

CHAPTER I

THE MEDITERRANEAN

The Roman Empire, at the end of the third century, had one outstanding general characteristic: it was an essentially Mediterranean commonwealth. Virtually all of its territory lay within the watershed of that great land-locked sea; the distant frontiers of the Rhine, the Danube, the Euphrates and the Sahara, may be regarded merely as an advanced circle of outer defenses protecting the approaches.

The Mediterranean was, without question, the bulwark of both its political and economic unity. Its very existence depended on mastery of the sea. Without that great trade route, neither the government, nor the defense, nor the administration of the *orbis romanus* would have been possible.

As the Empire grew old this fundamentally maritime character was, interestingly enough, not only preserved but was still more sharply defined. When the former inland capital, Rome, was abandoned, its place was taken by a city which not only served as a capital but which was at the same time an admirable seaport—Constantinople.

The Empire's cultural development, to be sure, had clearly passed its peak. Population decreased, the spirit of enterprise waned, barbarian hordes commenced to threaten the frontiers, and the increasing

expenses of the government, fighting for its very life, brought in their train a fiscal system which more and more enslaved men to the State. Nevertheless this general deterioration does not seem to have appreciably affected the maritime commerce of the Mediterranean. It continued to be active and well sustained, in marked contrast with the growing apathy that characterized the inland provinces. Trade continued to keep the East and the West in close contact with each other. There was no interruption to the intimate commercial relations between those diverse climes bathed by one and the same sea. Both manufactured and natural products were still extensively dealt in: textiles from Constantinople, Edessa, Antioch, and Alexandria; wines, oils and spices from Syria; papyrus from Egypt; wheat from Egypt, Africa, and Spain; and wines from Gaul and Italy. There was even a reform of the monetary system based on the gold *solidus*, which served materially to encourage commercial operations by giving them the benefit of an excellent currency, universally adopted as an instrument of exchange and as a means of quoting prices.

Of the two great regions of the Empire, the East and the West, the first far surpassed the second, both in superiority of civilization and in a much higher level of economic development. At the beginning of the fourth century there were no longer any really great cities save in the East. The center of the export trade was in Syria and in Asia Minor, and here also was concentrated, in particular, the textile industry for which the whole Roman world was the market and for which Syrian ships were the carriers.

The commercial prominence of the Syrians is one of the most interesting facts in the history of the Lower Empire. It undoubtedly contributed largely to that progressive orientalizing of society which was due eventually to end in Byzantinism. And this orientalizing, of which the sea was the vehicle, is clear proof of the increasing importance which the Mediterranean acquired as the aging Empire grew

weak, gave way in the North beneath the pressure of the barbarians, and contracted more and more about the shores of this inland sea.

The persistence of the Germanic tribes in striving, from the very beginning of the period of the invasions, to reach these same shores and to settle there is worth special notice. When, in the course of the fourth century, the frontiers gave way for the first time under their blows, they poured southward in a living flood. The Quadi and the Marcomanni invaded Italy; the Goths marched on the Bosphorus; the Franks, the Suevi, and the Vandals, who by now had crossed the Rhine, pushed on unhesitatingly towards Aquitaine and Spain. They had no thought of merely colonizing the provinces they coveted. Their dream was rather to settle down, themselves, in those happy regions where the mildness of the climate and the fertility of the soil were matched by the charms and the wealth of civilization.

This initial attempt produced nothing more permanent than the devastation which it had caused. Rome was still strong enough to drive the invaders back beyond the Rhine and the Danube. For a century and a half she succeeded in restraining them, but at the cost of exhausting her armies and her finances.

More and more unequal became the balance of power. The incursions of the barbarians grew more relentless as their increasing numbers made the acquisition of new territory more imperative, while the decreasing population of the Empire made a successful resistance constantly less possible. Despite the extraordinary skill and determination with which the Empire sought to stave off disaster, the outcome was inevitable.

At the beginning of the fifth century, all was over. The whole West was invaded. Roman provinces were transformed into Germanic kingdoms. The Vandals were installed in Africa, the Visigoths in Aquitaine and in Spain, the Burgundians in the Valley of the Rhône, the Ostrogoths in Italy.

This nomenclature is significant. It includes only Mediterranean countries, and little more is needed to show that the objective of the conquerors, free at last to settle down where they pleased, was the sea—that sea which for so long a time the Romans had called, with as much affection as pride, *mare nostrum*. Towards the sea, as of one accord, they all turned their steps, impatient to settle along its shores and to enjoy its beauty.

