



# The Invasion of Europe by the Barbarians

*John Bagnell Bury*

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J. B. Bury was an Irish historian, classical scholar, Medieval Roman historian and philologist. He objected to the label "Byzantinist" explicitly in the preface to the 1889 edition of his *Later Roman Empire*.

In print for more than thirty years, this book has long served as a standard text on the Germanic penetration of the Roman Empire. Bury's history is indispensable to anyone who seeks to understand the connection between the barbarian migrations of the third to the ninth century and the framework of modern Europe.

## **The Invasion of Europe by the Barbarians Details**

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## From Reader Review The Invasion of Europe by the Barbarians for online ebook

### Mike says

Good solid read delivered with a unique perspective. It certainly educated me to look at the barbarians as peoples with their own history and perspectives. Lessons for today when we look at our own empire surrounded (yes, not politically correct I know)

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### Nathan says

This is a spectacular history of the late Roman period of western Europe. Despite being almost a hundred years old, it remains one of the best general histories of the period.

The only real drawback is that it is essentially a transcribed series of lectures and not originally intended for a book. As a result, it doesn't contain anything but in-the-lecture references to Bury's sources.

This book is best read with a basic understanding of, or at least access to an atlas of, ancient Europe.

great book.

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### Erica says

This book is actually a collection of a series of lectures given by J. Bury at Cambridge in 1927. In them Bury describes the gradual sundering and collapse of the Roman Empire over six centuries (third-ninth C.E.) by the Germanic Tribes (I [heart] Visigoths). I found it truly fascinating to read this and learn about the connection between these invasions and migrations and the shape of the Europe we know today. I recommend having an atlas handy, however; maps are not furnished in this book and these guys really got around.

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### Lisa says

As I read this book, I can't help but wonder what further knowledge has been discovered since 1902! Supposedly, this is still considered the definitive work on the subject. It's interesting, but a bit dry. Also, the author references regions that have not existed in centuries. Maps would have been most helpful. In order to get my geographical bearings, I printed out some maps from the internet.

This book is interesting on more than one level. It not only tells us about the age of the barbarians, it also tells us much about the relationship between a scholar/lecturer and his audience in the early 1900's. I think it is funny the way J. B. Bury sometimes talks down to his audience.

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invading Huns] north of the Danube. They determined to withdraw southward beyond that river and seek the shelter of the Roman Empire. This was a very critical decision: it led to events which determined the course of the history of the Roman Empire. Accordingly they sent an ambassador to the Emperor Valens, who was then staying at Antioch, beseeching him to allow the nation to cross the river and grant them lands in the provinces of the Balkan peninsula. It was the year 376. In the meantime their families abandoned their homes and encamped along the shores of the lower Danube, ready to cross the moment the Romans permitted them. The situation was highly embarrassing for the Emperor and his government. It was unique: they had no experience to guide them in dealing with it. It was pressing; some decision must be come to immediately; there was no time for ripe deliberation. The opinion of ministers and councillors was naturally divided, but it was finally decided to accede to the request of the Goths and to receive them as new subjects on Roman soil. The decision was reached with much hesitation and only after many searchings of heart; but we may be certain that the Emperor and his advisers did not in the least realise or imagine the difficulties of the task to which their consent committed them. To settle peacefully within their borders a nation of perhaps 80,000 or more barbarians was a problem which could be solved only by most careful organisation requiring long preparation. In recent times Europe has had some experience of the enormous difficulties of dealing with crowds of refugees, and of the elaborate organisation which is necessary. Take, for instance, the case of the thousands of Asiatic Greeks who fled from the Turks and sought refuge in European Greece. [Bury refers here to the expulsion of Anatolian Greeks from the Turkish mainland that took place, roughly, in the years 1914 to 1922.] Here it was simply a case of affording food and shelter to people of the same race, but it taxed the whole resources of the Greek Government to solve it. The problem that met Valens was vastly different and more difficult. Quite suddenly, without any time for thinking out the problem or for any preparation, he was called on to admit into his dominions a foreign nation, of barbarous habits, armed and warlike, conscious of their national unity: to provide them with food, and to find them habitations. The Roman state was highly organised, but naturally there was no organisation to deal with an abnormal demand of this kind, which could not have been anticipated. As might have been expected, when the barbarians crossed the river and encamped in Lower Moesia (Bulgaria) all kinds of difficulties and deplorable incidents occurred. The military and civil officials were quite unequal to coping with the situation, and no wonder. War was the result, a war lasting nearly two years and culminating in A.D. 378 in the great battle of Hadrianople, which is one of the landmarks of history."

