¶ 6.1

Crisis, Christianity, and the Fall of the West

1. Third-Century Crisis & Dioletian

3. 5th-Century Invasions

5. The Ancient Legacy

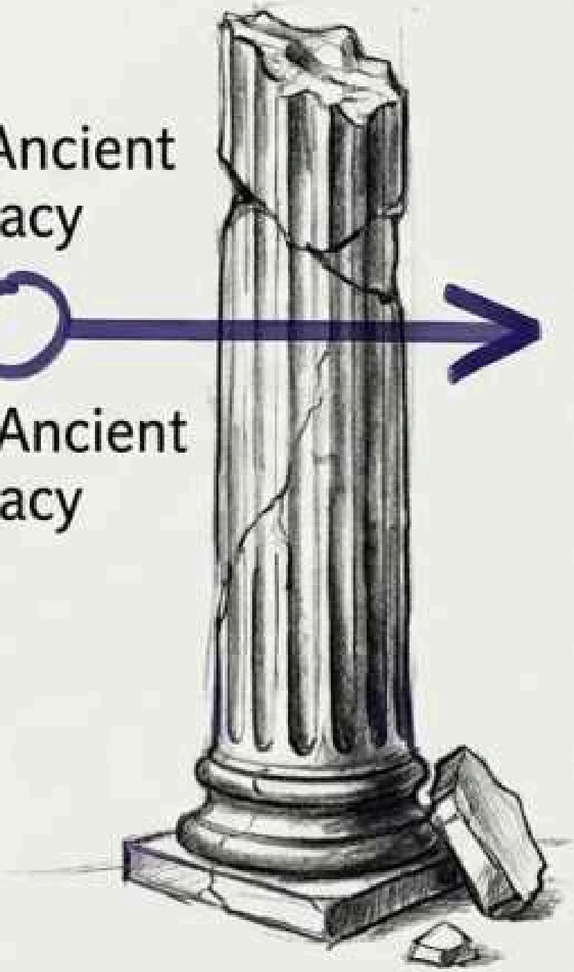
1. Third-Century Crisis & Diocletian

2. Rise of Christianity

3. 5th-Century Invasions

4. Survival of the East

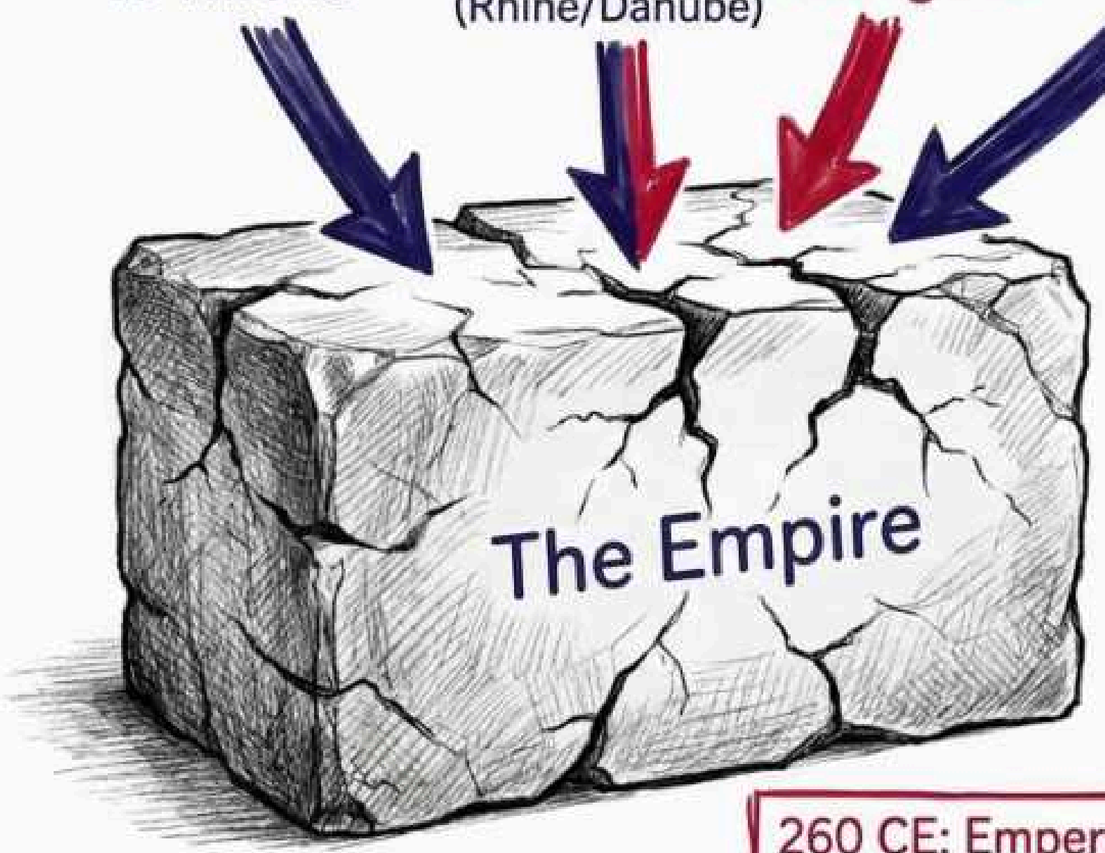