If the Franks did not reach the Mediterranean at their first attempt, it is because, having come too late, they found the ground already occupied. But they too persisted in striving for a foothold there. One of Clovis's earliest ambitions was to conquer Provence, and only the intervention of Theodoric kept him from extending the frontiers of his kingdom as far as the Côte d'Azur. Yet this first lack of success was not due to discourage his successors. A quarter of a century later, in 536, the Franks made good use of Justinian's offensive against the Ostrogoths and wrung from their hard-pressed rivals the grant of the coveted territory. It is interesting to see how consistently the Merovingian dynasty tended, from that date on, to become in its turn a Mediterranean power.

Childebert and Clotaire, for example, ventured upon an expedition beyond the Pyrenees in 542, which, however, proved to be ill-starred. But it was Italy in particular that aroused the cupidity of the Frankish kings. They formed an alliance, first with the Byzantines and then with the Lombards, in the hope of setting foot south of the Alps. Repeatedly thwarted, they persisted in fresh attempts. By 539, Theudebert had crossed the Alps, and the territories which he had occupied were reconquered by Narses in 553. Numerous efforts were made in 584–585 and from 588 to 590 to get possession anew.

The appearance of the Germanic tribes on the shore of the Mediterranean was by no means a critical point marking the advent of a new era in the history of Europe. Great as were the consequences which it entailed, it did not sweep the boards clean nor even break

the tradition. The aim of the invaders was not to destroy the Roman Empire but to occupy and enjoy it. By and large, what they preserved far exceeded what they destroyed or what they brought that was new. It is true that the kingdoms they established on the soil of the Empire made an end of the latter in so far as being a *State* in Western Europe. From a political point of view the *orbis romanus*, now strictly localized in the East, lost that ecumenical character which had made its frontiers coincide with the frontiers of Christianity. The Empire, however, was far from becoming a stranger to the lost provinces. Its civilization there outlived its authority. By the Church, by language, by the superiority of its institutions and law, it prevailed over the conquerors. In the midst of the troubles, the insecurity, the misery and the anarchy which accompanied the invasions there was naturally a certain decline, but even in that decline there was preserved a physiognomy still distinctly Roman. The Germanic tribes were unable, and in fact did not want, to do without it. They barbarized it, but they did not consciously germanize it.

Nothing is better proof of this assertion than the persistence in the last days of the Empire—from the fifth to the eighth century—of that maritime character pointed out above. The importance of the Mediterranean did not grow less after the period of the invasions. The sea remained for the Germanic tribes what it had been before their arrival—the very center of Europe, the *mare nostrum*. The sea had had such great importance in the political order that the deposing of the last Roman Emperor in the West (476) was not enough in itself to turn historical evolution from its time-honored direction. It continued, on the contrary, to develop in the same theater and under the same influences. No indication yet gave warning of the end of that commonwealth of civilization created by the Empire from the Pillars of Hercules to the Aegean Sea, from the coasts of Egypt and Africa to the shores of Gaul, Italy and Spain, In spite of the invasion of the barbarians the new world conserved, in all essential characteristics, the

physiognomy of the old. To follow the course of events from Romulus Augustulus to Charlemagne it is necessary to keep the Mediterranean constantly in view.

All the great events in political history are unfolded on its shores. From 493 to 526 Italy, governed by Theodoric, maintained a hegemony over all the Germanic kingdoms, a hegemony through which the power of the Roman tradition was perpetuated and assured. After Theodoric, this power was still more clearly shown. Justinian failed by but little of restoring imperial unity (527–565). Africa, Spain, and Italy were reconquered. The Mediterranean became again a Roman lake. Byzantium, it is true, weakened by the immense effort she had just put forth, could neither finish nor even preserve intact the astonishing work which she had accomplished. The Lombards took Northern Italy away from her (568); the Visigoths freed themselves from her yoke. Nevertheless she did not abandon her ambitions. She retained, for a long time to come, Africa, Sicily, Southern Italy. Nor did she loose her grip on the West—thanks to the sea, the mastery of which her fleets so securely held that the fate of Europe rested at that moment, more than ever, on the waves of the Mediterranean.

