Chapter Three: From Homer to Christ

3.1 Introduction

One of the main difficulties with a macro perspective is that at times the horizon needs to be so extensive that some rarely known parts of history must be taken into account. This can either force the researchers to analyze certain unfamiliar parts of ancient history in order to grasp the pulse of human history in the long run; or it may require the readers to have a slight acquaintance with history in general so as to comprehend the various advanced observations of a particular epoch.

The last paragraph makes clear the main problem with the upcoming chapters. As foretold earlier in the book, chapter three, four, and part of five will briefly inspect western history since the days of Greece three thousand years ago, with heavy emphasis on the artistic aspects of each epoch. This survey will then be juxtaposed with the analysis on contemporary popular culture in chapter two so as to breed a new way to interpret the nature of Hong Kong and the modern world as a whole in the twenty-first century.

The trouble is that while the more recent history of the western world is well known to everyone, this is certainly not the case for the more distant past. For instance, it is perhaps reasonable to expect that average individuals are only vaguely familiar with the Greek Age and the Roman Age. Especially troublesome is the thousand years that fit in the gap between the end of the Roman Age in the fifth century AD and the beginning of Renaissance in the fifteenth century – a period that is often labelled as the "Middle Ages". While it does not take up much effort to name several celebrated figures in the Greek and Roman Age, hardly anyone knows more than five names in Medieval Europe. This is perhaps already a reliable indication on the strangeness of this indispensable part of western history. As such, no in-depth understanding on the "Middle Ages" is possible without providing the readers with considerable amount of background knowledge. Thus, in hope of eliminating the aforesaid obstacles with these ancient portions of western history, the discussion on various advanced features that belonged to Greeks, Romans and the Medieval Europeans will be always accompanied by introductory materials. This will no doubt make the analysis lengthier than what it ought to be, yet this will also render the present work much more digestible, especially to amateurs of western history.

3.2 Humanism and Classical Greece[1]

The survey begins with the Classical Greek Age, roughly spanned from 800AD until 450AD. When asked to describe the Greek culture, one would usually recall *Odyssey* and *Iliad* from the great epic poet Homer (fl. ninth century BC), the great temples with gorgeous statutes in Athens, and a long list of great philosophers like Socrates (470?–399), Plato (427?–347?) and Aristotle (384-322) that this ancient civilization had produced. Few people will doubt that the Greek civilization was a great epoch full of creativity and newborn power.

Another important feature of this epoch that is perhaps less well-known is the immense interest in human nature of the Classical Greeks – something that is often referred as "humanism". Classical Greece was all about humanism. It was their way of looking at the

[1] The following secondary source materials have been consulted for this section: Sir Richard W. Livingstone, *The Greek Genius and Its Meaning to Us* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1915); Edith Hamilton, *The Great Age of Greek Literature* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1942); Goldsworth L. Dickinson, *The Greek View of Life*, 22nd ed., (London: Muthuen & Co., 1949); William C. Greene, *Achievement of the Greeks* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1996); Edith Hamilton, *The Echo of Greece* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1957); Humphrey D. F. Kitto, *The Greeks* (Chicago: Aldine Pub. Co., 1964).

both themselves and the world around them. They never saw humanity and the world as a material composition to be interpreted with mathematical formulas as do nowaday people; nor did they consider the world as under absolute divine and unseen forces and humanity as sinful creatures constantly under the wrath of God as in the so-called "Middle Ages". Instead, they considered humanity and human nature to be the only things that mattered in their world. That was the time when humanity and human nature received the highest regard in the West.

3.2.1 Greek Polytheism

Such emphasis on humanity was clearly shown in their polytheistic religion. Like all other ancient civilizations in the world, the Greeks had their own religion. Such necessity was probably due to human's frustration generated from nature. To understand this last point, place yourself in the ancient world, and imagine that you possess no modern scientific knowledge. How, then, will you feel when there was an earthquake, a flood, a drought, or a thunderstorm? Mostly one will feel helpless and frustrated by this unpredictable yet at times devastating nature around us. Therefore, to reduce this terror, the ancients had assigned a god or goddess to almost everything in nature. In the case of Greece, they impersonated the sky as Zeus, the earth as Demeter, and the sea as Poseidon. As such, people would have a way to interpret various natural phenomena. Hence, when the sky was blue and clear, it might indicate that Zeus was in good temper; and if there was an earthquake, it might suggest certain emotional state of Demeter. In the latter case, the Greeks might proceed to make some sacrifices to Demeter in the temple to calm him down. Nature, under this interpretation, became a company of spirits that people thought they understood.

The above concept that there was a spirit behind everything in nature was common to almost all ancient religions. What was unique about the Greek religion lied in the form and ability of the various deities. While most others emphasized the force of the unseen, the Greeks emphasized the human resemblance of their gods and goddesses. For them, their religious idols were beings in human form who had passed a great part of their history on earth, who at times intervened in the affairs of men, and who left their offspring on earth.[2] The only difference between mankind and gods was that they were immortal and they had great power. In other words, their gods and goddesses also possessed human nature and were not emotionless symbols of natural power. As the poet Pindar (552?-443?) bluntly put it: "one race there is of men and one of gods, but from one mother, Earth, draw we both our breadth; yet it is the strength of us diverse altogether, for the race of men is nought, but the brazen heaven abideth."[3] Such was the nature of various deities in ancient Greece. They humanized their idols.

Similar emphasis on humanity could be discovered in the relationship between life and religion. Here, the Greek religion once again significantly differed from others. For instance, the ancient Egyptians strongly believed in the eternal life and claimed that life in this world was only a flash of it. For this reason, they embalmed the corpse as mummy in order to keep the flesh intact so that the soul could stay within it forever. Christianity apparently put a similar emphasis in the after-life since Christians believed that our spirit would go to Heaven after death and awaited the final Judgment Day.

Such after-life conception of living was incomprehensible to the Greeks. Although they had their proper description of heaven, it was apparent that their tenor of life was not much affected by speculations about the world beyond, as did the Christians and ancient Egyptians. They believed that "when a man is dead all his

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[2] For instance, the Dorians claimed to be the descendants of Heracles the son of Zeus; and Ionians, descendants of Ion the son of Apollo.

[3] Pindar, *Nemean Odes*, ed. and trans. John B. Bury (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1965), vi.1-3.

glory is gone,"[4] and became "dust and ashes, what is nought turns to nothing."[5] It was rather their determined mind to generate pleasure from life in this world that possessed their mind. Pleasure, as defined by Aristotle, was to have prosperity conjoined with virtue, an abundance of goods and slaves and make good use of them, to have many friends, to have numerous family, to have health and physical beauty and athletic powers, and finally fame and honour.[6] And in the words of Homer, "dear to us ever is the banquet and the harp and the dance and changes of raiment and the warm bath and love and sleep."[7] Not a word had been said about the longing of a prosperous after-life. For them, all that matter was pleasure produced from actively engaging in this world.

Pleasure – their goal of life – could then be entirely found and achieved in this world through hard work of our body and soul and had few linkages with our after-life. As such, the concept of after-life had exerted only the vaguest impact on Greeks' life. Take out heaven and hell from Greek religion, and all the Greeks would continue to live in the same manner. But take out the concept of after-life from, say, Christianity and Egyptian polytheism, and their entire fabric would instantly fall apart. For the Greeks, then, what mattered was to generate pleasure through their own human ability – again an indication of their respect on the power of humanity – without assistance from the power of the uncontrollable unseen.

The above description may easily give rise to the impression that the various deities were only agents controlling the nature and had the slightest impact on their mentality. In a sense, that was true. The Christian conception of a direct spiritual relationship with God meant nothing for the Greeks since the role of their idols in their lives was contractual. This meant that as long as human did his part to sacrifice goods to the gods and try hard themselves, their idols would promise them with handsome rewards. After all, they believed that "the anxious thought of youth conjoined with toil achieves renown"[8] and that "unless we know what we ought to do and take pains to bring it about, God has decided that we have no right to prosperity."[9] As such, the force of the unseen had been reduced to insignificance, thereby minimizing the direct influence of divinity on human life in this world. Through another medium, however, these Greek myths had wielded probably the most long-lasting effect in the shaping of Greek minds, as will be shortly discussed in the upcoming section.

To sum up, the above glimpse on their religion already pointed out the importance of humanity in their society. They believed that nature was filled with humanized deities, yet the concept of divinity and after-life never exerted absolute influence on their life in this world since they had faith in the achievement of their goal of life through hard work alone. In short, everything in the Greek polytheism had been shaped to preserve the value of humanity.

3.2.2 Music, Literature, Sculpture, Athletics

Their immense interest in human nature was equally evident from the treasure of arts that they had left us. Only a very small portion of the Greek works had survived to present day. Nonetheless, this little remnant was more than enough to illustrate that they had achieved a level of artistic development perhaps unmatched in all

[4] Homer, *Odyssey*, ed. and trans. by Augustus T. Murray (Harvard University Press, 1995), ii.488f.
[5] Stesichorus, *Greek Lyric Poetry: A Selection of Early Greek Lyric, Elegiac and Iambic Poetry*, trans. and ed. David A. Campbell (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1982), fr. 52.
[6] Paraphrased from Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, ed. J. E. Sandys, trans. Sir R. C. Jebb (Cambridge University, 1909), I.v.3, 1360b.
[7] Homer, *Odyssey*, viii.247-8.
[8] Pindar, *The Works of Pindar*, ed. and trans. Lewis R. Farnell (London: Macmillan and co., 1932), fr. 207.
[9] Xenophon, *Memorabilia and Oeconomicus*, trans. Edgar C. Merchant (London: Heinemann, 1923), ii.8.

human history. No sculpture comparable to theirs; no buildings ever more beautiful; no writings superior. Prose, always late of development, they had time only to touch upon, but they left master pieces. History has yet to find a greater exponent than Thucydides (460?-400?); outside of the Bible there is no poetical prose that can touch Plato. In poetry they are all but supreme; no epic is to be mentioned with Homer;[10] no odes to be set beside Pindar; and of the four masters of the tragic stage three are Greek.[11] After all, solely based on the tangible visual and literary beauty of these great works, few people would disagree that the artistic development of humanity, at least in terms of literature and sculpture, had already reached its zenith in Classical Greece.

However, Greek art was more than about external beauty, as it was rather their emphasis on human nature that better characterized it. According to the observation of a noted historian on Greek culture:

> …the most beautiful work of art, in the Greek sense of terms, was that which made the finest and most harmonious appeal not only to the physical but to the moral sense, and while communicating the highest and the most perfect pleasure to the eye or the ear, had also the power to touch and inform the soul with the grace which was her moral excellence.[12]

To put it differently, Classical Greeks always imbued a moral lesson into every piece of art – a feature that is no doubt absent from nowaday popular culture. This was mostly because they believed that art has an educational role to play in life, and this was exactly where their deities exerted enormous influence.

Take for example the statue of Zeus at Olympia, the most famous work of Athenian sculptor Phidias (fl. fifth century BC). Few would doubt that this sculpture, made of ivory and gold, which Phidias produced according to the description of Homer, was not consummate from an aesthetic point of view. Yet, let not its wondrous beauty disguises its educational aspect. As a historian once commented, this figure of Zeus revealed "in form and countenance, the whole array of gifts and qualities proper to his supreme divinity."[13] In other words, when a Classical Greek appreciated the statue of a certain deity, what he really comprehended was the various moral qualities like courage, strength, or intelligence that a certain deity might symbolize. The significance of this sculpture of Zeus, therefore, transcended its physical beauty and represented an idealized human being that aimed at invoking the spectators to imitate the gifts that Zeus represented.

The aforesaid case with the statue of Zeus was certainly not isolated. In fact, almost all Classical Greek arts had taken the theme from myths in Homer's works or other contemporary heroic stories. Then the artists would idealize the subjects, imbue them with certain virtues, and finally present this ideal in the most aesthetic way. This was the case for prose, poetry, ode, drama, painting, statue, history, and even music. The inclusion of music might be unanticipated. Yet, as Plato once said: "excellence of music is measured by pleasure. It must delight the best educated and pre-eminent in virtue and education."[14] This view was later echoed by Plutarch (46?-120?) the Greek philosopher in Roman Age who wrote that the best instruction of music…

> …had a life and spirit in them that inflamed and possessed men's minds with an enthusiasm and ardour for action… the subject is always serious and moral; most usually, it was in

[10] Virgil (70-19 BC), the great poet in the Roman Age, once said that it is easier to steal Hercules' club than to appropriate a line from Homer. Quoted in William Greene, *Achievement of the Greeks*, pp. 290.
[11] Comments of Edith Hamilton in her *The Great Age of Greek Literature*, pp. 17.
[12] Goldsworth Dickinson, *The Greek View of Life*, 22nd ed., pp. 210.
[13] Dion Chrysostom. Quoted in ibid., pp. 216.
[14] Plato, *Laws*, trans. Trevor J. Saunders (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), ii.658-9.