5. The Ancient Legacy

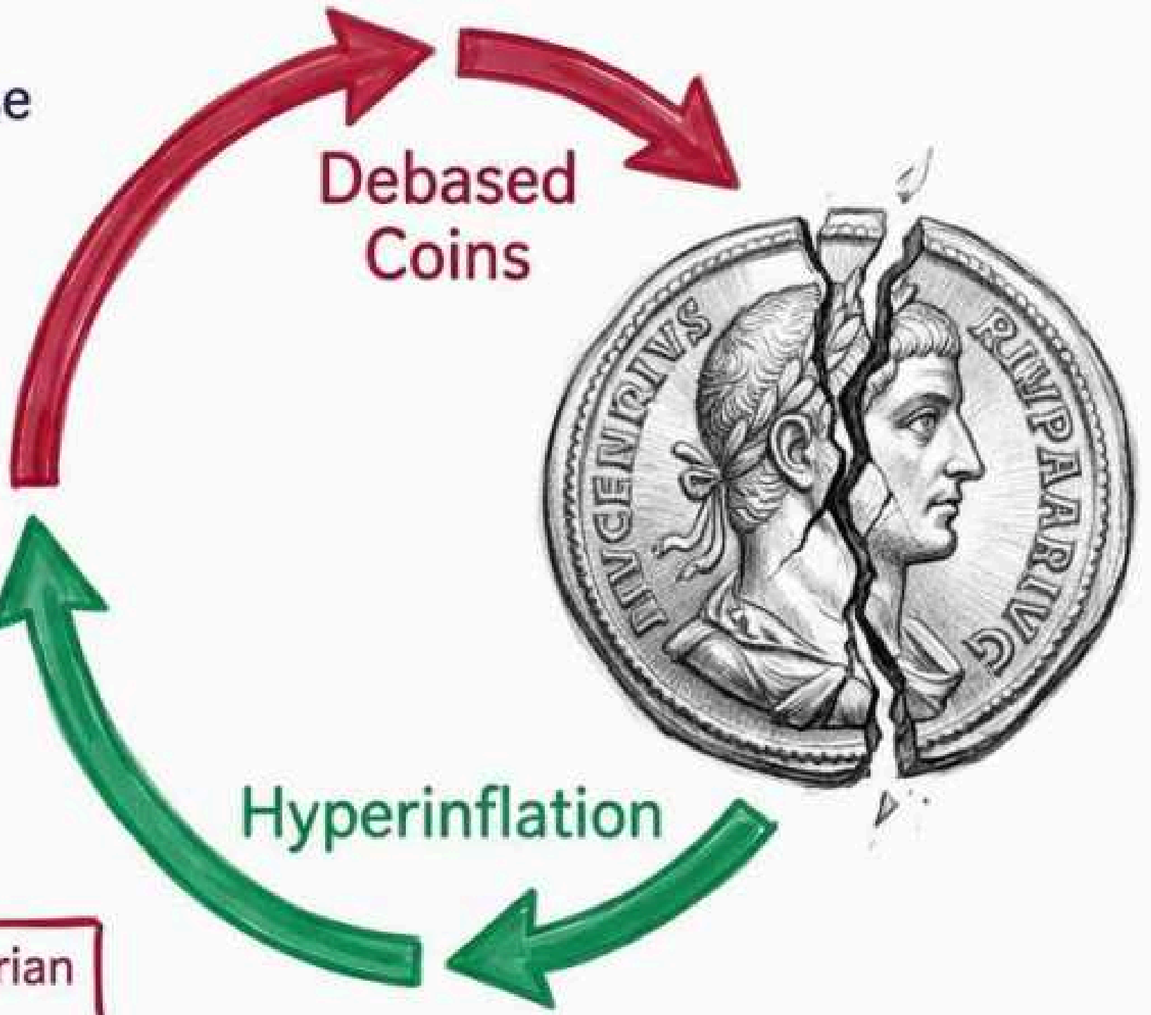


The Third-Century Crisis (235–284 CE)

¶ 6.2

>20 Claimants to Throne + External Invasions (Rhine/Danube) + Persian Resurgence = Near Collapse



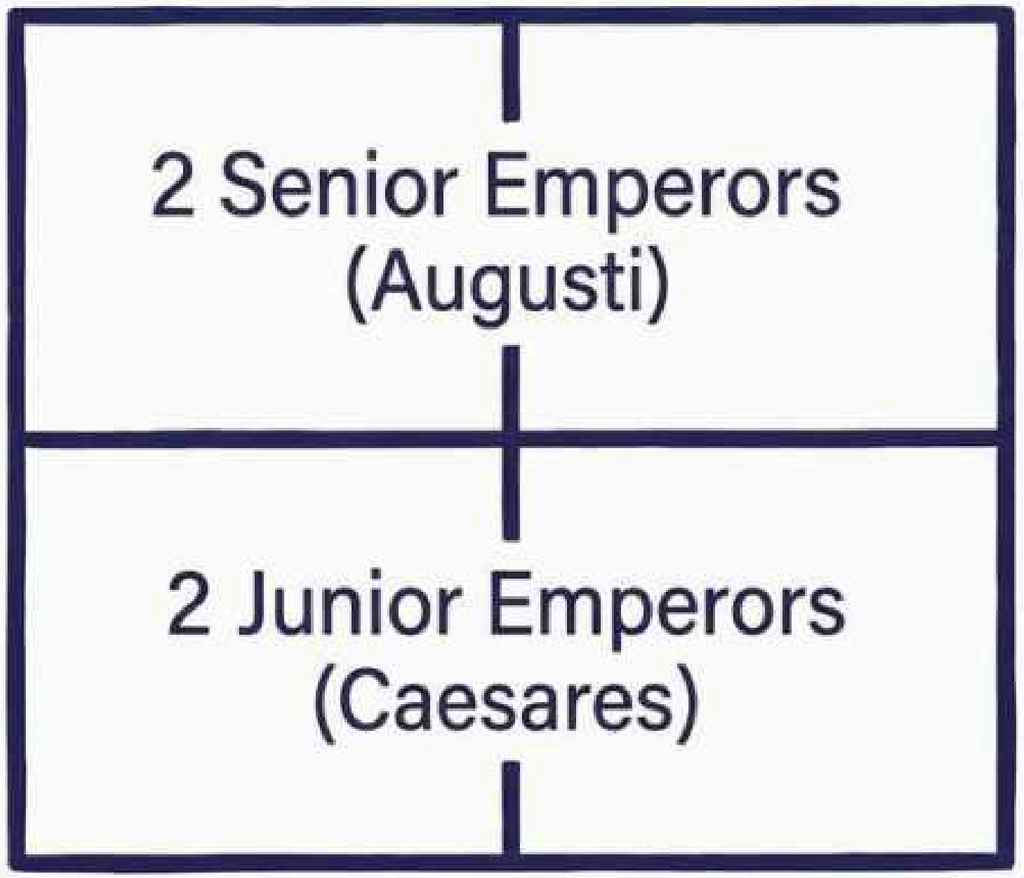


260 CE: Emperor Valerian captured by Persia.

Diocletian's Mathematical Approach to Order (284–305 CE)

