
Roman Empire: Roman Crisis

In times of crisis, in which people cannot change the course of events, the only thing to do is attempt to make the best decisions for oneself, to make life possible. In the fourth and fifth century, during the decline of the Roman Empire, life and culture continued to develop through hardship. The citizens of the Empire would use whatever small power or money they had to make life easier, eventually leading to a culture surrounding the development of massive villas in the countryside of Spain. These villas, although impressive, could not withstand the pressures of the Roman Empire, and in the end, succumbed to the outside world, crushing the prospering life inside the walls. However, it was through these villas that people were able to thrive for years before the constraints implemented on them. There were many reasons which led to the fall of the Western Roman world, but the barbarian invasions, the moral decay of the city and intense tax impositions created the outline, which pushed individuals to seek refuge in the freedom of the countryside, creating an ultimately powerful experience at La Olmeda.

The Roman crisis of the fourth and fifth century was characterized by the division of the empire. As barbarians entered, the city fell into despair and the economic world could no longer stand. In the end, each of the issues present in Rome worked interconnectedly to bring the Empire down. In fact, many argue that “the fall of Rome simply came because the barbarians took advantage of difficulties already existing in Rome” including the “decaying city (both physically and morally), [and] little to no tax revenue” (Wasson). As the barbarian troops entered, they not only killed thousands, and conquered lands, they stole Roman culture and implemented fear into society. The lives of all Roman people would be deeply impacted by this fear. Ultimately, it was the instability already present in Rome which allowed the barbarians to exploit the people, and swiftly take over.

The decaying city of Rome played an extremely impactful role in the fall, as Polybius once relayed of the fall of the Republic - the city would become “a victim of its declining moral virtue and the rise of vice within” (Wasson). Many relate this to Christianity; however, this can be seen in the way citizens allowed fear to encompass them, and ultimately flee to places like the countryside. Individuals began to let go of their centers of Roman power, a decision instilled by not only fear, but the actual implementation of new tax decisions. People wanted to live away from these power centers and create something of their own. The urban population made its way out to the surrounding environment, and began developing incredible villas to house those who could afford it.

The villas became more and more popular, beautiful mansions created by those rich enough, to house themselves and their families. The villas represented power as only the most wealthy could create and run such a center. It was almost as if the people decided to shift from the power of Rome, and create something of their own to thrive in. Those running the villas would be in charge of everything, and the goal was to implement all levels of production throughout the villa (Documentary). La Olmeda was one of these incredible Roman villas, created by those wishing to flee the decision making centers of Rome, where the collapse was inevitable, as “the migrants forcibly stripped it of the tax base” (Heather). These tax decisions ultimately created an entire loss of wealth, and people were extremely against the implementations. But, places like La Olmeda became an escape, one of the most beautiful villas, covered in magnificent

mosaics, where a new kind of culture thrived. It was at this villa, and many more, where power allowed individuals to live peacefully on the outside of an otherwise falling Rome. It was not until the middle of the fifth century, into the sixth, that La Olmeda began feeling the impact of barbarian presence.

Although La Olmeda began to decay, just as the city of Rome, the impact of this creation would go far beyond the fourth and fifth century. Centuries later, the rediscovering of such a place has been used to tell the stories of those who tried to flee the issues of Rome. The rebuilding and restructuring of the history in the archaeological site today, is what helps to show how society has developed over so many years. The power which came from La Olmeda is a representation of how society still works today, those wishing to hold power will do so by showing off what they are capable of creating. La Olmeda was grand, and life prospered there, but showing off power can only extend so far, as no amount of money could save the villa from being overtaken by the forces of the barbarians. This is a lesson for thousands today, as society is overrun by money and greed, and in the end, no matter how grand the villa is, it will succumb to the pressures of corruption.

The decline of the Roman Empire, and the crisis throughout the fourth and fifth century, which led to the fall of the West, overshadowed the power which prospered in the lands outside of the collapse. The people who thrived in the places like La Olmeda, in countrysides like Palencia, used their power to birth peace. In the end, this peace fell, and the culture disappeared. Today, we use passion to bring back that power.