> praise of such men as had died in defence of their country, or in derision of those that had been cowards […] Terpander and Pindar had reason to say that musing (or music?) and valour were allied.[15]

In brief, Classical Greek art was more than about creation of external beauty but instead had an active and educational role to play since it assisted in the training of body and soul.

Another quality that the statue of Zeus encompassed was the physical beauty of this deity, shown through his perfect countenance and developed male body. The various qualities of human nature like courage and toil that have been mentioned so far are perhaps understandable. Yet the Classical Greeks believed that a perfect and beautiful soul could not live without a beautiful body. Such emphasis on physical beauty was nowhere to be found in any other ancient civilizations, but was ubiquitous in the Classical Greek writings. Aristotle, for instance, wrote that "no one can be happy who is absolutely ugly."[16] In a similar tone, Plato argued that "the truly musical person will love those who combine most perfectly moral and physical beauty, but will not love any one in whom there is dissonance."[17] A friend of the writer Xenophon (430?-355?) even claimed that "I would choose not the Empire of Persia instead of beauty."[18] And in fact, one of the original purposes of the Olympic Games was to demonstrate the beautiful body of the athletes, apart from their toil of continuous physical training and their courage in the competition. This prominence on physical training demonstrated their determination to develop the power of humanity to the fullest extent, and this once again confirmed the view that the Classical Greeks saw the shaping of humanity as the only thing that mattered in the world.

To sum up, Classical Greek art once again indicated that the Greeks put the development of humanity before everything else. All of their works, apart from their aesthetic value, aimed to define the ideals that were meant to be imitated during the training of one's body and soul. In other words, the courage of a certain hero in a drama, the physical beauty of a god in a statue, the virtues of the subject in a poem, and the moral of a story in *Odyssey* imbued the artworks with educational significances, thereby rendering them like textbooks for Greeks. In other words, they learnt their lessons of humanity not in abstract doctrines, but from vivid stories or sculptures that were all based on the writings of Homer and others. It is no exaggeration that without the myths of Homer and others, the Greek civilization would look entirely different.

3.2.3 Thrive for Knowledge

Yet another area where the Classical Greeks exhibited their high regard in human power was by looking at their endeavour to acquire new knowledge. A simple scenario of two youths who were waiting for Socrates shall clearly illustrate such endeavour:

> "He (Socrates) has it wisdom, and he can give it to me. Oh, come and go with me to him." Quickly a crowd of ardent young men surround him. "What is Friendship? What is Justice? We will not let you off, Socrates. The truth, we want the truth." "What delight […] to hear wise men talk!"[19]

This endeavour was especially evident when compared to the situation in adjacent states. For instance, in Egypt and Persia, people

[15] See the biography of Lycurgus in Plutarch, *Lives*, vol. 1, trans. Arthur H. Clough (Boston: Little, Brown, 1859), para. 36-7, pp. 81.
[16] Aristotle, *Ethics*, ed. and trans. John Warrington (London: Dent, 1963), i.8, 1099b4.
[17] Plato, *Republic*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford University, 1994), vi.443e-444a.
[18] Xenophon, *Symposium*, trans. Anthony J. Bowen (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1998), iv.11.
[19] Plato, *Protagoras*, trans. Stanley Lombardo (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 1992), 310ff.

of all classes firmly believed that the world was governed by unapproachable divine forces. This concept was so embedded to their mentality that few people attempted to understand the will of divine (meaning the various natural phenomena), lest infuriate the pitiless deities. Moreover, their rigid social hierarchy made it a hard choice for the ruling class to allow the mass to acquire such knowledge, lest it jeopardized their royal power based on divinity. And at times when new knowledge had been produced, it would be jealously kept within the summit of the hierarchy. As such, the quest of knowledge was reduced to a minimum as any authorized attempt to try to make sense of the nature became strictly heretical, and "thus far and no farther"[20] became their motto. The words of the priests who were seen as the only intermediary between the deities and humanity were consequently interpreted as the words of the unseen, and the outcomes of divination were taken as the will of the heaven. Hence, whenever people had questions, they would visit these priests. And all that the citizens in these ancient states had to do was to serve the gods and their representative on earth ─ the king.

Not so in Greece, where one could find the most robust search for knowledge ever known to mankind. The intelligence of the ancient Greeks has long been renowned since they had taken the first indispensable step in almost every field of thought. Their saying of "all things to be examined; no limit to thought"[21] accurately described their feverish quest of knowledge. As Plato once said, "Egypt and Phoenicia love money, the special characteristic of our part of the world is the love of knowledge."[22] Interestingly enough, this view was later echoed by Saint Paul (5?AD-67?), one of the twelve apostles of Christ. Up and down the coast of Asia Minor he was mobbed and imprisoned and beaten. But in Athens, people brought him to a hill called Areopagus and asked: "may we know what this new teaching is?"[23] Such intellectual curiosity was largely due to the fact that the Greek religion had never possessed their mind compared to other ancient religions. Although there were priests, their sole job was to inform people when and what to make sacrifice for which deity, and then performed those rituals. And that was their entire job. Whenever people encounter a problem, they would go to the great philosophers, mathematicians, poets, but never to a priest. This situation had no doubt cleared the way for the free pursuit of knowledge.

Other than the free pursuit of knowledge, another direct result of the lack of religious taboo was the freedom to express their opinions. This was especially evident with the Athenians, who the great historian Herodotus (484-432) once praised "to stand first for wisdom."[24] For them, what distinguished a citizen from a slave was that, as the dramatist Euripides (480?-406) said, a slave "cannot speak his thought."[25] In fact, during the long history of Athens, only four people had been prosecuted for their thought. One of them, unfortunately, was Socrates. Three others had been sent in exile, but that was the entire list! Compared it with the endless list of fanatic political and religious persecution in the last few centuries, no doubt that the Athenians highly valued their freedom of speech.

What was behind their fervent pursuit of knowledge and their respect on freedom of speech was a rigid esteem for human reasoning power. They firmly believed that the power of human mind could help them to understand everything in the world, which looks mysterious and chaotic even to us in the twenty-first century. One could notice such conviction from the philosopher Anaxagoras (500?-428) who believed that "mind is the first principle; it helps us to create order from the chaos."[26] The best description of the Greek

[20] See Edith Hamilton, *The Great Age of Greek Literature*, pp. 36.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Plato, *Republic*, vi.435e-436a.
[23] The Bible, Acts 17:19-21.
[24] Herodotus, *History*, trans. David Grene (University of Chicago Press, 1987), i.60.
[25] Euripides, *Phoenician Women*, ed. and trans. Elizabeth Craik (Warminster: Aris & Philips, 1988), 391.
[26] Mary Fitt, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1948), pp. 84, art. 12.

attitude towards learning, however, was from the coolest thinker of all time, Aristotle. He put it this way:

> The heavens are high and far off, and the knowledge of celestial things that our sense give us, is scanty and dim. Living creatures, on the contrary, are at our door, and if we so desire, we may gain full and certain knowledge of each and all. […] If in the spirit of the love of knowledge we search for causes and recognize the evidences of design. Then will nature's purpose and her deep-seated laws be revealed.[27]

In other words, the power of reasoning alone, without any assistance from the unseen, was enough to unveil the secret of nature to humanity. It was the age when the human power received the highest regard from humanity themselves. Not even in Renaissance and the Enlightenment Age had knowledge acquired a similar status.

3.2.4 Perception on Wealth and Goods

One last aspect of the Classical Greek Age that must not be left behind was their attitude towards wealth. As has been illustrated so far in this chapter, "to have a beautiful soul in a beautiful body" was essentially their motto of life. This indirectly required them not to be obsessed over wealth as do nowaday people, lest their energy be wasted in non-humanist ends. And indeed they did not. As an anecdote, when the extremely wealthy King of Lydia called Croesus (d. 546) interviewed the Greek lawgiver Solon (638?-559?), Croesus asked him who was the happiest man in the world. Expecting to hear his own name, however, Solon answered him with name of an Athenian called Tellus, thanks to Tellus' flourishing country, happy family life, and his glorious death on the battle field.[28]

This, however, did not mean that the Greeks were strictly ascetic. Unlike some other ancient civilizations, asceticism, the extreme form of renouncing all worldly good, had never been practiced by Classical Greeks. Aristotle himself once caustically remarked that "those who say that a man on a rack would be happy if only he were good, intentionally or unintentionally are talking of non-sense."[29] In another occasion, this philosopher defined a happy man as "one whose activity accords with perfect virtue and who is adequately furnished with eternal goods for complete life-time."[30] Even Plato with clear inclination towards asceticism did not deny the utility of external goods. He ranked various components of life as first health, then beauty, then skill and strength in physical exercises, and lastly wealth.[31]

Accordingly, their concept of wealth fitted somewhere in the middle of absolute asceticism and complete materialism. Or, to put it differently, the Classical Greeks had found a perfect balance between an intellectual life, a spiritual life and a material life that would help them to acquire perfect virtues. Such was their perception of wealth.

To summarize the flourish of Classical Greece in a couple of pages is certainly not possible. Nevertheless, the description in the previous pages threw us some lights on how the Greeks, consciously or unconsciously, perceived humanity as the centre of their world. The nature of their religion, the moral lesson underneath their art works, their feverish pursuit of knowledge, and their perception on wealth all loosely converged to one point, namely that shaping of their humanity had always received the primary attention of the Greeks.

3.3 The Rise and Fall of the Greek Civilization

[27] Quoted in D'Arcy W. Thompson, "Natural Science," in *The Legacy of Greece*, ed. Richard W. Livingstone (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1922), pp.156.
[28] Herodotus, *History*, i.30.
[29] Quoted in Goldsworth Dickinson, *The Greek View of Life*, pp. 140.
[30] Aristotle, *Ethics*, i.10, 1101a14.
[31] Quoted in Goldsworth Dickinson, *The Greek View of Life*, pp. 141.

That the Classical Greek civilization was amongst the greatest ever known to the world was an incontestable fact. What has been more controversial was how did they manage to build it, and when and why did it fall apart later on. Like many other questions in historiography, it is impossible to satisfactorily answer these questions without raising objections from others. Such is not the primary task of this chapter anyway. To recall, the primary task here is to sort out various advanced characteristics of the Greek Age, the Roman Age, and the "Middle Ages". However, in order to render such analysis as coherent as possible lest readers with weaker background be lost in the grand flows of history, a short coverage on the rise and fall of each civilization cannot be avoided.

3.3.1 The Shaping of the Hellenistic World

Albeit the difficulty to explain the rise of the Classical Greek culture, there were still at least three factors which no doubt had played a significant role in this process. The first one was undoubtedly the nature of their religion that, unlike other contemporary ones, had imposed very few intellectual restrictions on its people and that had supplied them with a rich mythology. This had provided a good basis for the Greeks to build up their civilization. Under the Greek polytheism, people were free to question the traditional views and produce new ideas without having to worry about the possibility of persecution. Moreover, thanks to the pre-Classical Greek poets who had composed the extraordinarily rich mythology, the various deities were adorned with an astonishingly rich moral content. Not only had this mythology helped to shape the social norm of turning oneself into a virtuous man, but it had also provided them with an almost inexhaustible amount of themes and materials for the artists for a couple of centuries. In short, their religion played an indispensable role in the building of their effulgent culture.

The second factor, namely their unique *Polis* system, was more difficult to comprehend. When the Dorians invaded the scarcely populated Greek peninsula at around 1200 BC during the so-called "Homeric Age"[32], the local Greeks had built fortifications on hills in order to defend themselves. Shortly afterwards, these fortifications that were later known as acropolis emerged as the residences for the kings, the site for public assembly, the place for religious ceremonies, and later the market place. Gradually, the area around the acropolis turned into the residential area for the citizens, for the Greeks did not like to live near their farms, but instead preferred to live together. That was the beginning of their political fabric known as *Polis*, usually translated into "city-state".