¶ 6.3

The Tetrarchy



- Army Size
- Bureaucracy
- Taxes

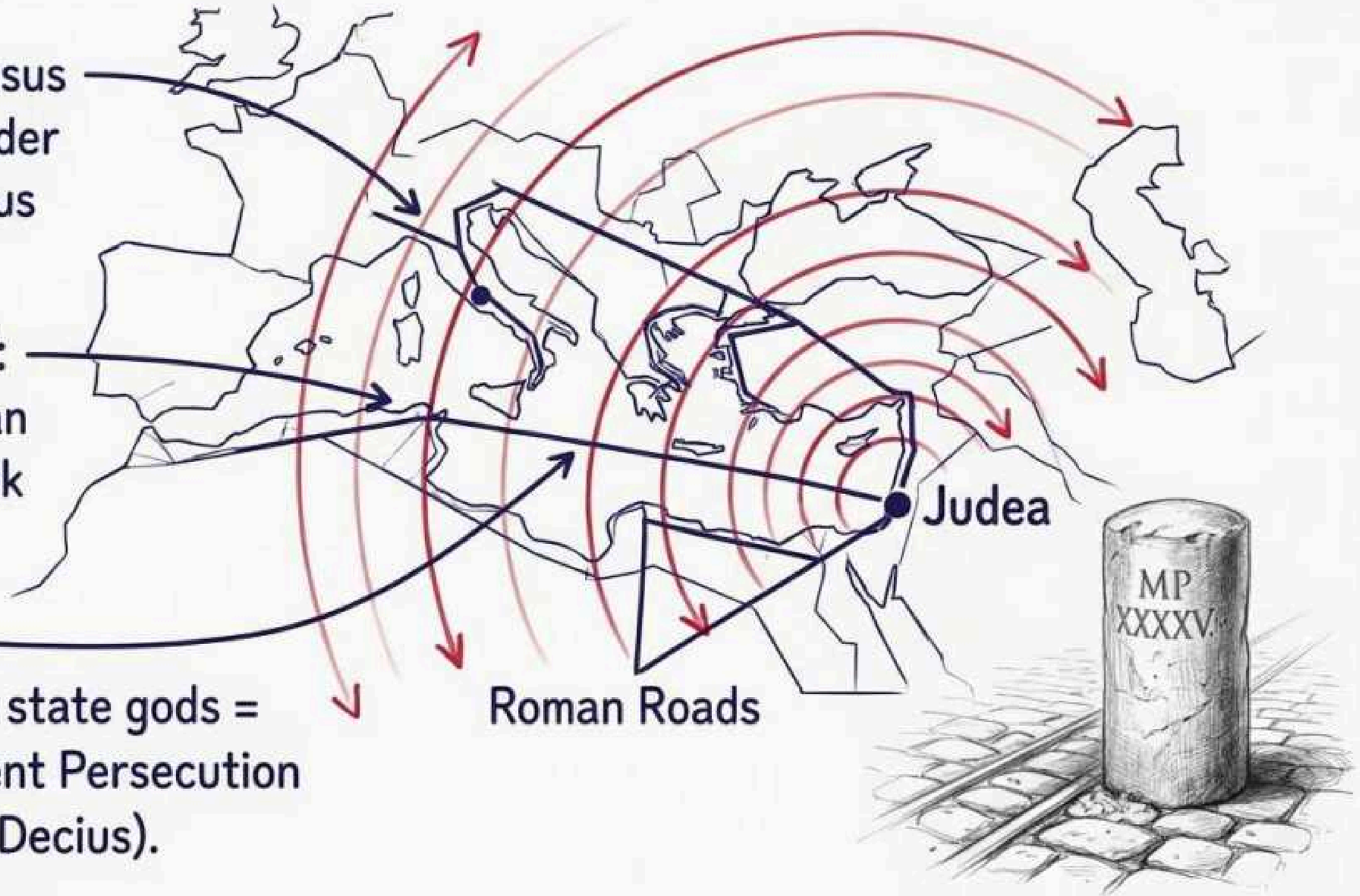
~~Edict of Maximum Prices (301)~~

Unusual Move:
Voluntary Retirement in 305.

The Organic Diffusion of Early Christianity

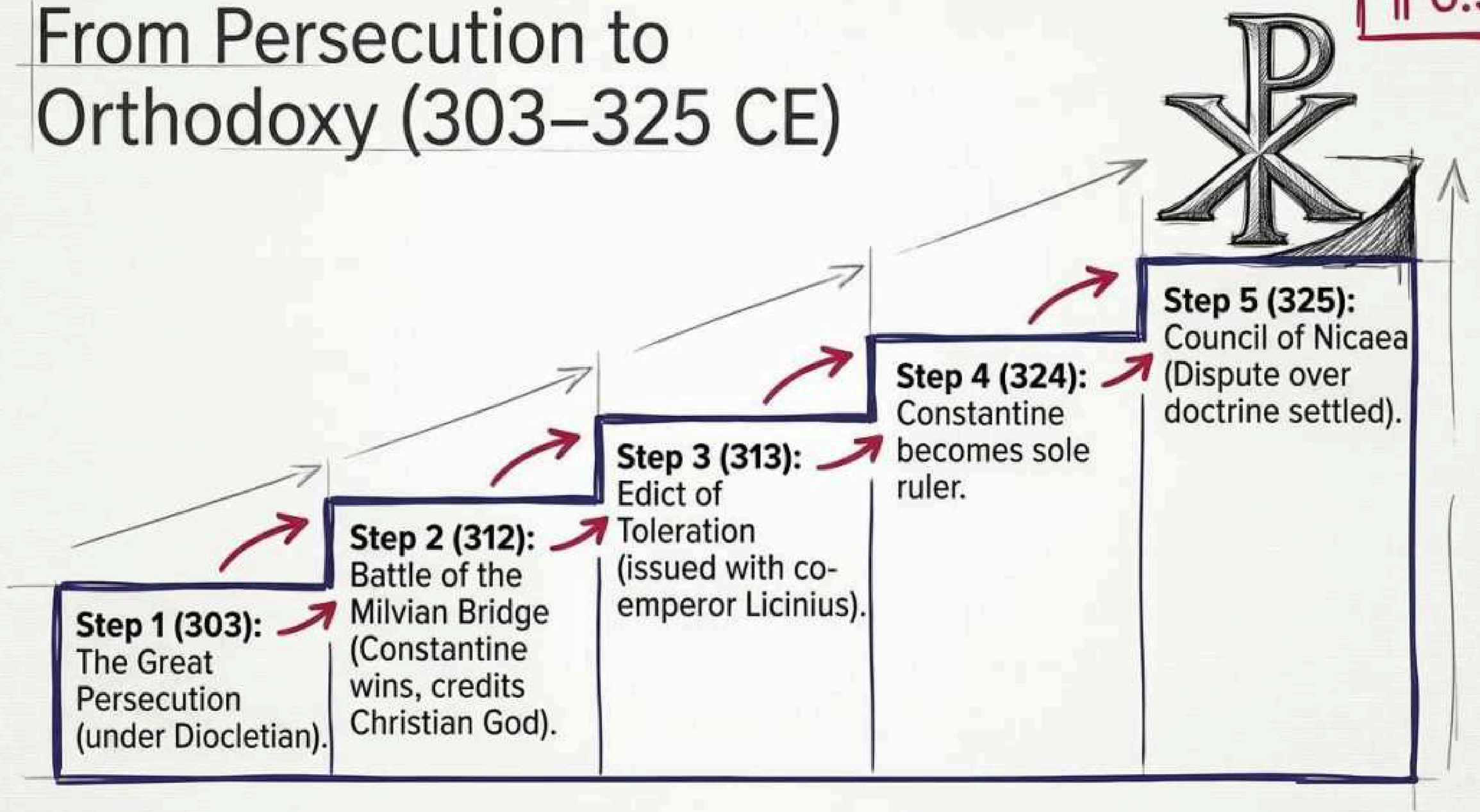
¶ 6.4

- **Origin:** Followers of Jesus (Executed c. 30 CE under Roman governor Pontius Pilate).
- **Catalysts for Spread:** Paul's missions + Roman Roads + Common Greek Language.
- **Conflict & Friction:** Refusal to sacrifice to state gods = Suspicion & Intermittent Persecution (64 CE Rome, 250 CE Decius).



¶ 6.5

From Persecution to Orthodoxy (303–325 CE)