As Wikipedia observes, the battle of Hadrianople, in which the recently admitted Goths defeated the army of their host, the Emperor Valens, "is often considered the start of the process which led to the fall of the Western Roman Empire in the 5th century."

The scenes are all too familiar. Visigoth refugees huddle on the northern banks of the Danube, fleeing the onslaught of the Huns behind them and longing to reach the opposite southern shore, which is controlled by the "civilized" Romans. In our own day, Syrian refugees huddle on the shores of the Mediterranean in Turkey, fleeing the onslaught of ISIS behind them and longing to reach a Greek island or the European mainland across the water. In both situations, officials are confused about what to do. Should the refugees be admitted? Their plight is heart-wrenching. But in ethnicity, language, culture, and religion they are vastly different from the local residents who will be forced to take them in. Also, they come from a place where warfare is a way of life and they are habituated to the ways of violence. Finally, the decision is made to admit them. They flood in. "All kinds of difficulties and deplorable incidents" ensue. As a result, the refugees become alienated from their hosts and turn against them. An act of humanitarianism on behalf of helpless refugees ends up undermining the stability of the very regime that welcomed them in.

As the old saw goes, history doesn't repeat itself, but it does rhyme.

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### **Vikas Datta says**

Shows well how civilisation advances from the dialectic of order and chaos..

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### **Peter McGregor says**

Only for those interested in history:

It lifts the veil of the "dark ages" and looks at the Germanic origins of so many European countries in the dying days of the Roman Empire.

It is well written. I only got lost in the constitutionality of the Ostrogoth kingdom in Italy. Otherwise, it was page turning.

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### **Vince Quackenbush says**

Likes this period of history. I am fascinated by the devolution of the Roman state to the nation-states of Western Europe, and the evolution of the Eastern Empire to Byzantium. The appearance of the Frankish Kingdom (France) was a key development in this process.

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### **Kerri says**

A solid collection of lectures and essays, but has a few annoyances. The two that stand out the most are the frequent references in Latin to sayings or people we're assumed to know (like anyone really learns Latin anymore :( ) which would've been nice to have footnotes for, and secondly there really isn't a through-line to the book, which leaves it sort of trailing off in the end with a 10 page discourse on the parallel legal systems of the Lombards and Romans.. great, but how does THIS period of post-Empire set up Europe for what came next? That's the lecture I wanted to finish the book with.

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### **Tim Martin says**

The Invasion of Europe by the Barbarians by J. B. Bury is a very readable and well written book that outlines the sequence and consequences of the migratory movements of the northern barbarians into Roman territory, migrations of the third through sixth centuries AD that eventually lead to Germanic peoples occupying the western half of the Roman Empire, from Britain to North Africa and ultimately largely dismembering the Empire.

It would be difficult for one to guess how old this work is from reading it; the book was basically a compilation of lectures Bury gave on the subject originally in 1903 (Bury himself passed away in 1927). The book read quite well for the most part as it had a brisk pace and the author a rather dry wit. My only complaints are that the final sections delved too much into what were for me the esoteric nature of Roman versus Lombard law (not as interesting or as useful to me at least as his coverage of the migrations and their consequences) as well as the complete lack of maps.

One of Bury's main themes was that the barbarians became a threat from inside the Empire's borders - what he called disintegration from within - as various Germanic peoples became federates of the Empire, invited to settle within its boundaries and in return generally for some form of tribute protected the frontiers and supplied contingents of troops. Nearly all the German peoples were for a time federates of the Empire before becoming independent masters of the lands they seized. Sometimes the rulers of the various tribes worked closely with the Emperor, at other times they were actually kings of their people and only nominally within the Empire. A system of establishing federate states within the Empire paved the way for the system of independent states that eventually replaced the Empire, a process that though not without conflict was also not cataclysmic either.