At around 800 BC, the Homeric Age reached an end, followed by the Classical Age. From then on, the Greek civilization took on a new direction. All the kingdoms disappeared, and there gradually developed a new political concept known as democracy. Within these tiny democratic city-states often with a population of only a few thousands, every citizen was obliged to actively participate in public affairs, both administrative and military, in addition to their private business. In other words, every citizen was at the same time a soldier, an officer, a jurist, a public speaker, a merchant, a farmer, a teacher, and a philosopher. The modern concept of specialization, where each citizen specializes in one profession, was simply incomprehensible to the Classical Greeks.

To understand how exactly the Polis system helped to shape the Greek culture, let us recall a frequently quoted, yet even more frequently misunderstood, sentence of Aristotle in his *Politics*: "Man is a political animal."[33] What he really meant was that Polis was the only social framework to fully realize one's spiritual, moral,

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[32] This epoch was so called because our knowledge of this period of Greek history mostly comes from *Odyssey* and *Iliad* of Homer.

[33] Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (New York: Modern Library, 1943), I.ii.1253a3.

intellectual and physical capacities. In other words, only by exposing oneself to the entirety of the world could one develop all of human's faculties. Thus, through the Polis system, the power of humanity was developed to the fullest extent.

The third factor, though insignificant as it might appear, was the relative peace in the Eastern Mediterranean world. None of the great empires posed a threat to the Hellenistic civilization. In Asia, the Hittite Empire had collapsed; the Lydian kingdom was not aggressive; the Persian power was still embryonic deep inside the continent; Egypt was in decay; Macedon was still in its infancy; Rome had not yet been heard of; and the Carthaginians and Phoenicians remained friendly with the Greeks for a long time. The Greek world, therefore, was free of any substantial threat, and needed not to establish a centralized militarist empire to defend itself lest itself be devoured by the others – that would no doubt smothered their intellectuality and as well their entire way of living. This was no doubt an irony of history. It was as if the heaven had arranged the Greeks to possess the Eastern Mediterranean long enough to work out the following experiment: to see how long the absurd Polis system – one that could not withstand any serious military threat from militarist empires but one that highly favoured spiritual and intellectual growth – could survive before the inevitable occupation by a large militarist empire. The outcome of this experiment was, if one begins the timer from the beginning of the Classical Age at around 800 BC, approximately four hundred years.

3.3.2 Signs of Decadence in Classical Greece

Historians usually put the end mark of the Classical Age at 338 BC, the year when Philip II (382-336; r. 359-336) the King of Macedonia officially conquered the entire Greek world. Yet the truth was that the Classical mentality, mostly clearly revealed in the artistic production, was already in decay almost a full century before the conquest of Philip.

Such decay was most apparent in Athens, who had once brought the Greek civilization to its acme. The Athenians had always shone more brightly than any other Poleis. After all, the majority of the greatest artists and philosophers were either its citizens or had lived in Athens. Even Herodotus the non-Athenian historian, once said that "of all Greeks, the Athenians stood first for wisdom."[34] This was especially true in the years after the democratic reform of the statesman Cleisthenes (570?-508?) in 508 BC. That was the heyday of Athens.

However, the Classical culture in Athens began to wane not long after her victory in the Persian War. The playwright Aristophanes (448?-388?), for instance, observed that "there is a new kind of music, which has driven out the old, and it is rubbish, a mixture of all kinds of incongruous melodies without rhythm or reason."[35] Xenophon later also lamented: "How can we convert man to a passion for the virtue and renown and happiness of old? The city has degenerated. The men of old, men say, were far superior to our contemporaries."[36] The tragic dramatist Aeschylus (525-456) held more or less the same opinion. He said: "if someone asked you whether you think the city is more glorious today than it was in the times of your ancestors, you would all agree that it was not. Were men better than now? Yes, they were superior: we are far inferior."[37] These were the views of contemporary Athenians.

And it seemed that their observations were correct. We can foresee this decadence when we read Euripides. In his tragedies, he propounded his terrific problems on humanity but found no solution

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[34] Herodotus, *History*, i.60.
[35] Edith Hamilton, *The Echo of Greece*, pp. 41.
[36] Xenophon, *Memorabilia and Oeconomicus*, III.v.7.
[37] Aeschines, *Works*, trans. Chris Carey (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 178.

to them.[38] All the Classical orthodoxies, traditions, and customs fell in ruin around him. Men became tired of hunting after the truth which they were no longer able to find. Moreover, tragedy has degenerated into comedy. The passionate search for truth turned into genial criticism of common sense; heroes and heroines gave place to courtesans and buffoons and cooks and slaves; and Euripides' ideal of a heroic and versatile life was replaced by Menander's (342-292) ideal of a comfortable and unheroic living.[39]

Actions began to divorce with thought as well. It is impossible not to feel this trend when reading Aristotle, where he was almost indifferent to realize his ideal constitution on earth. He lived to know more rather to make his knowledge effective. Even Plato resigned himself to the view that his ideal state must remain in the cloud.

Hence, it is no exaggeration that from about 450 BC onwards, Greece steadily moved towards new ways of thought and a new way of life, so much that for those who were born in the post-Classical Age, the glorious Age of Pericles (495?-429) must have seemed as remote as the Middle Ages to us.

3.3.3 Collapse of the Classical Mentality[40]

What explains the breakdown of the Classical spirit before the conquest of the Macedonians? The first answer that most people would come up with would likely be the series of destructive civil wars in the Greek world that had eventually exhausted all of their energy.[41] However, it would certainly be an oversimplification to associate the decline in the Classical spirit directly to those civil wars. In fact, Athens and other Poleis eventually recovered from such exhaustion, and indeed from the fourth century onwards the Greek world was once again active and enterprising enough in other directions. What had really happened was a permanent shift in the temper of people and the emergence of a different attitude to life, and this was much more than what the civil wars could alone explain. The real answer for the fall of the Classical culture has something to do with the collapse of the Polis system.

The Polis system was designed for amateurs. As noted above, every citizen in the Polis had numerous occupations at the same time. This was perhaps a tradition descended from Homer's conception of an all-rounded excellence. It implied a respect for the wholeness of life and a dislike of specialization. But it also implied that the nature of those occupations and life as a whole must have been so simple that they could be smoothly run by amateurs. For instance, laws must be easily comprehensible, military tactics must be straightforward, and so on. Otherwise it would be impossible for the Greeks to simultaneously handle all of their widely different duties.

Unfortunately, later changes in the environment slowly broke up the Polis system and, together with it, the traditional virtues. In military, for instance, the old tactic of arming oneself as heavy infantry and fight a short war was no longer suitable with the new international environment. Gradually, the new and superior tactics of employing a mix of light infantry and cavalry received a heavier emphasis. But these required intensive training and it was specialized to a degree beyond the reach of amateurs. Accordingly, mercenaries were hired and trained as a professional army, and this marked the end of the no longer feasible soldier-citizen system.

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[38] See Sir Richard Livingstone, *The Greek Genius and Its Meaning to Us*, pp. 240-1.

[39] See ibid., pp. 242.

[40] Materials in this section are mostly taken from Humphrey Kitto, *The Greeks*, ch. 5, pp. 152-169.

[41] There were the first Peloponnesian War in (460-446), the second Peloponnesian War (431-404), the anti-Sparta League Campaign (395-371), and the anti-Thebes League Campaign (362).

The story was similar in the economic aspect. Nowaday readers cannot read Plato and Aristotle without being struck by their insistence that a Polis must be economically self-sufficient. After all, we modern people always talk about the importance of specialization and the benefits of globalization. This was not so much because the Greeks lightly valued wealth, but it had more to do with the very concept of Polis. An autarkic Polis, where everyone was tightly associated with the state without much business to do with other Poleis, gave every citizen a high sense of association with the Polis and thus gave them a strong sense of public duty. In this sense, an autarkic Polis was an essential part to realize the Homeric way of living characterised by a strong consciousness on the presence of humanity – one where heroic and political virtues counted for everything.

However, especially after the Persian War, the Athenians increasingly based themselves on commerce and became dependent on export of wine and oil and import of corn. As a result, the city was then forced to control the Aegean Sea so as to secure her marital trade routes. Yet such overseas expansion for the sake of commerce pitilessly demanded the break-up of the autarky of the city and therefore was incompatible with the Homeric style of living.

Another effect of the expansion of commerce should be familiar to us, namely that private affairs began to be more interesting than public duties. When Pericles the great leader of Athens described the flourishing of commerce in Athens as "the products of the whole world come to us"[42], what he saw in fact was a decline in the sense of public duty. Steadily, merchant-minded citizens felt reluctant to devote their time, their money, and not to mention their life to the community that was increasingly divided by the two views of a pro-commerce, pro-expansion party, and a conservative, pro-peasant party. As an anecdotal example, the orator Demosthenes (384-322) struggled hard to persuade the citizens to contribute money for national defence instead to the theatre fund that was used to attend the theatre for free.[43]

Such trend towards individuality was apparent from the thematic evolution in drama. Earlier tragedies that preceded it had been political and heroic from head to toe, implying a sense of duty towards Polis. But the newer comedies found their themes from private and domestic life, and then made jokes on them. Sculptures, on the other hand, began to be introspective, to concern with individual traits and moods, instead of expressing an ideal from Homer's works. Likewise, new philosophical schools like the Cynics and Cyrenaics similarly began to adopt the notion that wisdom and virtues could be attained without being a citizen in Polis, thus the concept of cosmopolitanism.

To sum up, the breakdown of the Classical Greek culture was not a result of the Peloponnesian Wars or even the later Macedonian invasion, but was rather a result of the breakdown of the Polis. This unique political system had once served as the baby cradle for the Classical culture by providing a setting where one could fully realize all the heroic virtues described in Homer's works. Unfortunately, the coming of mercantilism, specialization and the individualism had fundamentally jeopardized the very basis of the Polis system. And once the Polis and the Homeric tradition failed to hold the mind of Greeks, the end of the Classical Age loomed.

3.3.4 The Hellenistic Age

After the invasion of Philip II, the Greek civilization as a whole fortunately did not vanish into thin air. Instead, it took on the new direction to colonize the world known to them with the Greek culture. This was the beginning of the Hellenistic Age.

[42] Quoted in Humphrey Kitto, *The Greeks*, pp. 165.

[43] Ibid., pp. 160.

Much of this successful spread of Greek culture was attributable to Alexander the Great (356-323; r. 336-323), the son of Philip II. After Philip II defeated the Greek coalition force in 338 BC in the battle of Chaeronea, he organized the Hellenic League in the Greek world, with himself as the leader of it. The Greek world finally achieved political unity – something that had never happened before – just that it was under the rule of a foreign power.

In 336 BC, Philip II was assassinated in Macedon. His twenty year old son Alexander the Great succeeded the throne and almost immediately began his great conquests. In 330 BC, the Persian Empire fell to his hands. In 328 BC, he conquered the Middle Asia. In 327 BC, his troops advanced to the Indus River, but his soldiers refused to move on. He left India in 325 BC, and died in 323 BC at the age of thirty-three. Almost immediately after his death, his unprecedented Empire fell apart, followed by a series of bloody civil wars. But these political incidents were of little interest for us as compared to the spectacular spread of Greek culture all over the Alexandrian Empire.

Whenever Alexander conquered new territories, he would order the building of new cities. Although they were originally intended for defensive purposes, what happened later on was that Greek immigrants and merchants flooded into them. In a sense, they had taken up the missionary role to convert the entire Empire, which already encompassed much of the world known to the West, to the new Hellenistic culture. One could meet these "missionaries" in big, medium, small cities, ready to sell their knowledge and art to whoever could hire them. They include financial advisers, architects, grammarians, rhetoricians, dancers, actors, painters, and so on. But one thing they would never be again, namely, being a free citizen in an independent Polis. This suggested that one should not expect the Greeks in the Hellenistic Age to match their ancestors in terms of virtues and artistic production. Indeed, although the Hellenistic Age had produced a long list of artists, most of their works lacked originalities and depth found in earlier Classical Age; while the focus of people had shifted from realizing Homeric virtues to theoretical pursuits of knowledge in mathematics and science. One thing is certain, that if the Classical Greek Age represented the peak of the humanist culture, then by the Hellenistic Age, the West had already passed this peak.

To sum up, the Classical spirit of realizing the various Homeric virtues was gone after the fall of the Polis system. However, that did not mean that the entire Greek civilization had been at once uprooted and vanished. What had happened instead was that the Greek culture had lost much of the humanist Classical spirit, to be replaced by individualistic and unheroic values. In other words, the Greek culture had survived in a new form. One last phase of the Antiquity yet remained to be discussed ─ the Roman Age.