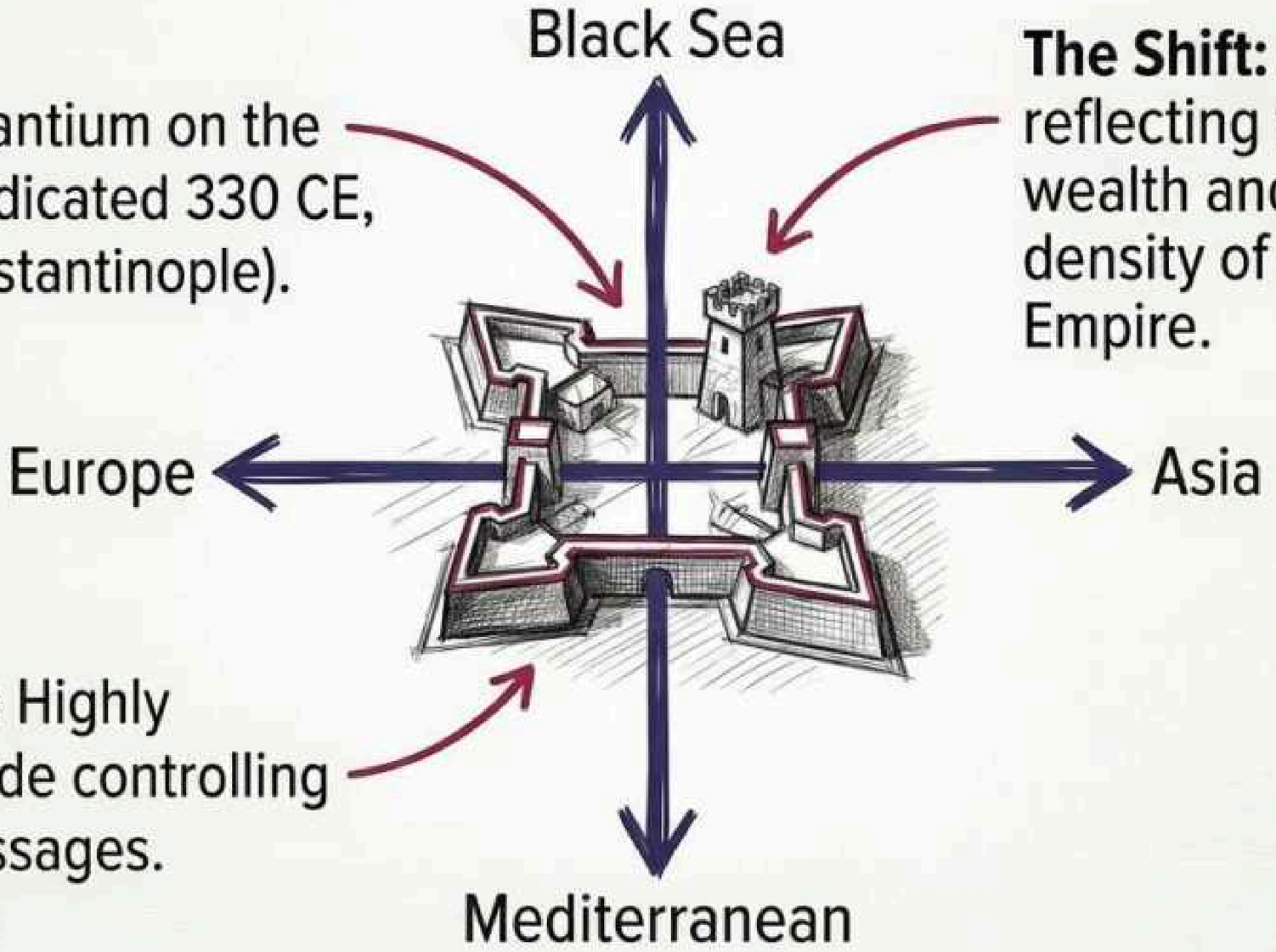


A New Capital at the Geopolitical Center

¶ 6.6

The Site: Byzantium on the Bosporus (Dedicated 330 CE, renamed Constantinople).

The Shift: A Second Rome reflecting the superior wealth and population density of the Eastern Empire.



The Strategy: Highly defensible node controlling vital trade passages.

Christianity Becomes the State Religion

¶ 6.7



Phase 1 (Toleration):
Post-Constantine integration.

Phase 2 (Brief Reversal):
Emperor Julian (361–363) attempts pagan revival (dies young).

Phase 3 (Privilege & Law):
Theodosius I.
380: Nicene Christianity becomes the official religion.
391-392: Pagan sacrifices formally banned.

Result: Urban Bishops emerge as dominant power figures in cities.

POWER (Influence & Authority)

TIME

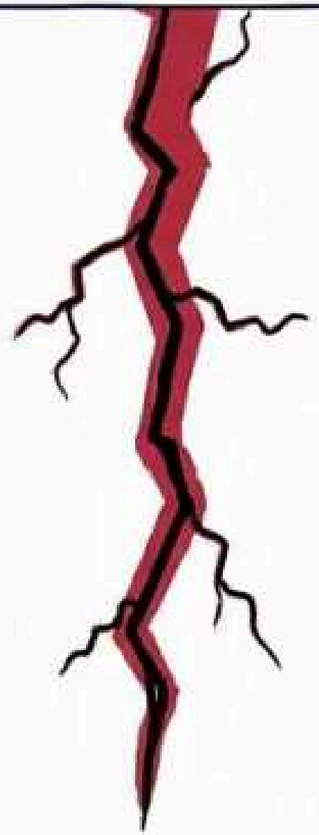
The Empire Divided (Post-395 CE)

¶ 6.8

Trigger Event: Death of Theodosius (395) → Empire divided between two sons, never unified again.

The West (Ravenna, from 402)

- Poorer, geographically exposed, heavily reliant on hired/mercenary armies.



The East (Constantinople)

- Wealthy, well-defended, structurally stable.

The division began as administrative, but became a permanent fracture.

The Century of Invasions

¶ 6.9

406: Vandals and others cross the Rhine.

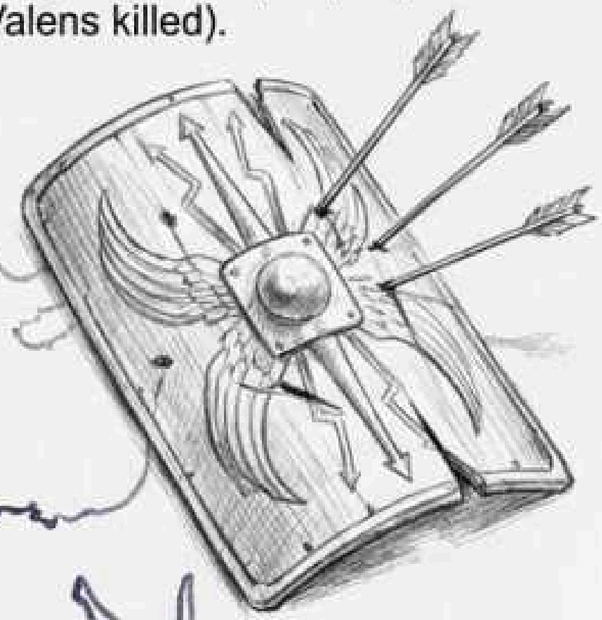
ROMAN FRONTIVE PERIMETER)

Domino Effect: Huns push Gothic groups into the Empire.

378: Goths destroy Eastern army at Adrianople (Emperor Valens killed).

410: Visigoths (Alaric) sack Rome — A massive psychological shock felt across the Mediterranean.

429–439: Vandals seize North Africa.

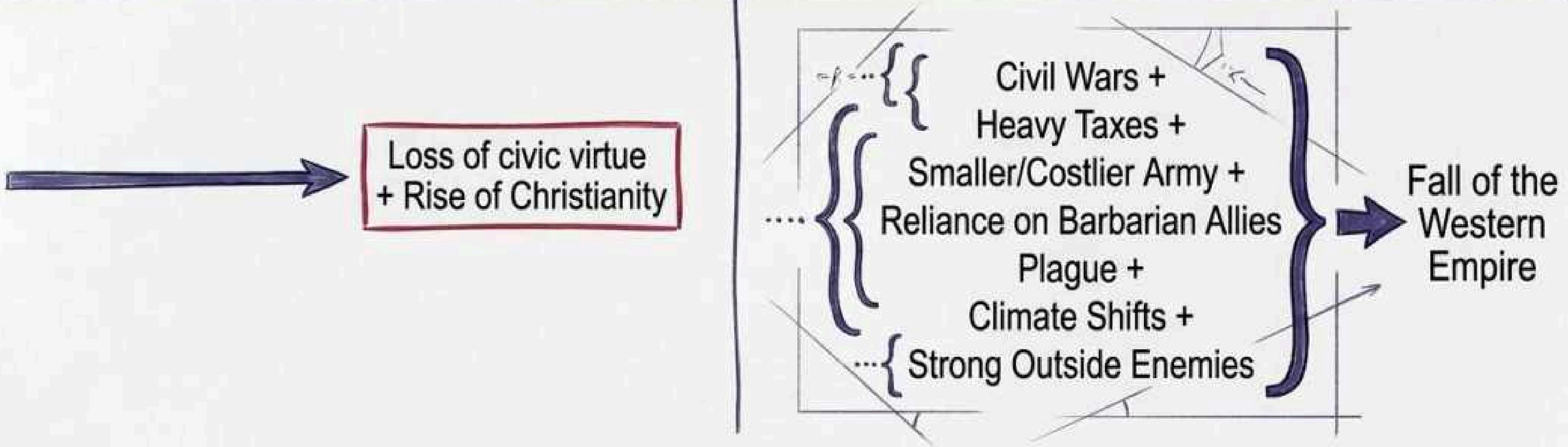


Diagnosing the Fall of the Western Empire

¶ 6.10

18th Century View (Edward Gibbon):
Loss of civic virtue + Rise of Christianity.