The Germanic federati became quite important in part because as Bury wrote the population of the old civilized lands around the Mediterranean had become "too highly civilized, and not physically fit enough" and thus were "quite useless for military service." The bulk of the army came from frontier provinces and from adventurers, many of which were barbarian volunteers from outside the Empire. Before Germanization of the lands under the federates began a dangerous Germanization was underway in the military (a military which was increasingly important, particularly in the West), a Germanization he called a "peaceful penetration," as by the end of the fourth century Germans had largely replaced most of the peoples from within the Empire and due to their ability had risen to hold the highest officer posts as well. This "grave danger" was overlooked by too many Emperors, too liberal in their policies in allowing Germans to occupy positions of supreme command due to their desire to attract the best men for the job. Eventually when the Empire had to face not only the threat of Germanic invaders from without but from the Germanic peoples already within the Empire military leadership fell predictably to Germans. Two of the chief actors of the fifth century for instance - the enemy leader Alaric and the Roman military leader Stilicho - were both German.

The traditional end given for the Western Roman Empire (AD 476) is addressed by Bury and in a manner supporting some of his key points. First, he said "Western Empire" is improper; it was the western provinces of the Empire, as there was really only one Empire. Second, on several occasions in the fifth century the death or deposition of an emperor in the west was followed by a considerable span of time with no emperor in Rome or Ravenna. Third, the rule of the Germans Odovacar and later that of Theoderic the Ostrogoth in Italy was not at all unlike that of other federates leaders; they acted with some coordination with the Emperor in Constantinople and both leaders respected Roman laws with regard to their Roman subjects; they were but intermediary stages between Italy being part of the Roman Empire and being a true Germanic kingdom.

Bury spent some time analyzing the populations of the Germanic peoples during the migrations and comparing military sizes with that of the Romans, noting that from the fourth to the sixth centuries most battles were fought by roughly even numbers of troops; the problem of military defense was not all hopeless or even "superlatively difficult," and it was not through battle alone that the Empire was dismembered.

For their part the Germans did not feel like hostile invaders, but rather regarded the Empire as a great institution that they had a rightful place within, their struggles less that of hostile external enemies but more a disenfranchised segment of society struggling for its rights. Alaric marched through Italy and attacked Rome not to destroy the Empire but to put pressure upon the imperial government to meet his various demands.

An interesting thread was the real legacy of the Huns. The Huns defeat of the Visigoths lead the latter to seek the shelter of the Roman Empire, an unprecedented decision as Emperor Valens permitted a nation of 80,000+ people to settle within his borders, allowing in essentially a foreign nation of a warlike nature and with strong national unity, a situation that eventually resulted in a war, culminating in the battle of Hadrianople in AD 378, one of the greatest disasters that befell Rome due to the Germans (and by the way the last battle the Romans fought mainly with infantry, as cavalry prevailed as a result and Europe did not see much infantry use again until the fourteenth century). Also the Hun invasion served to delay the process of German dismemberment of the Empire, both by the Huns controlling many of the East German peoples beyond the Danube (the ones most a threat to Rome) and by providing Roman generals with auxiliaries that

proved an invaluable resource against their German enemies.

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### **David says**

This is based on lectures from 1927, so I'm sure it's out dated. And though it presents things much more from the barbarian perspective than most things I've seen, it can be anti-barbarian and in particular anti-German at times. One of the best examples of this was during its discussion of the Huns, where Bury claimed that the Huns acknowledged their cultural inferiority to Germanic peoples, who were in turn culturally inferior to the Romans. Another example is its treatment of Stilicho, who was a pretty awesome guy from what I remember. But Bury faults him for his handling of Alaric, which the author says was because Stilicho was part German rather than a true Roman. Nonetheless, it had plenty of new information for me about the barbarians at the end of the Roman Empire.

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### **Leila Mota says**

It's amazing how much we (I) don't know about the history of Europe during Roman times and following "barbarians" invasions. We learn some things in school but it's all very superficial. There are so many peoples that lived in Europe and Asia and that influenced the evolution of the continent and the countries and populations formation.

The book is written in a way that can be easily understood, even though it's necessary to keep track of the many tribes and dates to follow the relevant events and to decipher some specific terms. Nothing that can prevent our enjoyment.

The author was a Cambridge professor dedicated to the Roman Empire study. He also worked on sections of the Encyclopaedia Britannica. I'll look for other books by the same author and/or the subject.

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### **Luis Delgado says**

#### **The Invasión of Europe ny the Barbarians**

Permite conocer de manera ágil porque se desmembro el Imperio Romano de Occidente y conocer los pueblos bárbaros que lo promovieron. Falta un mapa que abarque los territorios qué conformaron el Imperio Romano.

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