3.4 Last Phase of Antiquity – The Roman Age[44]

[44] The following secondary source materials have been consulted for this section: Lane Cooper, *The Greek Genius and Its Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1928); William Greene, *Achievement of the Greeks*; Matthew Dillon and Lynda Garland, eds., *Ancient Greece: Social and Historical Documents Archaic Times to the Death of Socrates* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994); Elizabeth Rawson, *Perception of the Ancient Greeks*, ed. Kenneth J. Dover, pp. 1-28 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992); Reginald H. Barrow, *The Romans* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963); David Thompson, *The Idea of Rome: From Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1971); Richard M. Haywood, *The Myth of Rome's Fall* (New York: Crowell, 1958); Ferdinand Lot, *The End of the Ancient World and the Beginnings of the Middle Ages* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961); Peter R. L. Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity: From Marcus Aurelius to Muhammad* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971); Donal Kagan, ed., *The End of the Roman Empire: Decline or Transformation?* (Lexington: D. C. Heath, 1992); and Alfred J. Andrea, ed., *The Medieval Record: Sources of Medieval History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1997).

The history of Rome should be familiar to us all. By the turn of the millennium, the Romans had established an Empire that stretched from Gibraltar to the Black Sea and from England to North Africa. In a sense, the Mediterranean Sea became almost like a pond for the Romans. Never had Europe achieved a comparable level of political unity as in the Roman Age.

Rome the city was, according to their myths, founded in 753 BC by Romulus and Remus. That was the beginning of the kingdom phase of Rome. In 509 BC, a revolution led by the aristocracy successfully overthrew the kingship and Rome became a republic headed by a Consul elected by the aristocracy. Beginning with the First Samnites War in 343 BC, Rome kept expanding on the Italian Peninsula and eventually unified it in 270 BC. Later from 264 BC until 146 BC, the Romans had been engaged in three successive wars with Carthage that possessed North Africa and Spain. Almost simultaneously from 215 BC to 146 BC, they had fought four wars with the Macedonians. In both campaign the final victory fell into the hands of the Romans, who had been handsomely rewarded with vast territories around the Sea. In 64 BC, Syria was annexed by the Empire; and in 30 BC, the Egyptian Ptolemy dynasty ended when Octavian (63BC-14AD) defeated Mark Antony (83?-30) and Cleopatra (69-30). In 29 BC, Octavian was named emperor by the senate, and in 27 BC he was given the honorary title of Augustus. This was the beginning of the Roman Empire. By the turn of the millennium, the Romans had established an Empire with no temporal or territorial limit.[45]

From 29 BC until the death of Emperor Marcus Aurelius (121-180; r. 161.-180) in 180 AD, the Empire had enjoyed more than two hundred years of peace and prosperity – a period that was known as *Pax Romana*[46]. The wars had ended. The entire Mediterranean Sea was now under the protection of the imperial navy. Throughout the entire Empire, merchants could use one currency, follow one set of law code, and do business anywhere they wanted. Industries thrived, new cities sprang up, and Rome the capital of the Empire shone ever more brightly.

3.4.1 Latin culture of the Romans

Let's leave aside the military, political and economic success of the Roman Empire for the moment and focus instead on her cultural achievements. Roughly speaking, from the close of the Classical Age somewhere near 400 BC until the first trace of Dark Age European culture somewhere in 300 AD – a period that roughly corresponded to the acme of the Roman Age – the Western world had undergone a series of cultural restructuring that eventually transformed the West into a fundamentally different civilization.

The Greek culture had long exerted considerable influence on the Romans. Especially after the final Macedonian war in 167 BC, Rome was suddenly flooded with Greeks and Greek luxuries, and many young Romans began to absorb the Greek way of life. The Roman lyric poet Horace (65-8BC) once claimed that "the proud city (Rome) that took captive Greece was herself overcome by the culture of Greece."[47] Even the great Latin culture proponent Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43) had to admit that Greece was the true cradle of the Rome civilization,[48] and where Pliny the Younger said that Rome owed the Greeks a great debt of gratitude.[49] And in fact, even the

[45] The great Roman poet Virgil (70-19 BC) once wrote: "No limits have I fixed, of time, or place, to the vast Empire of the godlike race." See Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans. Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Random House, 1983), i.281-2.

[46] Latin. Literally meaning *Roman Peace*.

[47] Horace, *Works*, trans. Charles E. Passage (New York: F. Ungar Pub. Co., 1983), Epistles II, i.156.

[48] Marcus Tullius Cicero, *In Catilinam I-IV*, trans. C. Macdonald (Harvard University Press, 1977), Pro Flacco, 62.

[49] Pliny the Younger, *Letters*, vol. 2, trans. William Melmoth (Harvard University Press, 1924), VIII.xxiv.2-3.

orthodox Roman religion had taken much of its ideas from the Greek religion. Thus, the Latin culture had inherited a lot of treasures from Greece.

However, few would disagree that the Latin culture was no match of the Classical Greek culture in terms of greatness. Cicero once proudly claimed that "had Rome honoured poetry and painting as the Greeks have done, she too would have produced great poets and painters."[50] But the truth was that the Latin culture was never able to claim a dominant position over the vastly superior Greek culture. Indeed, a Greek satirist called Lucian (120?-180?) recorded in one of his amusing essays that Greeks could still see Romans as uneducated vulgarians as late as the second century AD.[51] The Roman rhetorician Quintilian (35?-95?) did an interesting comparison between the Roman and Greek culture in the second century AD. He wrote that:

> …if the Greek is the more graceful language, Latin is the more forceful; Virgil is the Roman Homer, Cicero the Roman Demosthenes, Sallust (86?-34?) can stand with Thucydides and Livy (59BC-17AD) with Herodotus; in comedy we cannot compete, and in tragedy only with Seneca's (4?BC-65) *Thyestes*.[52]

The fact that he did not claim superiority anywhere was perhaps another piece of evidence to support the generally accepted comment that nowhere could the Latin culture claimed to dominate the Greek culture, even though one may argue that the Romans were more advanced in architecture, jurisprudence[53], and administration of the Empire. Hence, as suggested earlier in the chapter, the ancient humanist culture had no doubt reached its acme in the Classical Age. From then onwards, it was on a defensive stance ─ not striving for further development, but rather for a mere survival.

Worst of all, even this little remnant showed additional signs of decadence later on. A modern historian, for instance, once put that the Empire in the whole second century AD was "unable to produce a single new idea of any sort"[54] and "was suffering an intellectual fatigue."[55] This was most apparent in historical writings. After the brilliant names like Tacitus (55?-120?), Juvenal (60?-140?), Pliny (23AD-79), and Suetonius (69?-140?), the Empire could not produce another remarkable historian. For instance, Fronto (100?-170?), the single-most celebrated writer in the second century, was below the standard of mediocrity. The discovery of his works in the nineteenth century has dealt a blow to his reputation, as they showed him as a "superficial, vainglorious and hollow declaimer."[56] Similarly, Aulus Gellius (130?-180?) composed a twenty volume compendium of miscellaneous learning that he entitled *Noctes Atticae* or *Attic Nights* whose goal was, "by furnishing a quick and easy short-cut, […to] lead active and alert minds to a desire for independent learning and to the study of the use arts."[57] Yet it is generally agreed that his work had no method, no definite end in view, no order, no individual thought and no style. This was true even for sculpture, as hardly any work produced after 100 AD was worth mentioning. Most of them were merely imitations of the Classical works and were intended to glorify a certain contemporary hero instead of expressing various

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[50] Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, trans. John E. King (London: W. Heinemann, 1945), I.i.8.
[51] See Lucian, "On the salaried posts in great houses," passim; quoted in Kenneth Dover, *Perceptions of the ancient Greeks*, pp. 23.
[52] Quintilian, *The Institutio Oratoria of Quintilian*, trans. Harold E. Butler (London: Heinemann, 1922), X.i.46, 93, 98, 100-1, 105, 123.
[53] Cicero, the great writer of Roman Republic, said that the Greek civil laws are all "artless, well-nigh ridiculous." See Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Cicero on Oratory and Orators*, trans. John S. Watson (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1970), i.44.
[54] Comment of Tenney Frank; quoted in Richard Haywood, *The Myth of Rome's Fall,* pp. 32.
[55] Comment of Mommsen; quoted in ibid.
[56] Ferdinand Lot, *The End of the Ancient World*, pp. 151.
[57] Aulus Gellius, *The Attic Nights of Aulus Gellius*, trans. John C, Rofle (Harvard University Press, 1946), Preface 12.

Homeric virtues. In short, the western world after 100 AD became a cultural Sahara.

3.4.2 Reasons of Roman Cultural Backwardness

The fact that the Roman Empire could not safeguard the invaluable humanist culture that she had inherited from Greece was attributable to the general atmosphere of the Empire. First and foremost, their practical spirit, inherited from their farmer ancestors, could not possibly favour any serious intellectual and cultural development. As a matter of fact, the Romans never appreciated the speculative, abstract and philosophical portion of Greek culture. What they often did, as in the case of mathematics and physics, was that they appropriated the practical part of a certain field of study for immediate use, while leaving the theoretical basis behind. Similarly, art quickly degraded and served as means of glorification for contemporary great figures, abandoning the higher Classical purpose of attaining Homeric virtues. With such practical spirit, they could never comprehend the concept of achieving a virtuous life through art, religion, and intellection. This was the first sign that the Classical concept of humanism did not interest the Romans.

Another important reason contributing to the decline in Classical culture was their obsession with gold coins that became especially evident during the *Pax Romana*. As the lust for gold grew, people began to leave the development of virtues behind, and solely focused on the pursuit of wealth. Such moral degeneration that had in fact begun in the late republic was captured by a historian called Sallust. In *Catilina*, he wrote that,

> …when wealth was once considered an honour, and glory, authority, and power attended on it, virtues lost her influence, poverty was thought a disgrace, and a life of innocence was regarded as a life of ill-nature. From the influence of riches, accordingly, luxury, avarice, and pride prevailed among the youth; they grew at once rapacious and prodigal; they undervalued what was their own, and coveted what was another's; they lost all distinction between sacred and profane, and threw off all consideration and self-restraint."[58]

If it was not told that this passage was written by a Roman historian two thousand years ago, one may easily assume that this is yet another typical critic on nowaday materialism! In any case, it should be clear that the rise of materialism had destroyed the moral grip that the orthodox Roman religion once had on the Roman's mind. As a consequence, the anxiety of the public to feel in control of their life whose pad had quickened hurriedly rose, as shown in the proliferation of "manuals of astrology, of dream book, of book of sorcery."[59] The Romans had lost the strong sensation on life-giving spirit and the passion to develop their human nature once found in Classical Greece.

Another factor that helped to strip the Classical spirit from the mind of the Hellenistic Greeks and later the Romans was a new philosophy called Stoicism, founded in the Hellenistic Age by a Cyprusian called Zeno (335?-263?).[60] Stoicism was passive and strictly individual, as compared to the active Classical philosophies that emphasized the power of humanity and the importance of collective life. This philosophy suggested that everything in the world (including one's destiny) was orderly and such orderly pattern was the will of God. Accordingly, they were uninterested to bring about any changes to the secular world, and were willing to accept anything that happened to them, lest they disturbed the heavenly order. The only thing that they cared was to restrict one's reasoning power, to strip oneself of all impulses and to follow a strict moral

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[58] Sallust, *Sallust's Bellum Catilinae*, trans. John T. Ramsey (California: Scholars Press, 1984), Decline in Morals, V-XIII.
[59] Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity*, pp. 63.
[60] It appeared that after the close of the Classical age, genuine Greek or Latin philosophies and religions could not compete with the less humanistic ways of thinking coming from the East. Stoicism, whose founder Zeno was a Phoenician, was one such example.

code in order to maintain a peaceful mind that would facilitate the perfection of one's spirit – not this-worldly virtues but the abstract and individual eternal spirit. This new philosophy so evidently lacked the life-giving energy found in the Classical values, and it had little interest to bring about any changes in the secular world with the power of human. At any rate, the sentiment of helplessness and reclusiveness here emerged.