Modern Consensus (The Multi-Factor Formula):
Civil Wars + Heavy Taxes + Smaller/Costlier Army + Reliance on Barbarian Allies + Plague + Climate Shifts + Strong Outside Enemies.



Verdict: A complex web of factors. No single cause satisfies most scholars.

476 CE: A Cliff or a Gradient?

¶ 6.11

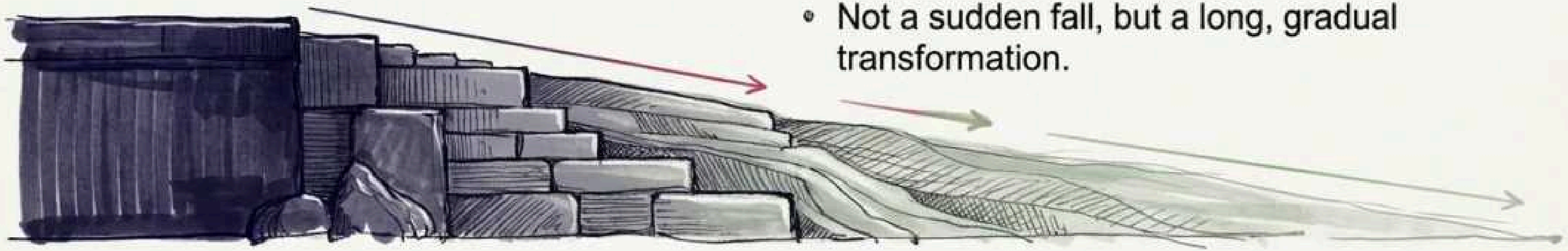


The Conventional View (rejected):

- The Conventional Date: 476 CE — Germanic commander Odoacer deposes the boy emperor Romulus Augustulus.
- Contemporary Reality: People living at the time did not think a great era had suddenly ended.

The Modern Shift (since 1970s, Peter Brown):

- The concept of Late Antiquity.
- Not a sudden fall, but a long, gradual transformation.



The Survival of the Byzantine East

¶ 6.12

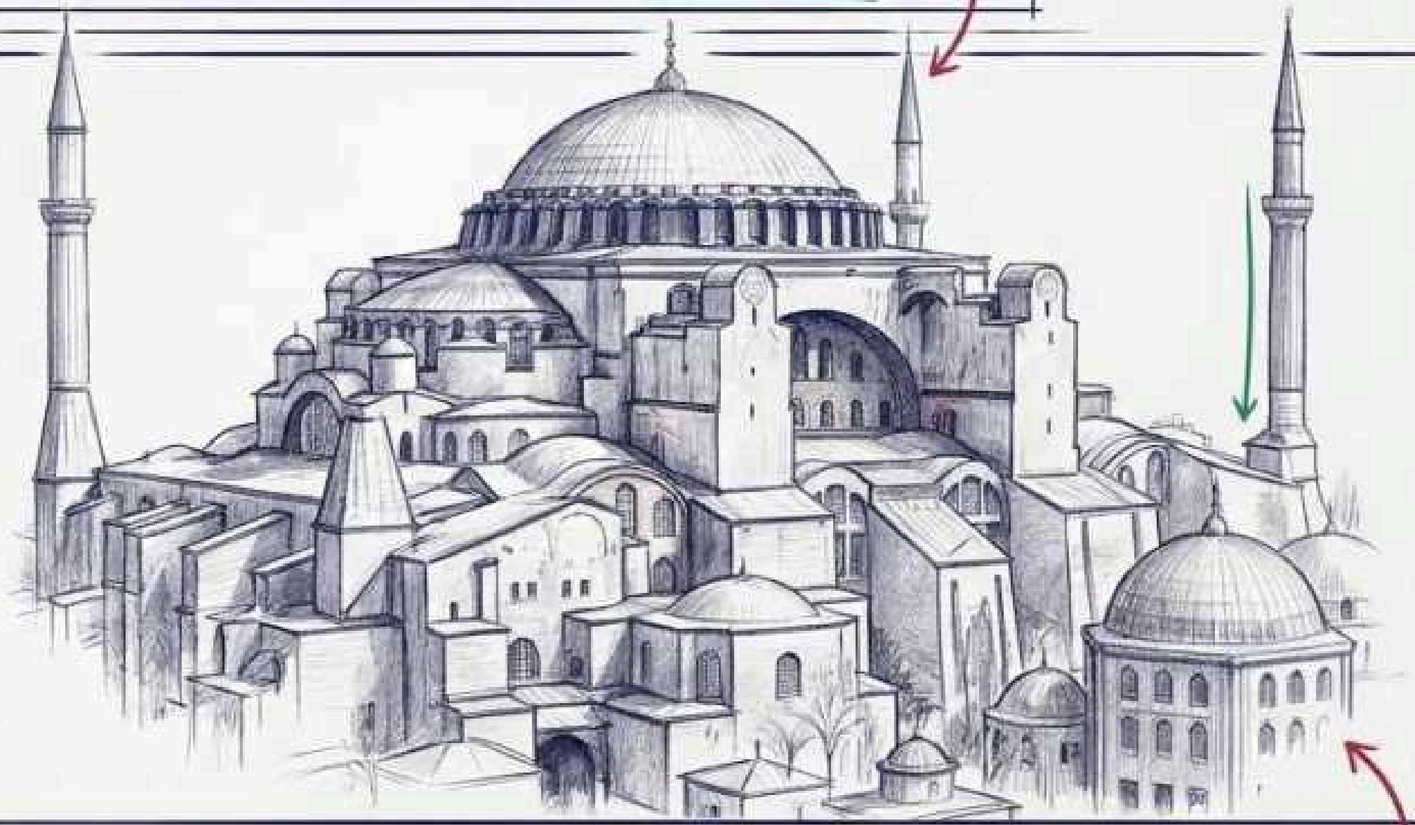
Identity: Citizens called themselves Romans (Modern historians call them Byzantine).

Justinian's Reign (527–565):

Reconquered parts of the western territories.

Corpus Juris Civilis: The gathering and codification of Roman law.

Hagia Sophia (537): Monumental church architecture.

