius Probus became the leader of the Roman Empire. He continued the work of Tacitus; he removed the Alemanni and Franks from Gaul and removed barbarians from Asia Minor. Probus was killed by his soldiers in 282; they were angry because he was a strict disciplinarian and abused their labor even during a time of peace.\(^{56}\)

Prior to his death, Probus named Marcus Aurelius Carus as his successor. Carus continued to remove non-Romans from the Empire, as he took upper Mesopotamia back from the Persians. Carus died in 283 and his two successors, sons Carinus and Numerianus, were also killed in the following two years.

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The Roman Army, which was leaderless after the death of Carus and his sons, accepted Diocletian as the next Emperor. The accession of Diocletian put an end to the fifty years of turmoil that occurred after the assassination of Alexander. After learning of an agricultural rebellion in Gaul which was caused primarily due to high taxes, Diocletian sent Valerius Maximianus to suppress the uprising. Maximian did this with little issue and was consequently named as a second Augustus by Diocletian. Also named as Augustus were Gaius Galerius, who defeated the Iazyges and Carpi along the Danube River, and Flavius Valerius Constantius, who fought off the barbarians in Gaul. The co-rule of the four men became known as the Tetrarchy. Diocletian enacted many different reforms throughout his time as Augustus. To avert more potential invasions by the barbarians, Diocletian greatly increased the size of the army. He also divided the empire into dioceses, which were regional administrative divisions. The decision to regionalize administration also led to an increase in the size of the military.

By this time, the economy was in shambles. Inflation occurred at a rate of just under twenty three percent per year from 293 to 301.\textsuperscript{57} Government expenditures skyrocketed because of Diocletian’s enlargement of the military and a vast public works project. He attempted currency reform, but this effort widely failed. He enacted economic reform via the Edict of Prices of 301 in an effort to end the period of economic instability. This fixed prices throughout the Roman Empire on nearly every good or

service. Violators of the Edict were put to death. However the law was generally ignored and eventually the government quit enforcing it.\textsuperscript{58}

Diocletian and Maximian both abdicated in 305. From this year through the fall of Rome in 476, the Roman society and economy continued to become weaker. There is archaeological evidence which shows the decline of the Roman economy. Throughout the last years of the Roman Empire, the quantity and quality of pottery which was traded sharply declined.\textsuperscript{59} The increasing size of bureaucracies—known for being particularly slow and inefficient—contributed to the economic difficulties, as did the growing size of the military.\textsuperscript{60} In the latter years of the Roman Empire, the army lost effectiveness as it continually lost battles to Visigoths and other barbarian tribes until the abdication of Romulus Augustulus.

From the accession of Nero in 54 to the abdication of Diocletian and Maximian in 305, the Roman economy experienced constant inflation. The inflation was done through the debasement of currency—particularly by reducing the silver content of the denarius. The primary reason for the debasement of currency in the Roman Empire was to finance the ever-expanding military. The cost of the military must have been immense; it had to not only prevent invasions on an almost continuous basis but also was responsible for providing public goods. Prices were estimated to have risen by a factor of thirty five in the century prior to the Edict of Prices of 301.\textsuperscript{61} The rampant inflation led the economy to

\textsuperscript{59} Bryan Ward-Perkins, \textit{The Fall of Rome} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 106
\textsuperscript{60} Arthur E. R. Boak, \textit{A History of Rome to 585 A.D.} (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955), 455, 457
decay in the years leading up to the fall of Rome in 476. Though it is impossible to gauge precisely how much the economy contributed to Rome’s collapse in relation to other factors, it is incontrovertible that it facilitated the destruction of one of the greatest and most powerful civilizations in history.
Bibliography