The immensely popular Stoicism was mostly an upper and educated class phenomenon. For the uneducated mass, it was the various mystery cults[61] from the East that had substituted the Classical values. Generally speaking, most of these mystery cults believed that the world was evil and would eventually pass away; and man, sinful by nature, could achieve immortal bliss if only he turned away from things of this world and cultivated those of the eternal spiritual realm. Accordingly, along with varying degrees of asceticism, many of the cults believed in a redeemer god who would guide the world and eventually sacrifice himself in order to bring salvation, eternal life and union with God to his faithful followers. Hence, gone were the various Classical values like the emphasis on the development of one's human nature, the respect of power of humanity, and the this-worldly spirit. What replaced them was a passive belief that humanity was by nature incapable of saving themselves and must resort in the power of unseen. Although most of these mystery cults were small in scale, they had nevertheless accustomed the mind of the Romans to the possibility of a direct and personal vision of divinity through mystical ritual acts.

To sum up, the practical spirit of the Romans, their lust for gold coins, the new philosophies like Stoicism, as well as various mystery cults from the East together summoned an atmosphere that did not favour the Classical culture. People were no longer interested in their human nature and instead turned to the spiritual realm. The entire Roman society became anti-humanistic, and had prepared the way for the spread of the most important amongst all the mystery cults – Christianity.

[61] Examples of mystery cults include: Isis, Mithra, Cybele, Sol Invictus (Unconquered Sun), Gnostics, and finally Christianity.

3.4.3 Embrace of Christianity

The four factors above may explain the inability of the Romans to sustain the Classical culture, but they were certainly not sufficient to explain the coming of the drastically different "Middle Ages". The genuine answer of this issue was of course the fateful embracing of Christianity by the entire Roman society in the fourth century AD, which ultimately turned out to be the single most lasting impact that the Roman Empire had on human history.

After Jesus Christ (4BC-29)[62] was crucified in 29 AD, His twelve apostles soon left the Near East and began to preach the gospel within the Empire. An interesting question to ask here is who were the early Christians? Probably to the surprise of most readers, they were the merchants instead of the humble and oppressed. As mentioned earlier in a previous section, after the Empire unified the Mediterranean Sea, long-distance trade flourished. Merchants around the Sea carried their goods from one edge of the world to another, and this meant that very often they had to live outside their hometown for an extensive period of time. For instance, there was an account on a certain Phrygian merchant who had visited Rome the city for seventy-two times in his life.[63]

[62] It may sound strange that Jesus Christ was actually born in 4 BC given that BC literally stands for "Before Christ". However, our modern calendar which splits time between BC and AD (abbreviation of *Anno Domini*; Latin, literally "[in the] year of [Our] Lord") was not invented until 525 AD. At that time, Pope John I (r. 523-526) asked a monk named Dionysius (470?-540?) to prepare a standardized calendar for the western Church. Unfortunately, poor Dionysius missed the real BC/AD division by four years.

[63] Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity*, pp. 62.

This immediately gave rise to a problem. Recall that both the orthodox Greek and Roman religions were means to familiarize oneself with the unpredictable and mysterious natural world. However, they were strictly local, meaning that every time someone travelled to a strange place, he would face a completely different kind of religion, with bizarre ways of prayer and sacrifice, and with names of gods that were unheard-of. Thus, if a merchant travelled out of his hometown often enough, he would feel that he belonged to nothing, thereby generating an anxiety vis-à-vis the nature. Christianity apparently solved this problem for these cosmopolitan merchants since by nature it is a universal, not local, religion. Because there is only one God to serve, wherever a Christian goes, he faces the same type of rituals and the same familiar God. Thus, as a historian put it, until 200 AD, "the Christian communities were not recruited by the humble and oppressed, but instead the lower middle class and respectable artisan."[64]

It was only after the close of *Pax Romana* in 180 AD that Christianity began to spread among the humble and oppressed. So far in this chapter, the focus has been on the cultural development achieved by the ancient elites. Few words have been said about the situation of the unfortunates, especially the slaves. Slaves mainly came from two sources: kidnapping[65] and war captives[66], and they were sometimes castrated, who were loved by buyers of them.[67] They were usually involved in labour-intensive hard works like construction, farming or manufacturing. At times, they were even thrown into Colosseum the amphitheater in Rome to fight against wild animals with bare hands so as to amuse the audience. They were periodically traded in open market and were often killed by their masters for no specific reason. They were the fraction of mankind who looked the least like mankind.

For these wretched people, Christianity was indeed attractive, thanks to its emphasis on human equality, its promise of a better coming-life in Heaven, its trustworthy story of the arrival and sacrifice of the Messiah, as well as its ease to attain salvation through faith and prayer together gave them certain degrees of spiritual consolation from their miserable life. Such was the attractiveness of non-humanistic early Christianity[68] in the late Roman Age.

A similar story happened to the peasantry. Italy was once an earthly heaven for small farmers. However, during the Second Punic War (218-202), Hannibal (247-182) the Carthaginian general brought the war into the Italian peninsula, and this had brought the peasantry system to its knee. Part of the peasants who had lost their farm turned into cities, part of them became serfs for great tenants, and in general they lived a worse quality of life than their ancestors. Christianity, once again, a religion that promises a better coming-life and the equality of all human beings, provided a spiritual relief for these people who had been uprooted from their land and who lacked any goal in their life in this world.

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[64] Ibid.

[65] In a Greek play called *Wealth* by Aristophanes, a character called Poverty asked another character called Chremylos how he would get his servants. The latter answered that he would buy them with money of course, from someone who wanted to make a profit, like a merchant from Thessaly from amongst all those kidnappers. See Aristophanes, *Wealth*, trans. Alan H. Sommerstein (Warminster: Aris & Philips, 2001), 509-26.

[66] As an example, Thucydides recorded that in 416 BC the Athenians captured the Polis of the Melians, killed all the Melian men, and enslaved the children and women. See Thucydides, *The Fifth Book of Thucydides*, trans. Charles E. Graves (London: Macmillan, 1949), 1162.4.

[67] Herodotus recorded that a certain slave called Hermotimos was captured by enemy and sold to a wicked man called Panionios. This man made money by buying handsome slave, castrated them and then sold them at higher price. As an endnote to this anecdote, many years later Hermotimos finally took revenge and castrated Panionios and his four sons. See Herodotus, *History*, viii.105.1-106.4.

[68] The reason of using the term "early Christianity" is to distinguish Christianity before and after the eleventh century AD, as the cult looked completely different in these two phases.

Christianity gained further popularity among the lower social classes in the hundred years after the end of the reign of Emperor Marcus Aurelius in 180 AD. From then on, the Empire was plagued with civil wars, natural disasters, and barbarian invasions, which resulted in massive destruction, hyperinflation, and social upheavals. Just as the Empire seemed close to collapse, Emperor Diocletian (245-313; r. 284-305) rescued the Empire through ironhanded administration so as to improve the military strength of the Empire, mostly done by expanding the army, increasing the tax, and forcing people to inherit their familial occupation.[69] Although the work of Diocletian no doubt awarded the Empire another two hundred years of lifespan, the new rigid social system had further destroyed any hopes of having a pleasant life in this world.

The story was slightly different for the educated class. Albeit the unmistakable decline of Greek philosophy, for a while Christianity did not gain any wide acceptance among the small number of elites who still highly valued the Classical culture. However, sometime in the fourth or the fifth century, the Greek upper classes somehow abandoned the flexible Greek language that had been in use for a long time, in favour of a much more complicated Archaic Attic style spoken by small and meticulously educated elite.[70] A contemporary rhetor, when asked how he would punish a felon, answered with black humour: "make him learn the ancient classics by heart, as I have to do."[71] By reverting to an archaic form of Greek, they effectively set up a bulwark round the Greek culture, forcing the less educated to turn to something else. After all, Christian doctrines and Greek philosophies were two different means to achieve the same goal, namely a complete framework to interpret the world, just that the Christian method through conversion was much cheaper and easier to learn, especially for the less educated class.[72] As a consequence, many Greek philosophers later abandoned the Greek method in favour of the Christian method.

An important reason for the prevalence of Christianity over the other Eastern mystery cults with similar believes was the vastly superior Christian theory of demons. In other mystery cults, demons, or spirits with malicious character, were believed to float around and inflict mischief on humanity, and it was the task of their priests to temporarily cope with them through sacrifice. But in Christianity, as shown passim in the Bible, Jesus Christ had fully contained the demons and at times even turned them into friendly spirits. Thus, the Christian priests were able to present to the mass a picture in which demons could be entirely checked by Christ and His human agents. In a sense, doing so was like leading a small boy visiting a lion in a zoo, instead of showing him a scene of an adult fighting a lion. Such was one of the edges of early Christianity over other mystery cults.

Another edge of Christianity was its highly successful church system. The well-organized, Empire-wide church community offered at times public service that even the state could not and would not perform. At times of inflation, the Christians invested large sums of liquid capital in people; during public emergencies like plague or rioting, Christian clergy was shown to be the only united group in town, able to perform burial rituals and organize food supply; in cities with mass poor, the church supported them and other misfortunates; in 254, when some barbarians raided a group of Christians, the church was able to send large amount of ransom to rescue them; where two generations ago, faced by the same situation, the Roman state declared that they would not do anything to rescue the captives.[73] Even in the twenty-first century where humanitarianism becomes a social norm, these acts of the church still

[69] For example, the son of a bread maker must be a bread maker. This was because during the chaotic third century AD, many people ran away from the city to flee the wars, causing a severe setback in production.
[70] Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity*, pp. 64
[71] Ibid.
[72] The modern historian Peter Brown once remarked that "this is like an under-developed nation inhabitants claiming to have learnt nuclear physics through dreams and oracles." See ibid., pp. 53.
[73] This paragraph is mostly taken from ibid., pp. 67.

appear highly commendable to us ─ not to mention to the wretched in the late Roman Age.

Such tremendous growth of Christianity was of course not without setback. In its earliest days, thanks to its small scale and its similarities with Judaism, it had received little attention from the state. After all, the Roman government had traditionally been tolerant towards non-orthodox cults as long as they did not cause too much trouble. However, as Christianity mushroomed in the absence of state intervention, its church communities and its unique exclusivity due to its monotheistic nature began to severely disrupt the traditional Roman life based on polytheism and urban life. The fact that the Christians increasingly seemed to aim at a social revolution, which eventually took place many centuries later, finally made Emperor Nero (37AD-68; r. 54-68) to launch the first persecution on the Christians. However, the trend towards mysticism and monotheism was so strong that even the later Empire-wide persecution by Emperor Decius (201-251; r. 249-251) in 250 and eventually the greatest and also the bloodiest persecution by Diocletian in 303 failed to uproot Christianity from the Empire. Each time a persecution was over, the Christian community quickly recovered and forced the state to begin another round of assault. This cycle continued until 312.

In 312, Emperor Constantine (280-337; r. 306-337) who later moved the capital to Constantinople (nowaday Istanbul) was campaigning in Italy against Emperor Maxentius (278?-312; r. 306-312) his imperial rival. According to one Christian author, on the eve of the battle, Constantine had a dream in which he claimed that Christ appeared and commanded him to use in his war a standard made in the form of the cross.[74] Whatever had happened, shortly thereafter he won a decisive victory, thereby becoming the uncontested Emperor in the West. For whatever reason, he ascribed his victory to Christ and declared the full legal status of Christianity. Yet historians usually hold the view that the decision of Constantine appeared to be political, namely to cool down the hatred of the dangerous and influential Christian community who just suffered a series of brutal assaults.

Christianity quickly mushroomed once it had weathered the storm of persecution. In 313, Christianity commanded the belief of about ten percent of the population.[75] Yet by 390, it already became the majority religion.[76] A few decades later, all other religions were officially outlawed by the state[77]so that towards the end of the fifth century, Christianity had monopolized the religious belief in the Occidental world.

3.4.4 Fall of the Western Roman Empire

At the same time that Christianity grew stronger and stronger, the Empire herself turned weaker and weaker. After the death of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius in 180 AD, the *Pax Romana* abruptly ended. A series of civil wars amongst the generals took place, coupled by severe barbarian invasion from the North and the East. So great was the threat to Italy that Emperor Aurelian (212?-275; r. 270-275) deemed it necessary to construct massive defensive walls around the formerly unwalled Rome and later abandoned Romania to the Goths in order to shorten the frontier. Towards the end of the third century, the Empire had been so weakened that it seemed about to collapse. Fortunately, the new Emperor Diocletian initiated in a systematic manner a radical restructuring program that enabled the Empire to survive for another two centuries.

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[74] Eusebius of Caesarea (270-340), *Life of Constantine*, trans. Averil Cameron and Stuart G. Hall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), i.29.