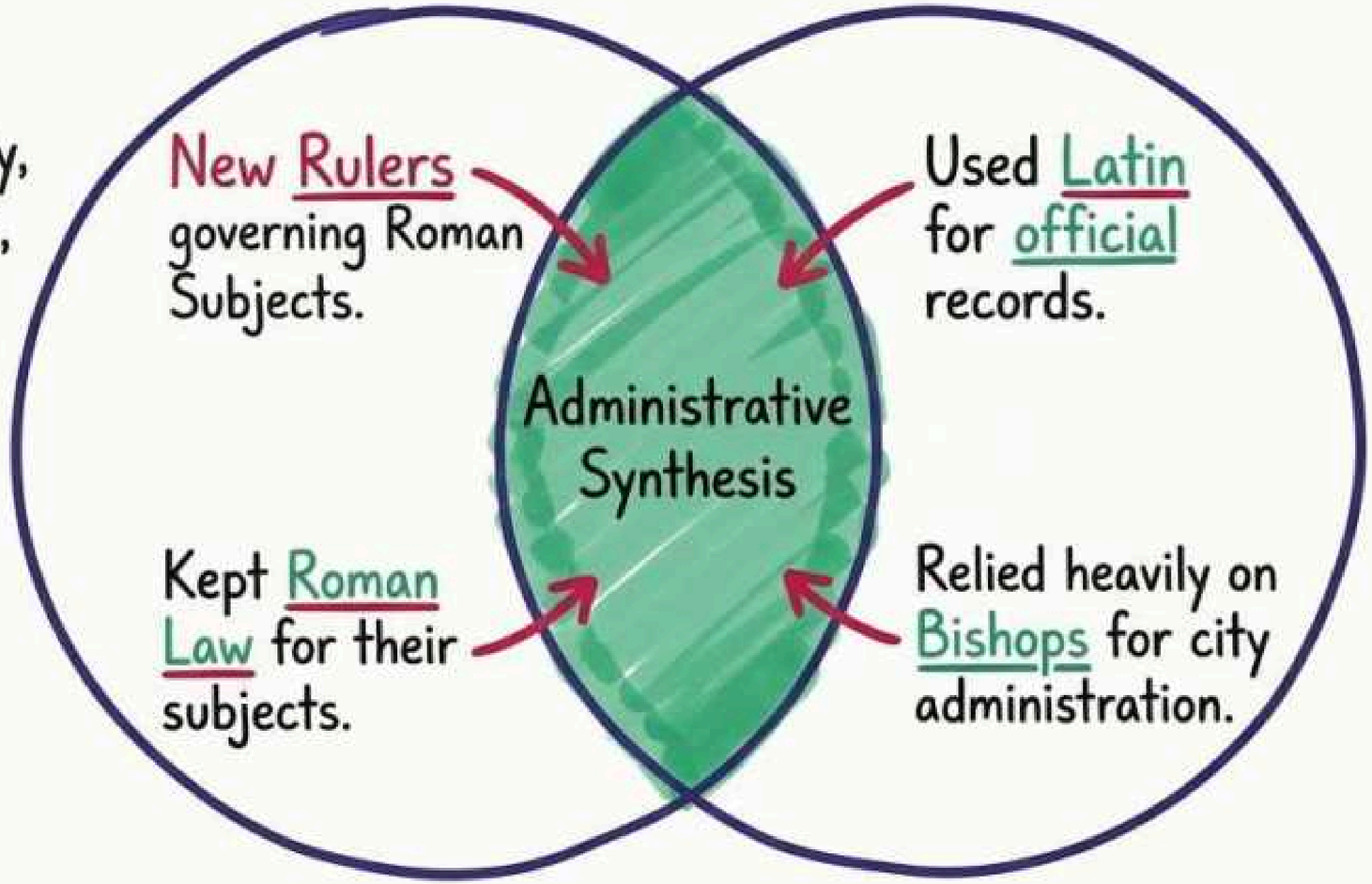


The End: Constantinople ultimately fell to the Ottomans in 1453.

New Kingdoms and Cultural Synthesis in the West

¶ 6.13

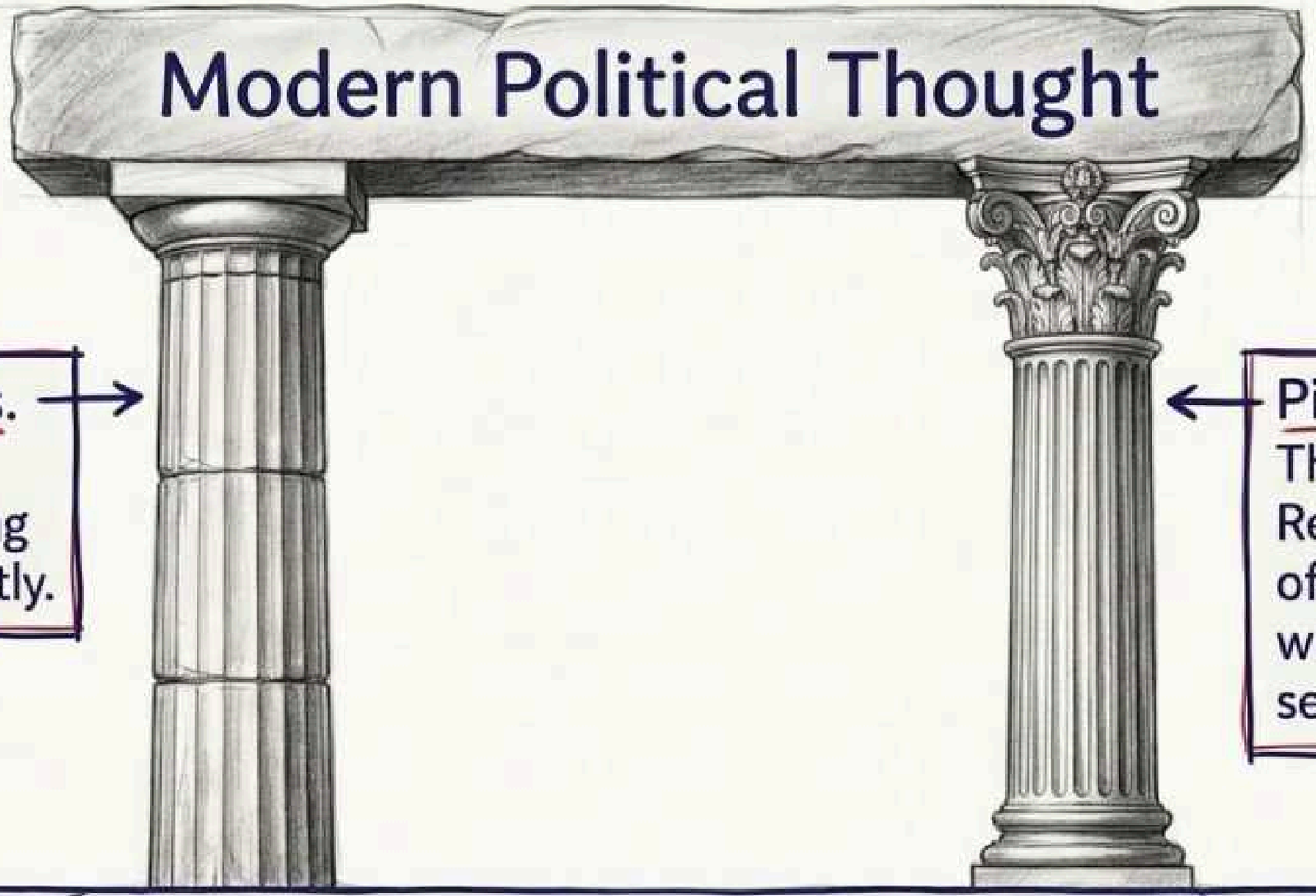
The Map:
Ostrogoths rule Italy,
Visigoths rule Spain,
Franks take Gaul.



Result: The Western Church became the vessel that carried on much of the empire's administrative and educational tradition.

The Structural Pillars of Modern Politics

¶ 6.14



Pillar 1: Athens.
The concept of citizens governing themselves directly.

