

**NAXOS**  
AudioBooks

**NON-  
FICTION**

Edward Gibbon  
**The Decline and Fall  
of the Roman Empire – Part I**

Read by **Philip Madoc**  
with **Neville Jason**



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*Praetorian Guards*

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Edward Gibbon

# The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire

One of the incomparable moments of English literature, Edward Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, written between 1776-88, is not only a masterful example of historical and classical scholarship, but also perhaps the greatest work of rationalist thought in the English language.

Through a detailed observation of and commentary upon the moral heights and sordid troughs of the empire from the second century AD to the fall of Constantinople in 1453, Gibbon constructs a philosophical viewpoint through which the greatness of man's potential is continually juxtaposed with the poverty of his achievement.

But the vast history, stretching for considerably more than one million words, is far more than a dry narrative of names, places and dates. It is one of the most gripping narratives in the English language; like an enormous plum duff, cutting into it at virtually any point reveals a densely-packed concoction of juices, fruits, spices and the occasional sipping of utter outrageousness.

Gibbon composed his masterpiece in two stages. The first half, which arguably is the more interesting and thus receives greater attention in this recording, covers a period of some 300 years, up to the end of the Western empire, the Roman empire in its true sense, in about AD 480. The second half covers almost 1,000 years of history, and deals with the decline of the Byzantine empire, the empire of the East.

The unifying vision of Gibbon, through which he attempts to view both halves of his work, is that of tracing an undeviating decline from the ideals of political and intellectual freedom inherited from ancient Greece and Rome. But even in decline there are periods – albeit brief – in which former glories shine through, such as under the short reign of the emperor Julian, Gibbon's leading candidate for praise as possessor of the heroic virtues of honesty, honour, dignity and selfless tolerance.

Gibbon's early life was clouded by illness, which at one point was so grave that he was expected not to survive. The consequent irregular schooling meant that

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he spent much of his time reading. According to his Memoirs, he had by the age of 14 read all the basic materials from which he drew upon for *Decline and Fall*. His father sent him to Magdalen College at Oxford University in 1752, when Gibbon was 15. There he idled, and drifted into Roman Catholicism, much to the anger of his father, who sent the errant son to Lausanne. By becoming a Roman Catholic convert Gibbon had, under the prevailing laws, disqualified himself for virtually all public service.

At Lausanne, Gibbon was tutored by a Calvinist minister, Daniel Pavillard, who gently educated Gibbon in French, mathematics, classical literature – and eased him back into Protestantism at the end of 1754, though it is clear from *Decline and Fall* that Gibbon's view of any systematic Christian doctrine was at the very least ambiguous. Nevertheless, Lausanne was an education in itself. He became acquainted with Voltaire, fell in love with (but did not marry) Georges Deyverdun, who eventually married Jacques Necker, who became French finance minister under Louis XVI. He returned to England in 1758, but visited Paris in 1763 and Rome in 1764, where he determined to write his masterpiece.

From 1770 he was established in London,

and in 1775 was elected to the Club, the circle which formed around Samuel Johnson – though Johnson's biographer, James Boswell, openly despised Gibbon. He published the first volume of *Decline and Fall* on February 17th, 1760, to immediate acclaim and some controversy, due to the last two chapters which discussed the rise of Christianity in heavily ironic terms. His philosophical scepticism, schooled by his early studies in classical writing, encouraged his reservations about all forms of supernatural belief. In 1781 he published the second and third volumes, and in 1782 returned to Lausanne, where, by 1788, he had completed the last three volumes. He died, in London, in 1793.

A complete reading of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* would occupy more than 100 hours. The sheer length of time required for such an undertaking would tax the patience of even the most ardent admirer of Gibbon – and put such a recording beyond the reach of anyone but the wealthiest patron. This abridged version gives, it is hoped, much more than a flavour of the entire work. This recording deals with the period during which the seeds of decline were sown, and traces the lives and works of those emperors who most inspired Gibbon



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to embark upon his mammoth work.

Although this recording concentrates on the first three volumes and, of necessity, omits the absorbing chapters on, for example, the history of Roman law and the rise of Islam contained in the final three volumes, those later volumes deal with a period when the Roman Empire, in its true sense, was already history.

Nevertheless, this abridged version conveys the narrative drive that Gibbon develops; covers the turbulent early relationship between Christianity and paganism; and tracks the manner in which the corruption of Rome made it possible for the successive and relentless barbarian invasions to erode the might of the once invincible legions. Gibbon's history is, in the end, not merely the story of Rome – but of all empires, throughout all history.