[75] Alfred Andrea, ed., *The Medieval Record*, pp. 29.

[76] Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity*, pp. 104.

[77] For a list of law code concerning the suppression of paganism, see Michael Maas, ed., *Readings in Late Antiquity: A Sourcebook* (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 177-8.

Unfortunately, towards the end of the fourth century, the barbarians, especially the Huns and the Germans, turned more and more ferocious, and the western half of the Empire[78] once again lost the ability to defend herself. In 476 the year of destiny, the German tribe leader Odoacer (435?-493) who had controlled Italy for years deposed the puppet Western Roman Emperor Romulus Augustulus (b. 461?; r. 475-476) and never replaced him. The western half of the Empire finally came to an end.

No other topic has attracted more attention of modern historians than the fall of the Roman Empire. For instance, Edward Gibbon (1737-1794), the great historian of the eighteenth century who formally launched the systematic study on the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, said that:

> …the demise of Rome was the natural and inevitable effect of immoderate greatness. Prosperity ripened the principle of decay; the cause of destruction multiplied with the extent of conquest; and as soon as time or accident had removed the artificial supports, the stupendous fabric yielded to the pressure of its own weight. The story of its ruin is simple and obvious; and instead of inquiring why the Roman Empire was destroyed, we should rather be surprised that it had subsisted so long.[79]

Another historian called Michael Grant (b. 1914), said that "I have identified thirteen defects which, in my view, combined to reduce the Roman Empire to final paralysis."[80] Other theories include: outdated military tactics and lack of training of the Roman legions; Christianity had weakened the Empire's martial spirit and her ability to defend herself due to Christianity; Roman technology was inadequate to meet demands of changing times; disease mortally weakened Roman society; an exhausted soil was incapable of supporting the Empire's population; the Empire's vitality was sapped when the Roman upper classes were submerged by rural, Eastern, and Germanic people. Amongst these myriad theories, the one proposed by the noted French historian André Piganiol (1883-1968) is especially noteworthy: "The Empire did not die a natural death. It was assassinated."[81] This was a vivid way of expressing the view that the Western Roman Empire was destroyed by much stronger adversaries at a time when it showed no sign of natural weakness.

For whatever reason, the Roman Empire finally collapsed. A few hundred years later, a historian recorded the following prophecy of several pilgrims: "As long as the Colosseum stands, Rome will stand; when the Colosseum falls, Rome will fall; when Rome falls, the whole world will fall."[82] The world certainly did not come to an end in 476. And neither did the Classical culture fall in 476, since it has long died before that memorable year. Loosely speaking, ever since the Greek Polis system failed at around 400 BC, the humanistic Classical culture was destined to decline. This decadence later received additional boost from Stoicism, the Roman's practical spirit and their lust for wealth, and the various mystery cults from the East. And with the miraculous yet fateful conversion of Constantine, this transformation into an utterly non-humanist culture was finally completed. From then on, a drastically different kind of anti-humanist culture emerged and quickly replaced the long exhausted Classical culture.

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[78] In 286, Diocletian divided the empire into east and west in an attempt to rule the territory more effectively.

[79] Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1960), pp. 524-5.

[80] Quoted in Donal Kagan, ed., *The End of the Roman Empire*, pp. 5.

[81] Quoted in Richard Haywood, *The Myth of Rome's Fall*, pp. 5.

[82] Collected in fragments of Bede (673-735) in Sieur Charles Du Fresne Du Cange, *Glossarium Mediae et Infimae Latinitatis*, vol. 2, ed. and trans. G. A. L. Henschel, et al. (Niort: L. Favre, 1883), pp. 407. Bede was only quoting a prophecy of several Anglo-Saxon pilgrims who visited Rome before his death in year 735, for our venerable monk had never passed the English Channel.

3.5 Hagiography and Dark Age Europe[83]

It is difficult to assign a good label to this new culture. To call it "medieval" is no doubt incorrect. The term "Middle Ages", usually thought to last from around 650 until somewhere in 1500, could and should be divided into two distinct epochs, with year 1000 as the line of division. These two halves of "Middle Ages" differed so drastically from each other that they must be treated separately, as will be shown shortly. Nor is it adequate to label the new culture as the "Christian" culture since this mystery cult also looked completely different before and after year 1000, making such label highly inaccurate. Thus, due to the lack of better alternatives, it leaves us no choice but to use a highly controversial term ─ the Dark Age European culture. This label is not perfect simply because the expression "Dark Age" readily leads one to erroneously associate it with unenthusiastic terms like "dissolution" and "corruption". The truth is that the more closely one inspects this culture, the less "Dark" it in fact appears. Nonetheless, given that "Dark Age" is the least of the evils, this term would be used throughout this book. Roughly speaking, this new culture could be dated from as early as 313 AD, the year when Christianity acquired imperial recognition, until around 1000 AD, the first sign of European Renaissance.

As usual, the best way to understand a certain epoch is by studying its artwork. Let us take a look at the following short passage found in a Dark Age English literature:

> As has been told by men that knew of it, the man of memorable life[84] cured the ailments of various sick people, by invocation of the name of Christ, during those days in which, when he went to the conference of kings, he remained for a short time in the ridge of Cété. By the extending of his holy hand, or when they were sprinkled with water blessed by him, or even by touching the hem of his cloak, or by receiving a blessing of anything, such as salt, or bread, and dipping it in water, very many sick people, believing, regained full health.[85]

The passage above neither came from a fairy tale collection nor from a mythology, but from the hagiography (meaning the biography of a Saint) of Saint Columba called *Vitae Columbae* or *Life of Columba*, written by Saint Adomnan (625?-704) a hundred years after Columba's death.[86] Albeit the brevity of this passage, it nevertheless contained almost all the features unique to the Dark Age European culture. Therefore once one thoroughly understands it, one should have a good sense about the nature of this epoch.

3.5.1 Miracles and Magic

[83] The following secondary source materials have been consulted for this section: Alexander H. Thompson, *Bede: His Life, Times, and Writings* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969); Charles W. Jones, *Saints' Lives and Chronicles in Early England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1947); Peter Brown, *The Cults of the Saints*; John van Engen, "The Christian Middle Ages as an Historiographical Problem," *American Historical Review* 91 (June 1986): pp.519-52; Alfred Andrea, *The Medieval Record*; David Thompson, *The Idea of Rome*; Samuel Dill, *Roman Society in Gaul in the Merovingian Age* (London: Macmillan, 1926); Valerie I. J. Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991); Alexander Murray, "Missionaries and Magic in Dark-Age Europe," in *Debating the Middle Ages: Issues and Readings*, ed. Lester K. Little and Barbara H. Rosenwein (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), pp. 92-104; Henri Pirenne, *Mohammed and Charlemagne*, trans. Bernard Miall (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1939); P. H. Sawyer, *Kings and Vikings, Scandinavia and Europe, A.D. 700-1000* (London; New York: Methuen, 1982); P. H. Sawyer, *The Age of the Vikings*, 2nd ed. (London: E. Arnold, 1971);

[84] "The man of memorable life" is referring to Saint-Columba (521?-597?), the founder and the first abbot (r. 542?-597?) of the Iona monastery in western Scotland.

[85] Saint Adomnan, *Adomnan's Life of Columba*, trans. and ed. Allan O. Anderson and Marjorie O. Anderson (London: T. Nelson, 1961), ii.6, pp. 339, 41.

[86] To be precise, it was written between 689 and 704, See Jean-Michel Picard, "The Purpose of Adomnan's Vitae Columbae", *Peritia* 1 (1982): pp. 167.

The most surprising element in the excerpt above must be the magical power that Columba possessed, or at least seemed to possess. Indeed, the idea that a certain religious man could cure sick people merely by blessing them is perhaps incomprehensible even to the most faithful and stubborn-minded Christians nowadays, let alone to non-Christians. However, for the Dark Age Europeans, it was the other way around – it was inconceivable of not to think that the Saints possessed magic power.

That the uneducated and thus credulous mass believed in magic should not be surprising for us. Much more unanticipated was perhaps the fact that even the sober-minded intellectuals of the time, such as historians, firmly believed in miracles as well. For instance, Saint Bede the Venerable, the most celebrated British historian in the Dark Age, recorded the following story in his *Historia Ecclesiastica* or *Ecclesiastical History*: a jailer of a captive of war found that the fetters used to bind him always dropped down, which the jailer later discovered that it was because the brother of the captive who was a priest prayed for him everyday.[87] This was only one instance where Bede had included stories of this kind in his supposedly serious history of England. The fact that he indiscriminately treated the miracle stories with other non-miracle historical events was an important piece of evidence demonstrating that "no doubt Bede sincerely believed that the miracles he described really happened."[88]

In order to understand the origin of their faith in magic, it is necessary to take a closer look at the conversion of the Roman population. In the late Roman Age, the Greek way of interpreting the world through natural philosophy was no longer able to compete with the interpretation of various Eastern mystery cults like Christianity so that by the time of Saint Gregory of Tours (538-594), the most celebrated French historian in the Dark Age, ignorance of science and philosophy was widespread.[89] Generally speaking, these cults believed in a system of worldview that nowaday people would immediately dismiss as superstitions inspired by faith – that the world is full of spirits, that these spirits are in fact agents of God, that demons float around and inflict all kinds of mischief on humanity, that certain human beings possess the required spiritual power to cope with those demons, that a Messiah would come on earth and save humanity, and that there is a glorious spiritual life awaiting us after our flesh is dead.

Attentive readers shall remember that the highly humanistic Greek polytheism also believed that the nature was full of spirits. What distinguished Christianity altogether from the Greek counterpart was that Christianity showed no interest in human nature and instead focused on the power of the unseen. People no longer considered the shaping of human nature as the ultimate goal of life, no longer believed in the supremacy of human power, no longer took the deities as idols and imitate their virtues, and no longer interpreted the universe as a joyful playground for humanity. Instead, they paid no attention in the shaping of human nature; they regarded themselves as vehicles for divine activity with a profound sense of littleness and sinfulness; they saw the universe as a scene of chaos and mystery, in which human could at best do renunciation, submission to supernatural and grateful acceptance of miraculous aid; and they deemed God not as a friend but as an angry judge with few human traces who reined the world in an absolute sense and who expressed His judgments through miracles and disasters, and men needed to avert His anger through penance and gift to church, and by turning the world to monastic life. Human nature ceased to interest the West, where it had been substituted by faith to the omnipotent God. This new interpretation that emphasized on the power of the spirits was so deeply rooted in everyone's mind that it could not be easily altered.

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[87] Saint Bede the Venerable, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. Bertram Colgrave and Roger A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), iv.22, pp. 401-5.

[88] Alexander Thompson, *Bede: His Life, Times, and Writings*, pp. 227.

[89] Charles Jones, *Saints' Lives and Chronicles in Early England*, pp. 78.

Their firm belief in the omnipresent power of God explained the "existence" of magic in the Dark Age. Miracles were seen as messages or judgments of God and hence were considered to be natural occurrence. Miracles were always expected, therefore miracles always happened, and doubts in miracles were seen as profanatory and heretical. Thus, even as eminent as Pope Gregory the Great (540?-604; r. 590-604) "felt bound to believe in miracles that he cannot have any doubt."[90] As an example, if a sick was healed a few days after a Saint blessed him or her, he or she would attribute that to the miracle of Saint and never to the physicist who visited him or her a few days ago. To sum up, the notion of miracles was the social norm of the time and was to be accepted without question.

The speed of the conversion also explained the belief in magic in the Dark Age. After 313, what the Christian bishops faced was flocks and flocks of pagans lining up in front of churches, all waiting to be converted. Such a rash conversion of the huge mass "forced the bishops to accept many pagan practices"[91], like various practices of magic and theories of demons and spirits unique to certain Eastern mystery cults. Thus, due to the haste of the mass conversion after 313, Christianity was all of a sudden stuffed with all sorts of exotic religious practices like certain kinds of magic.