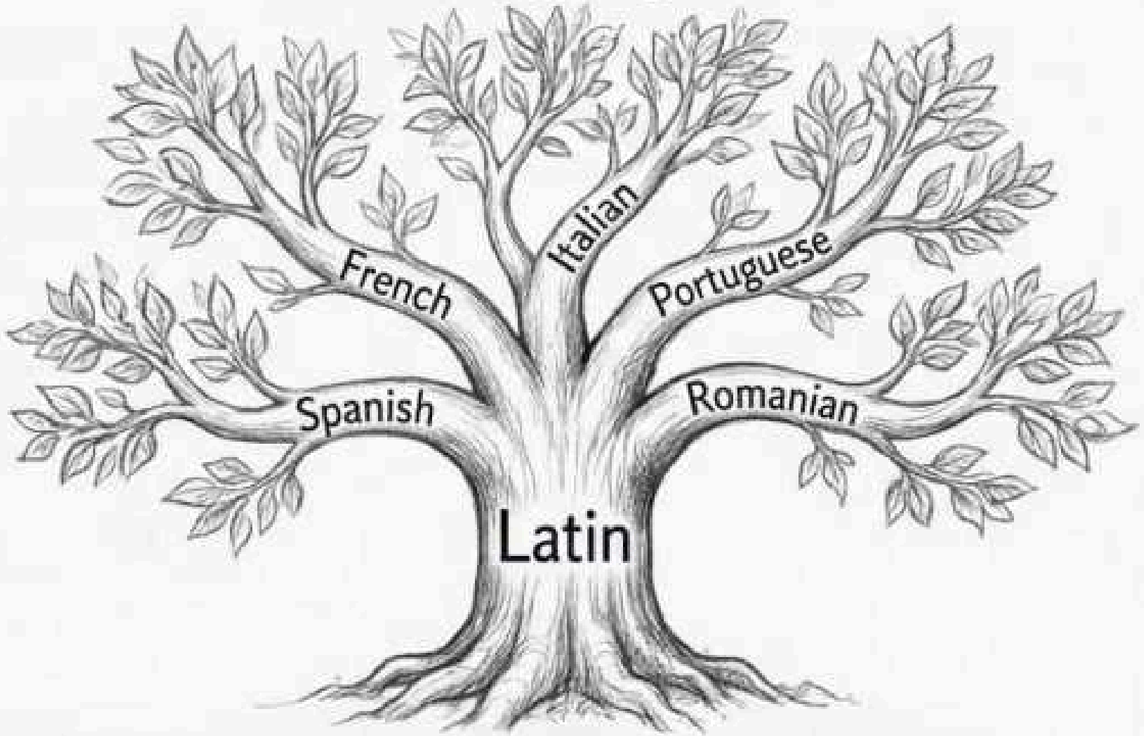
Pillar 2: Rome.
The concept of a Republic (elected officials, a senate, written law, separated powers).

The Continuity: Thinkers from the Renaissance through the 18th century drew directly on ancient writers like Polybius and Cicero.

The Enduring Architecture of Language and Law

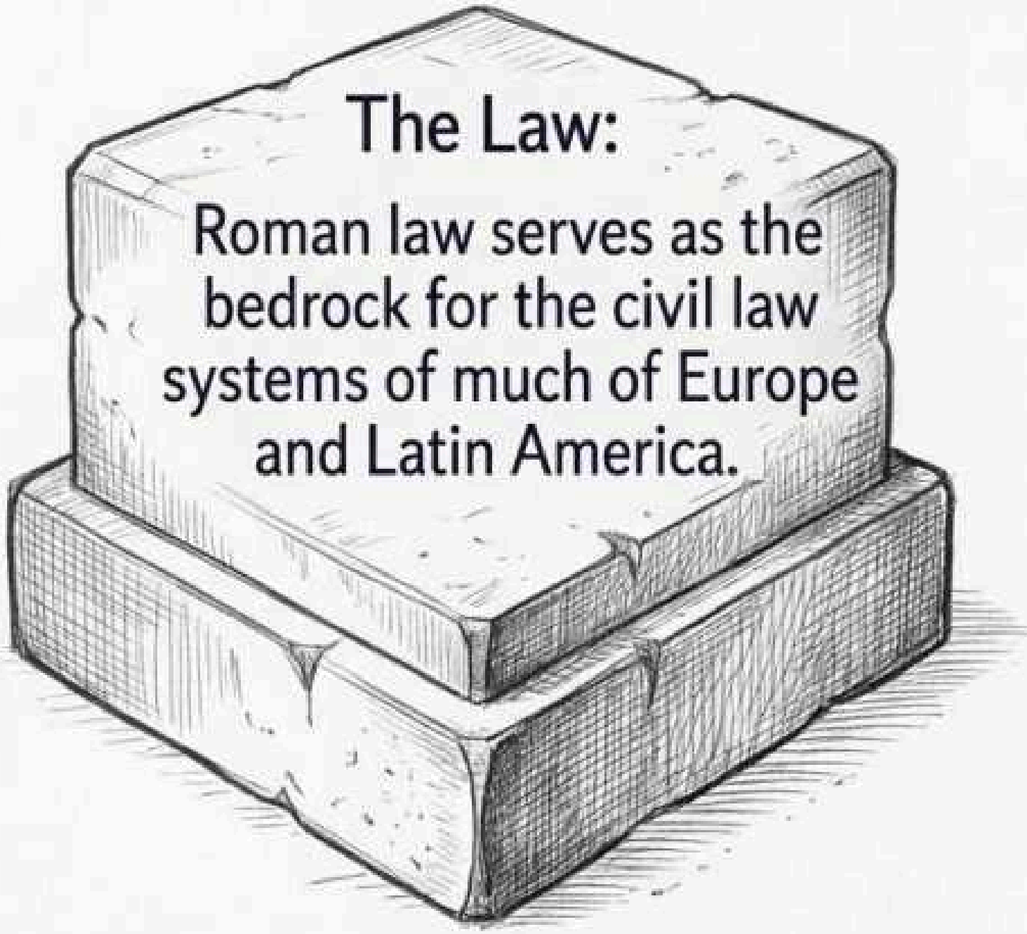
¶ 6.15

The Language Tree



The Vocabulary: Greek & Latin supply the foundational roots for Science, Medicine, and Law.