**Notes by Gary Mead**





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## Emperors of Rome

### **AUGUSTUS**

23 BC – 14 AD

### **TIBERIUS**

14 – 37

### **CALIGULA**

37 – 41

### **CLAUDIUS I**

41 – 54

### **NERO**

54 – 68

### **GALBA**

68 – 69

### **OTHO**

69

### **VITELLIUS**

69

### **VESPASIAN**

69 – 79

### **TITUS**

79 – 81

### **DOMITIAN**

81 – 96

### **NERVA**

96 – 98

### **TRAJAN**

98 – 117

### **HADRIAN**

117 – 138

### **ANTONINIUS PIUS**

138 – 161

### **MARCUS AURELIUS**

161 – 180

**Lucius Verus** 161 – 169

**Commodus** 176 – 180

### **COMMODUS**

180 – 192

### **PERTINAX**

193

### **DIDIUS JULIANUS**

193

### **SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS**

193 – 211

**Caracalla** 198 – 211

**Geta** 209 – 211

### **CARACALLA**

211 – 217

**Geta** 211 – 212

### **MACRINUS**

217 – 218

### **ELAGABALUS**

218 – 222

### **SEVERUS ALEXANDER**

222 – 235

### **MAXIMINUS**

235 – 238

### **GORDIAN I**

238

### **GORDIAN II**

238

### **BALBINUS**

238

### **PUPIENUS**

238

### **GORDIAN III**

238 – 244

### **PHILIP**

244 – 249

### **DECIUS**

249 – 251

### **TREBONIANUS GALLUS**

251 – 253

### **AEMILIANUS**

253

### **VALERIANUS**

253 – 259

**Gallienus** 253 – 259

### **GALLIENUS**

259 – 268

**Postumus** (in Gaul)

258 – 267

### **CLAUDIUS II**

268 – 270

**Tetricus** (in Gaul)

268 – 273

### **QUINTILLUS**

270

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**AURELIAN**

270 – 275

**TACITUS**

275 – 276

**FLORIANUS**

276

**PROBUS**

276 – 282

**CARUS**

282 – 283

**CARINUS**

283 – 285

**Numerianus** 283 – 284**DIOCLETIAN**

284 – 305

**Maximian** 286 – 305**GALERIUS** and**CONSTANTIUS**

305

**GALERIUS** and **SEVERUS**

306

**GALERIUS, LICINIUS,  
CONSTANTINE, DAIA**and **MAXENTIUS**

307 –

**(Galerius** d.311,**Maxentius** d.312,**Daia** d.313, **Licinius**

defeated 324)

**CONSTANTINE I**

324 – 337

**CONSTANTINE II**

337 – 340

**Constans** 337 – 340**Constantius** 337 – 340**CONSTANS**

340 – 350

**CONSTANTIUS**

340 – 361

**JULIAN**

361 – 363

**JOVIAN**

363 – 364

**VALENTIAN I**

364 – 375

**Valens** 364 – 375**Gratian** 367 – 375**VALENS**

375 – 378

**GRATIAN**

378 – 383

**VALENTINIAN II**

375 – 392

**Theodosius I** 379 – 392**THEODOSIUS I**

392 – 395

**Arcadius** 383 – 395**Honorius** 394 – 395**EMPERORS OF THE  
WESTERN EMPIRE AFTER  
THEODOSIUS I****HONORIUS**

394 – 423

**VALENTINIAN III**

423 – 455

**MAXIMUS**

455

**AVITUS**

455 – 456

**MAJORIAN**

457 – 461

**SEVERUS**

461 – 465

**NO EMPEROR**

465 – 467

**ANTHEMIUS**

467 – 472

**OLYBRIUS**

472

**GLYCERIUS**

473 – 474

**NEPOS**

474 – 475

**ROMULUS AUGUSTULUS**

475 – 476

**END OF WESTERN EMPIRE:  
ODOACER, KING OF ITALY**



*Edward Gibbon (1737–94),  
author of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire**

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**The music on this recording is taken from the  
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*Bronze head of Constantine*

Edward Gibbon

# The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire

## Part I

Read by **Philip Madoc** with **Neville Jason**

Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* is one of the greatest texts in the English language. In magisterial prose, Gibbon charts the gradual collapse of the Roman rule from Augustus (23 BC-14 AD) to the first of the Barbarian kings, Odoacer (476-490 AD). It is a remarkable account, with the extravagant corruption and depravity of emperors such as Commodus, Caracalla and Elagabalus contrasted by the towering work of Constantine, Julian and other remarkable men. It remains the standard work of scholarship on the subject two hundred years after it was written; yet equally important, in its sheer accessibility, it is an unforgettable story.



**Philip Madoc's** extensive theatre work includes the roles of Othello and Iago, Faust and Macbeth and recently, with the RSC, The Duke in *Measure for Measure* and Professor Raat in *The Blue Angel*. TV roles include Lloyd George, Magua in *The Last of the Mohicans*, and the defence lawyer in *Brookside*. He also stars in his own detective series, *A Mind to Kill*. He also reads *The Death of Arthur*, *The Canterbury Tales* and *The Arabian Nights* for Naxos AudioBooks.

**Neville Jason** also reads Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* and Tolstoy's *War and Peace* for Naxos AudioBooks.

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