A similar story happened later to the conversion in the pagan lands of England, Scotland and Ireland in the fifth and sixth century. In these remote corners of the world, the local cults were so deeply rooted in the society that when the Christian missionaries arrived, they found themselves fighting a strenuous battle with these well established religions. In fact, this was exactly the task of Columba, namely to convert the pagans in Scotland. His hagiography written by Adomnan was a record of how he won the mind of the various races in Scotland with his miracles. Thus, in the midst of these extended and tedious clashes, the missionaries could not possibly have the time to slowly wash away all the pagan practices on these lands and must resort to rash conversion so as to popularize Christianity in the shortest amount of time. As a result, they were forced to adapt Christianity to the various pagan practices so as to render the Christian belief more easily acceptable. As an evidence, Pope Gregory the Great, in an often-quoted letter to Abbot Mellitus (r. 590-604) in 601 concerning how pagan temples were to be dealt with, recommended not the destruction but the adaptation of pagan shrines and celebrations, for "it is doubtless impossible to cut out everything at once from their stubborn minds."[92] Thus, the strategy of these early missionaries was simply to step into the shoes of the pagans from which the latter has been dislodged, thereby allowing Christianity to quickly gain the same level of status as the existing cults, without having to begin from ground zero.

The traditional spiritual worldview of the people, together with the rashness of the conversion, left no choice to the bishops and the missionaries but to concentrate on the omnipotence and omnipresence of their God so as to win the heart of the pagans. Therefore, when they preached the Gospel, they mostly focused on Christ's miracle power instead of His virtues and other aspects of His human nature. Yet even more commonly used in preaching were hagiographies, in which the Saints were presented as the agents of God who could save their followers from the endless sufferings and mischief with Their Holy power granted by God. In other words, the miracle stories in the hagiographies became evidences to convince people of the omnipotence of God and Christianity. In short, Christian culture as portrayed by the church fathers in those early days was taught through supernatural signs and miracle stories in the hagiographies and Bible, instead of through moral stories.

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[90] Frederick H. Dudden, *Gregory the Great, His Place in History and Thought* (London: Longmans, 1905), pp. 340.

[91] Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, pp. 18.

[92] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, i.30, pp. 109.

In summary, unlike the Greek and Roman polytheism, early Christianity heavily focused on the supernatural power of God and utterly ignored any discussion on development of virtues and human nature. This was the reason why historians in general agreed that the early Christians "were at best only superficially Christianized"[93] and had "in broad stretches a religious consciousness that can hardly be called Christian."[94] Such were the main characteristics of early Christianity in Dark Age Europe.

3.5.2 Variety of Saints

Back in the Classical Age, the deities who represented various virtues served as models to imitate in the course of shaping one's human nature. They were an integral part of Greek humanist culture. As Europe approached the Dark Age, however, the Greek humanist tradition quickly yielded its position to the early Christianity, and the deities in Homer's works were replaced by the Saints. After all, hardly anyone in the Dark Age would read Homer because they were seen as pagan and therefore heretical. Instead, hagiographies emerged as the favourite literatures of the time, even surpassing the Bible. In those days, "the philosophers and the orators have fallen into oblivion; the masses do not even know the name of the emperors and their generals; but everyone knows the names of the martyrs (a type of Saints), better than those of their most intimate friends."[95] Such was the popularity of these Christian heroes.

There existed a wide variety of Saints. The first type was the Christian martyrs. These Christians all martyrized while defending the church against the persecutions by the Roman Empire before 313. The courage of these martyrs was impressive for the mass at a time of increased brutality, and they enormously helped to attract new followers after each round of persecution.

Another variation was the ascetic Saints. After the end of the persecution era, no Christian died as martyrs anymore. Shortly afterwards, people's attention shifted to a few church fathers living in solitude in the African desert. They were known as monks, a word coming from the Greek *monachos*, which meant "one who lives alone". Later, some of them felt that it was too difficult to live in isolation and began to live with other monks together in a monastery under the leadership of an abbot.

Originally, these monks lived a monastic life so as to stay away from evil influences of the secular world and to suppress all physical impulses so that God might fill their human body and work through in miraculous ways. For this end, they all followed a strict set of rules that required them to renounce their own will, to be fully obedience to Christ and the Abbot, to give up all of their possession, to avoid gluttony, and to drink as little as possible.[96] However, the world later perceived them as special friends of God who, by virtue of that relationship, possessed special spiritual and divine power that they could impart to the weaker members of society, and thousands through the Saints and monks came to know God. Columba fell into this category of Saints. In the eyes of the mass, this abbot of the Iona monastery gained his holy power of miracles through his close connection with God made possible by his ascetic and monastic life.

Yet another type of Saints was the recluses, which was in fact an extreme form of ascetic monks. Gregory of Tours, the most celebrated French historian in the Dark Age mentioned earlier, gave us an account of a twelve year old boy who volunteered to become a recluse. For eight years he stayed in seclusion within a little cell where hardly one can stand, sufficed with very little food and drinks,

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[93] John van Engen, "The Christian Middle Ages as an Historiographical Problem," pp. 521

[94] Ibid., pp. 520.

[95] Theodoret, *Theodoreti Graecarum Affectionum Curatio*, 8.67, PG 83, 1033A; quoted in Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, pp. 50.

[96] See Terrence Kardong, ed., *Benedict's Rule: A Translation and Commentary* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1996), Prologue, ch. 2, 33, 39, 40.

and devoted himself to watching and prayers.[97] No doubt that people in those days believed that absolute seclusion would purify their spirit from all secular evils. Such religious zealot is hardly comprehensible to nowaday people. [98]

The above quick survey on Saints was enough to demonstrate that these Saints, unlike their counterparts in the Classical Age, were no longer models whose human nature were to be imitated by the mass, but were instead their sacred protectors through their divine power. Moreover, these Saints often practiced what might appear as self-torturing activities that aimed at establishing spiritual connections with the Heaven. Once again, this was completely the opposite of the Classical traditions that emphasized on the physical, moral and intellectual training that aimed at the development of one's humanity. In short, in Dark Age Europe, the notion of regarding human nature as the supreme issue of humanity disappeared. Only one thing was important ─ faith in God.

3.5.3 Merger of Heaven and Earth

The above passage in *Life of Columba* was interesting in another sense that it tells us about the Dark Age European viewpoint on the relationship between this world, the upper world, and the coming world. In Classical Age, people highly valued life in this world. Aristotle's definition of happiness told us that happiness could be achieved in this world with human power alone. The notion of the upper world and the coming world played the slightest influence in life of this world.

However, in the Dark Age Europe, the concept of Heaven was ever more closely related to life of this world. As the excerpt in *Life of Columba* described, Columba invoked the name of Christ before he performed his miracles. Such sequence suggested that strictly speaking his miracles were done by God through him. So his miracles were not magic at all but were merely acts of the omnipotent God performed through His holy representative on earth. In fact, if one carefully reads the entire *Life of Columba*, one would notice that every miracle Columba performed was always preceded by a short prayer or invocation of the name of Christ. It was as if the Saints were God's agent in this world and that Heaven was just above the sky and constantly exerted influences on earth.

This idea of a merger between the Heaven and this world could further be shown in the formation of Christian communities. Usually, after a Saint was dead, the church or monastery would keep the body in the cemetery in the backyard instead of burning it or burying it far away. This was because people believed that this way the Saints would and could continue to impart their holy power to nearby inhabitants. Accordingly, in order to benefit from that remnant of divine power as much as possible, people built villages

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[97] Saint Gregory, Bishop of Tours, *History of the Franks*, trans. Ernest Brehaut (New York: Octagon, 1965), VIII.a34, pp. 199.

[98] Unfortunately, there hardly existed any physical description of these Dark Age Christian recluses. Yet a British in the early twentieth century visited Tibet and read a description of a Buddhist recluse who had lived in a cell for sixty-nine years in complete solitude, with no chatting and no sunlight. That recluse felt that his death was near and wanted to see sunlight again before he died, so people led him out and observed that:

> …he was all bent up together and as small as a child, and his body was nothing but a light grey parchment-like skin and bones. His eyes had lost their colour, were quite bright and blind. His hair hung round his head in uncombed matted locked and was pure white. His body was covered only by a rag, for time had eaten away his clothing and he had received no new garments. He had a thick unkempt beard, and had never washed himself all the time or cut his nails.

It would not be surprising if Christian recluses looked like this lama after years and years of seclusion. See, Sven Anders Hedin, Trans-Himalaya (New York: Macmillan, 1909), pp. 8.

around those holy cemeteries near monasteries where no city should be built.[99] Dark Age European villages, therefore, were no longer economic or political but primarily religious centres. Hence, the Saints had broken the ancient boundaries between Heaven and earth, divine and human, living and dead, and town and grave. The Heaven lied just beside people's dwelling place.

It was however the political treatises of Saint Augustine of Hippo (354-430) entitled *De Civitate Dei* or *City of God* that best illustrated the relationship between earth and Heaven. His work enjoyed unparallel influence for several centuries and served as the blueprint for the correlation of faith and politics, only challenged by the rediscovered works of Aristotle in Renaissance almost a full millennium later. For instance, he wrote in chapter seventeen that for those who lived in good faith, the life in this world was only a pilgrimage with little meaning in itself, compared with the glorious life in the Heaven after death. Also, he wrote that "the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory which shall be revealed in us"[100], and that "it is not in view of terrestrial and temporal benefits that God is to be worshiped, but in view of eternal life, everlasting gifts and of the society of the heavenly city itself."[101] Thus, all secular orders were meaningless, and everything promised by Christianity lied ahead in the Heaven ahead. Once again, the concept of upper world and the coming world played a crucial role in the shaping of people's behaviour in this world. All that mattered was to have faith so that one could reach the Heaven after death.

To sum up, the concept of the Heaven and the coming world completely dominated the mind of Dark Age Europeans. While the Classical Greeks sought the perfection of body and soul, the Dark Age Europeans sought to reach the Heaven after death, which could be done with faith and faith alone. Thus, faith far outweighed the importance of developing one's human nature.

3.5.4 Literary Style in the Dark Age

The literary style of Adomnan, the author of *Life of Columba*, was equally revealing. His work contained in total 119 short accounts on Columba's miracles, yet they followed no particular chronology and might appear to be hopelessly jumbled together. After all, no chronology was possible even if one tries to sort them because only in two instances are we given a precise relative chronology[102] – let alone a precise date. In fact, the majority of the passages began with vague terms like *alio in tempore* (at one time) that tell us nothing about date or chronology.[103] This timelessness and lack of chronology would appear highly abnormal in a modern biography.

Moreover, Adomnan appeared not to be very creative in the style of narration, since almost all the shorter passages were merely a mass of repetition in terms of format. Very often they began with *alio in tempore*, followed by a brief description of the circumstance encountered by Columba. Then the Saint would pray to the Lord, who subsequently granted him supernatural power to overcome the obstacle. Finally, all the amazed witnesses of the miracle would glorify God and Columba.

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[99] For instance, Saint Athanasius (296-373) wrote in his *Life of Anthony* 14 that he once "founded a city in the desert." See Heliodorus, *An Aethiopian History written in Greek by Heliodorus* (New York: AMS Press, 1967), 1.5.3; See Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, pp. 8 for a similar deliberate sense of paradox surrounding a brigand's lair in the marshes.

[100] Originally a quote from the Bible, Romans: 8.18; quoted in Saint Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, *The City of God*, trans. John Healey (London: Dent; New York: E. P. Dutton, 1931), V.18.

[101] Ibid.

[102] "…two years after the battle of Cul-drebene…" in Saint Adomnan, *Adomnan's Life of Columba*, i.7; and "For indeed about seventeen years ago…" in ii.44.

[103] Approximately 99 out of the total 119 passages in *Life of Columba* began with *alio in tempore* or close equivalents.

Also, these shorter passages had well-nigh no artistic value as all of them were laid down with the barest language skills and hardly in any aesthetic fashions. A few longer passages, however, were unexpectedly of superb artistic quality. This was especially true for the last passage of book three, with the scene of Columba's horse dropping tears as the life of its master comes to an end[104] often dubbed as one of the most touching scenes in Dark Age literature.

Furthermore, Adomnan appeared economical on the description of everything. Columba as described by Adomnan in *Life of Columba* acted almost like an emotionless robot with not the slightest trace of humanity that performed miracles wherever he went. No matter he encountered things that were fortunate or unfortunate, Adomnan would not tell us anything about the emotional state of Columba. As such, Columba as portrayed by Adomnan lacked the humanity that makes a human a true human. In addition, Adomnan never provided his readers with any physical details of any individual, any object or any location, nor any precise figures for distance, date, time, and size. Hence, one never knows whether a certain monk was tall or short, or a quill was old or new, or a church was gorgeous or ugly, or the time was early or late.[105] It was as if detailed description counted for nothing in those days.