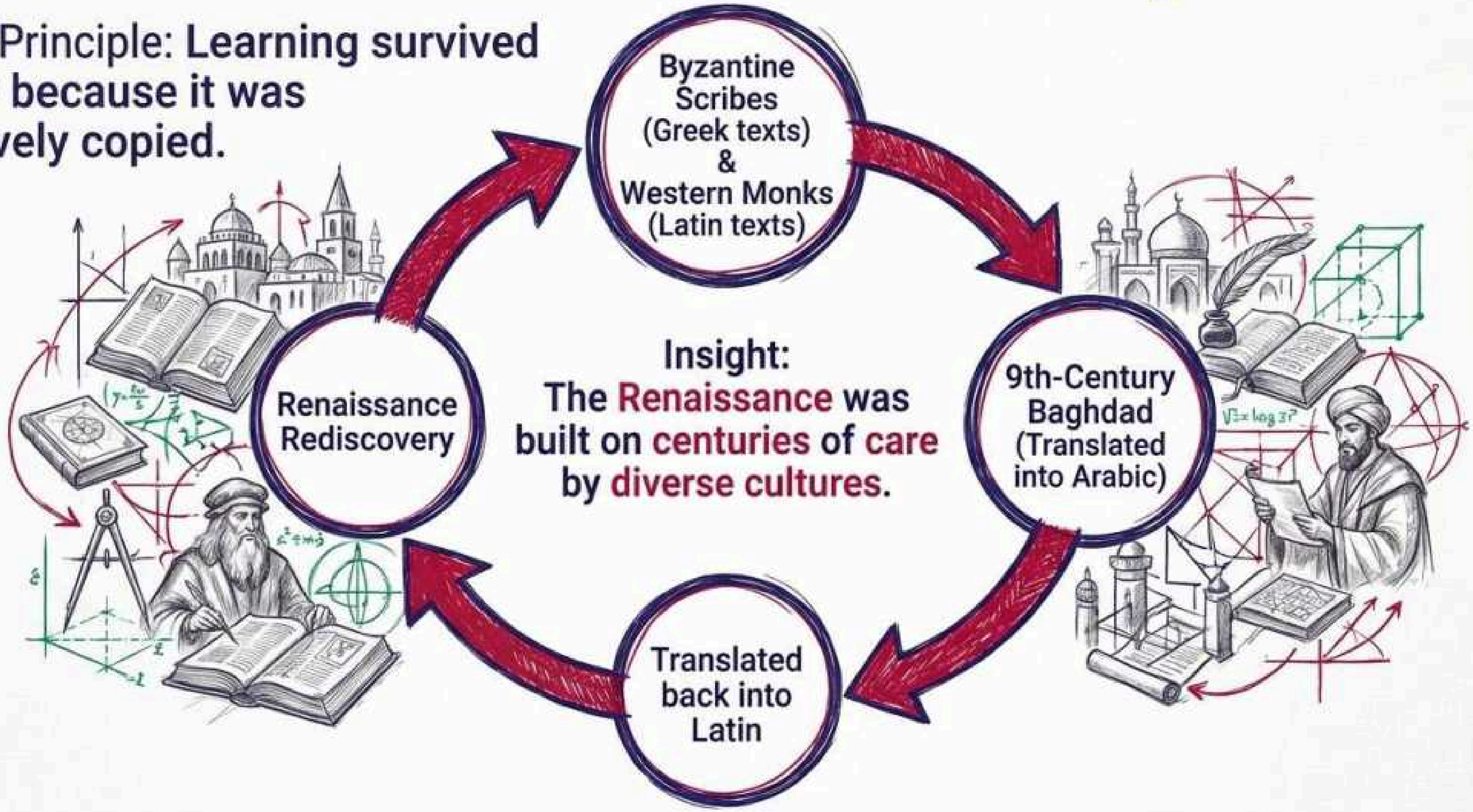
The Alphabets: Greek alphabet gives rise to Latin & Cyrillic (used today by billions).



The Active Preservation of Learning

¶ 6.16

The Principle: **Learning survived only because it was actively copied.**



The Global Context of the Ancient World

¶ 6.17

Context: Greece and Rome were only part of the ancient world.

Peer Empires: Han China, the Persian Empire, and the Kingdoms of India were equally important.



The Connectors: Linked together by the Silk Road and Indian Ocean sea routes.

Rule of Thumb: Good history asks what the sources actually say.

The Historian's Forensic Toolkit

¶ 6.18



Literary Sources:
Herodotus, Thucydides, Polybius, Livy, Tacitus.



Material Evidence:
Inscriptions, coins, papyri, shipwrecks, excavations.

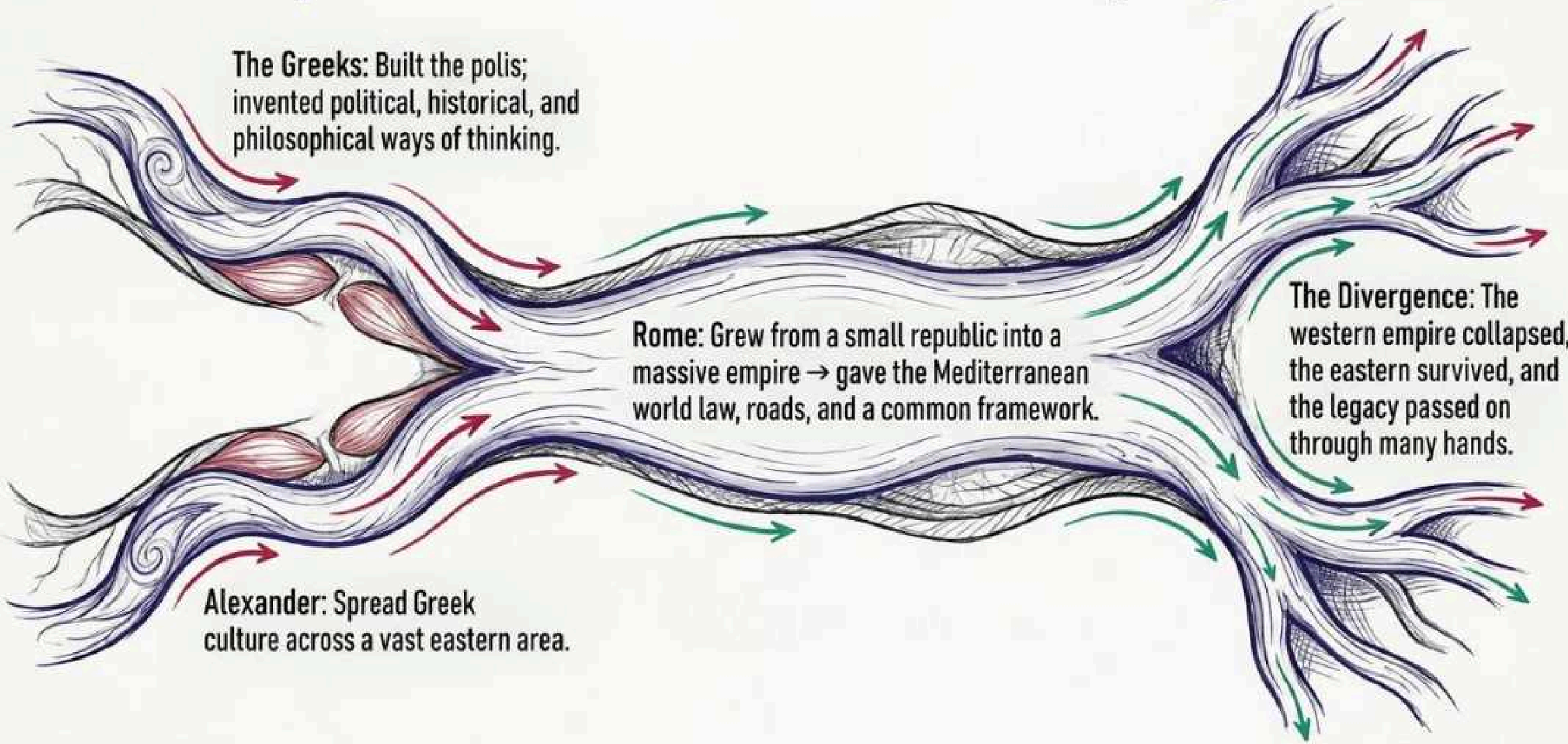
The 4 Diagnostic Questions:

- ✓ Who wrote it?
- ✓ When?
- ✓ For whom?
- ✓ Why?

The Missing Voices:
Women, the poor, and enslaved people rarely wrote. Their lives must be pieced together from indirect evidence.

Course Synthesis: The Arc of Antiquity

¶ 6.19



The Greeks: Built the polis; invented political, historical, and philosophical ways of thinking.

Rome: Grew from a small republic into a massive empire → gave the Mediterranean world law, roads, and a common framework.

The Divergence: The western empire collapsed, the eastern survived, and the legacy passed on through many hands.

Alexander: Spread Greek culture across a vast eastern area.

¶ 6.20

Applying Historical Thinking

Task: Pick one ancient institution (e.g., Athenian Jury, Roman Senate, Roman Law).

Comparison: How does it resemble something in your world? How does it differ?

Critical Thinking: What evidence would you need to know before claiming a direct line from the ancient version to the modern one?

Questions like that are where historical thinking begins.

Questions or feedback: garyanderson@mail.grokbot.com | **X:** @garyanderson