Most important, many events that had no doubt left indelible marks on his career like his exile from Ireland, his founding of the Iona monastery, as well as his conversion of the Picts[106] were all together omitted in *Life of Columba*. One could only expect to obtain the barest essential facts on his youth[107] and his decision to leave Ireland from Adomnan's work.[108] It was entirely valid to question if a hagiography could really be considered as a biography.

For readers who are not accustomed to Dark Age literatures, the list of features above on *Life of Columba* can be a surprise. The absence of rhetoric, the repetition in style, the lack of descriptive details and precision, and the scarcity of narration on his secular life may lead to a simple conclusion that Adomnan simply lacked the required skill of a writer. However, the fact that all the 112 passages strictly followed these characteristics was a convincing sign that he did it in purpose. Moreover, let's not forget that the majority of other Dark Age writings also shared these artistically unacceptable features.[109] Hence, it might be worthwhile to inspect the reason of this Europe-wide phenomenon.

There existed at least three reasons. The first one was about the literacy of the general public. It is very important to remember that these hagiographies were read by the literates Christians, or read to the illiterate Christians during mass. Whichever the case, people were not as nearly as educated in the Classical Age since they never received the same level of education that the Greeks enjoyed. Hence, if the hagiographies were written with Homeric level of rhetoric, hardly any Christian would understand. Thus, it was important for the hagiographers to keep the language simple.

Secondly, even if the hagiographers wanted to fill their pages with Homeric rhetoric, they probably could not do so. This was because they too did not receive the same quality of training as did the Classical writers. Generally speaking, Dark Age authors were stripped of skill in arrangement, literary delicacy and purity of expression, while their Latin was barbarous and decadent.

[104] Saint Adomnan, *Adomnan's Life of Columba*, iii.23.
[105] This observation applies to other writings of the time. For instance, in Bede's prose, there is no date, no measure of length and breadth, no unit of money, and no technical title except king. See Charles Jones, *Saints' Lives and Chronicles in Early England*, pp. 74.
[106] The Picts were one of the ancient races residing in Scotland.
[107] Saint Adomnan, *Adomnan's Life of Columba*, ii.25.
[108] Ibid., iii.4. The story of his exile from Ireland is very interesting, as it involves probably the first legal case on copyright in the West. See Menzies Lucy, *Saint Columba of Iona: A Study of his Life, his Times, & his Influences* (London; Toronto: Dent, 1920), pp. 21-36.
[109] Approximately six hundred hagiographies were written before year 800.

Interestingly enough, Emperor Charlemagne (742-814; r. 800-814)[110] who had unified for a short period of time the territory of nowaday France, Germany and northern Italy once openly complained to the bishops, the most educated class in those days, that:

> …we have recognized in most of [your] letters both correct thoughts and uncouth expressions. As the skill in writing was less, so also the wisdom for understanding the Holy Scriptures might be much less than it rightly ought to be. And although errors of speech are dangerous, far more dangerous are errors of the understanding.[111]

Even the educated bishops and monks of the time were such ill-trained in writing, let alone the general public.[112] After all, the objective of the limited education was restricted to the acquisition of basic background knowledge and reading skills required to interpret the Bible and hagiographies and to discuss theological issues. In any case, literary training was not the prime focus of the bishops and monks in those days.

The third reason was religious. Once again, it was worthwhile to recall that the primary channel where the mass in the Dark Age learnt the message of God was through hagiographies. Hence, the hagiographers had the important task to render their works as appealing as possible. For this end, they stripped all human nature from the Saints so as to present them as unhuman as possible. To recall, God at that time was thought to be emotionless and also lacked any trace of humanity. Accordingly, portraying the Saints as unhuman beings would make them suited to the definition of holy beings, and this would make the public much easier to believe that the Saints really possessed divine power given their lack of humanity.

It was also important for the hagiographers to render their miracle stories as ideal as possible so that they would appear more convincing. Bear in mind that in every passage, Columba always overcame the obstacles in an effortless fashion and in a systematic manner, with no failure or difficulty. As such, the concept of the superiority of divine power over demonic power would come much clearer. Simply imagine how much credibility on divine power it would take away if Columba had to fight a long and tedious battle to defeat pagan and demons. This explained the straightforwardness of the format.

Another preoccupation of hagiographers was that anything that would make these divine miracle stories secularized must be excluded. Accordingly, all details on objects, all measures of things, all references of time, and all human traits of people had been consciously eliminated, as those details would make their divine stories secularized. This was especially true for rhetoric. Certainly, Homeric type of rhetoric and style would imbue a high level of vividness in the miracle stories, but at the same time they also risked to render the stories full of secular type of literary beauty. Thus, a style and format with no description, no measurement, no rhetoric, and no variation in style avoided the secularization of the miracles.

Consciously or not, the poor Latin of these hagiographers also contributed to the charm of their writings. Certainly enough, the use of Homeric or Shakespearean rhetoric would imbue a story full of lively details; however, this did not mean that stories written with poor language skill were necessarily worthless. Their simplicity and unskilful use of language might at times avoid giving rise to the impression that the author was pedantic, just as a historian once suggested that the decadent Latin of the hagiographers had the

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[110] Charlemagne used to be the king of the Frankish kingdom (r.768-814), but later he was crowned Emperor by Pope Leo III (750?-816; r.795-816) on the Christmas Day of 800.

[111] University of Pennsylvania, *Translations and Reprints from the Original Sources of European History*, vol. 6, trans. D. C. Munro (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1900), no.5, pp. 12-14.

[112] In fact, even Emperor Charlemagne himself could not write, although he tried hard later in his life.

"charm and merit of sincerity and directness of vision."[113] In the meantime, their occasional singular vividness, born of intense feeling, gave "honest expression to thought" [114], which immensely contributed to sincerity of the religious message. In short, their poor Latin had the natural beauty of spiritual bareness.

In summary, the apparently degraded literary style of the hagiographies was partly due to the lack of proper language training, but mostly due to the necessity to convey the message of God as directly and as sincerely as possible. Faith was so crucial in the Dark Age that everything in the society had been geared to strengthen that concept, while everything that might impede it had been excluded altogether from their writings. After all, Adomnan himself admitted in the preface of *Life of Columba* that: "Let them remember that the kingdom of God inheres not in exuberance of rhetoric, but in the blossoming of faith."[115]

3.5.5 Concept of Wealth and Political Instability

Earlier in this chapter, we have briefly covered how the Greek viewed wealth as a means to pleasure and fulfilment. Given that the above survey on Dark Age has shown many contrasts between the Classical Age and Dark Age, it would not be surprising that their view on wealth would differ as well.

The Dark Age European apparently lost every bit of desire in the accumulation of wealth. An important reason was that Europe as a whole was so poor that no accumulation was possible. Roughly speaking, after year 650, all long-distance inland and maritime trades and almost all short-distance trades disappeared altogether from the continent. As a result, the ancient Mediterranean trade economy abruptly broke down into a nest of closed village economy, with virtually no economic linkage with each other. This had brought a significant decline in productivity and put an end to all export industries all over Europe. In the eyes of nowaday people, that was no doubt an economic breakdown.

A brief look at the top tip of the social hierarchy should illustrate the material condition of the time. In a Mosaic of Charlemagne produced in either 798 or 799,[116] the Emperor did not wear any luxurious garments but simply a plain cloak with no fancy cutting. Other than his crown on his head, it is impossible to distinguish this great Emperor from a normal peasant. Simply compare this mosaic with any portrait of Louis XIV (1638-1715; r. 1643-1715) or Bonaparte Napoleon (1769-1821; r. 1804-1815) almost a millennium later in order to understand how poor this grandfather of France was. Not only that, the messenger that he sent out every year to assess his Empire used a meal menu with nothing fancy in it. It consisted only of bread, a little pork, and eggs.[117] There was no use of spice at all, which had long disappeared from literature after 716.[118] That was simply a rustic menu.

According to the theory proposed by the Belgian historian Henri Pirenne (1862-1935), this abrupt shift in economic structure was mostly due to the rise of the Arabian Empire who had conquered much of the Southern and Eastern border of the Mediterranean Sea by the seventh century. From then on, the Christians who formerly hold monopoly of the Sea now faced serious aggression from the Arabs. Shortly afterwards, all Christian maritime traffics disappeared from the Sea, only to be replaced by the Arabian navy, merchant ships and pirates. And from 650 onwards, "Christians could no longer float a plank upon the sea."[119]

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[113] Samuel Dill, *Roman Society in Gaul in the Merovingian Age*, pp. 408.
[114] Ibid., pp. 409.
[115] Saint Adomnan, *Adomnan's Life of Columba*, first preface.
[116] Lateran mosaic, in the Basilica of San Giovanni in Laterano, Rome.
[117] Henri Pirenne, *Mohammed and Charlemagne*, trans. Bernard Miall, pp. 171.
[118] Ibid., pp. 170.
[119] Ibid., pp. 166.

Even short distance inland trade encountered a similar fate, as "all inland professional merchants disappeared."[120] That was partly because the almost ceaseless feuds amongst various land lords, vassals and kings had severely disrupted the condition of traffic. Worst of all, starting from 800, a new type of raiding emerged. They were the Vikings from today's Sweden and Norway, the Hungarians from Eastern Europe, and the Saracens from North Africa. At first, their raids had been restricted to shore cities and occurred only a few times per year. However, later they began to establish permanent settlements deep in the continent and launched raids in the very heartland of Europe.

It is difficult to overstate the severity of this decades-long barbaric invasion. A contemporary bishop once wrote in a letter that: "it is nearly 350 years that we and our fathers have inhabited this most lovely land, and never before has such a terror appeared in Britain as we have now suffered from a pagan race."[121] A contemporary French poet once described: "the wild beasts going by horse and foot, killing babies, children, young men, old men, fathers, sons and mothers…. They overthrow, they despoil, they destroy, they burn, they ravage, sinister cohort, fatal phalanx, cruel host."[122] In terms of social and economic damage, it has been written that:

> [The] Viking expeditions were organized on a large scale with fleets numbering hundreds of vessels, and the western provinces of the Empire, together with England, were systematically ravaged year by year. For nearly fifty years the invasions went on increasing in intensity until all the abbeys and towns of the West from Hamburg to Bordeaux had been put to the sack, and great tracts of country, especially in the Netherlands and in north-western France, were converted into desert."[123]

Under such chaotic situation, it was even difficult to make short distance travelling, let alone long-distance trading.

Apart from the continuous social upheavals, another reason for their dislike of wealth had to do with the Christian principles.[124] Christians in those days regarded money and wealth as the source of all greed and sin. After all, Christ was sold by Judas for thirty gold coins[125] and had lived himself a life of extreme poverty, making it inconceivable that His followers should live a luxurious life. This also partly explained the ascetic elements in the above mentioned rule of Saint-Benedict where no monk should possess any personal wealth. Only by renouncing all secular values might one attain sanctity.

In brief, the inherent anti-wealth attitude found in early Christianity as well as the disappearance of trade due political instability together made the Dark Age Europe very poor in the eyes of nowaday people. However, the Dark Age Europeans of course did not see it this way. Wealth for them was the exactly thing to avoid if one wanted to get into heaven. They valued their religious life much highly than their material life.

There existed no other periods in Western history with which people are more unfamiliar than the Dark Age Europe. This last point is precisely the reason why it is crucial to study this age in depth. Only by filling out this gap can one obtain a complete and coherent sense of history and thereafter perform a meaningful long-term analysis. The image of God and the Saints, the longing of

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[120] Ibid., pp. 173.

[121] D. Whitelock, ed., *English Historical Documents c. 500-1042*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (London: Methuen; New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), no.193, pp. 842. It was mostly the relics in churches and monasteries made of gold and silver that attracted the raiders.

[122] Abbon, *Le Siège de Paris par les Normands, Poème du IXe Siècle*, ed. Henri Waquet (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1942), lines 177-195, pp. 28-30; quoted in P. H. Sawyer, *The Age of the Vikings*, 2nd ed., pp. 120.

[123] The view of Christopher Dawson, typical of many. See Christopher Dawson, *The Making of Europe* (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), pp. 241.

[124] Much more on this issue shall come in chapter four.

[125] The Bible, St-Matthew 26:14.

heaven, people's perception on themselves, and the prevailing literary style in this period unmistakably indicated that, unlike the Classical Greeks, the Dark Age Europeans had completely ignored or suppressed their interest in human nature so as to achieve a higher spiritual end. They no longer saw shaping of their human nature to have any meaning other than making them harder to get to Heaven. Such was the essence of the Dark Age.