What was true of the political situation held equally well for the cultural. It seems hardly necessary to recall that Boëthius (480–525) and Cassiodorus (477–*c.* 562) were Italians as were St. Benedict (480–534) and Gregory the Great (590–604), and that Isidorus of Seville (570–636) was a Spaniard. It was Italy that maintained the last schools at the same time that she was fostering the spread of monachism north of the Alps. It was in Italy, also, that what was left of the ancient culture flourished side by side with what was brought forth anew in the bosom of the Church. All the strength and vigor that the Church possessed was concentrated in the region of the Mediterranean. There alone she gave evidence of an organization and spirit capable of initiating great enterprises. An interesting example of this is the fact that Christianity was brought to the Anglo-Saxons (596)

from the distant shores of Italy, not from the neighboring shores of Gaul. The mission of St. Augustine is therefore an illuminating sidelight on the historic influence retained by the Mediterranean. And it seems more significant still when we recall that the evangelization of Ireland was due to missionaries sent out from Marseilles, and that the apostles of Belgium, St. Amand (689–693) and St. Remade (c. 668), were Aquitanians.

A brief survey of the economic development of Europe will give the crowning touch to the substantiation of the theory which has here been put forward. That development is, obviously, a clear-cut, direct continuation of the economy of the Roman Empire. In it are rediscovered all the latter's principal traits and, above all, that Mediterranean character which here is unmistakable. To be sure, a general decline in social activity was apparent in this region as in all others. By the last days of the Empire there was a clearly marked decline which the catastrophe of the invasions naturally helped accentuate. But it would be a decided mistake to imagine that the arrival of the Germanic tribes had as a result the substitution of a purely agricultural economy and a general stagnation in trade for urban life and commercial activity.¹

The supposed dislike of the barbarians for towns is an admitted fable to which reality has given the lie. If, on the extreme frontiers of the Empire, certain towns were put to the torch, destroyed and pillaged, it is none the less true that the immense majority survived the invasions. A statistical survey of cities in existence at the present day in France, in Italy and even on the banks of the Rhine and the Danube, gives proof that, for the most part, these cities now stand on the sites where rose the Roman cities, and that their very names are often but a transformation of Roman names.

¹ A. Dopsch, *Wirtschaftliche und soziale Grundlagen der europäischen Kulturentwicklung*, Vienna, 1920, Vol. II, p. 527, takes issue strongly with the opinion that the Germanic invasions put an end to Roman civilization.

The Church had of course closely patterned the religious districts after the administrative districts of the Empire. As a general rule, each diocese corresponded to a *civitas*. Since the ecclesiastical organization suffered no change during the era of the Germanic invasions, the result was that in the new kingdoms founded by the conquerors it preserved intact this characteristic feature. In fact, from the beginning of the sixth century the word *civitas* took the special meaning of "episcopal city," the center of the diocese. In surviving the Empire on which it was based, the Church therefore contributed very largely to the safeguarding of the existence of the Roman cities.

But it must not be overlooked, on the other hand, that these cities in themselves long retained a considerable importance. Their municipal institutions did not suddenly disappear upon the arrival of the Germanic tribes. Not only in Italy, but also in Spain and even in Gaul, they kept their *decuriones*—a corps of magistrates provided with a judicial and administrative authority, the details of which are not clear but whose existence and Roman origin is a matter of record. There is to be noticed, moreover, the presence of the *defensor civitatis*, and the practice of inscribing notarized deeds in the *gesta municipalia*.

It is also well established that these cities were the centers of an economic activity which itself was a survival of the preceding civilization. Each city was the market for the surrounding countryside, the winter home of the great landed proprietors of the neighborhood and, if favorably situated, the center of a commerce the more highly developed in proportion to its nearness to the shores of the Mediterranean. A perusal of Gregory of Tours gives ample proof that in the Gaul of his time there was still a professional merchant class residing in the towns. He cites, in some thoroughly characteristic passages, those of Verdun, Paris, Orleans, Clermont-Ferrand, Marseilles, Nimes, and Bordeaux, and the information which he supplies concerning them is all the more significant in that it is brought into his narrative only incidentally. Care should of course be taken not to exaggerate its value.

An equally great fault would be to undervalue it. Certainly the economic order of Merovingian Gaul was founded on agriculture rather than on any other form of activity. More certainly still this had already been the case under the Roman Empire.

But this does not preclude the fact that inland traffic, the import and export of goods and merchandise, was carried on to a considerable extent. It was an important factor in the maintenance of society. An indirect proof of this is furnished by the institution of market-tolls (*teloneum*). Thus were called the tolls set up by the Roman administration along the roads, in the ports, at bridges and fords, and elsewhere. The Frankish kings let them all stay in force and drew from them such copious revenues that the collectors of this class of taxes (*telonearii*) figured among their most useful functionaries.

The continued commercial activity after the disappearance of the Empire, and, likewise, the survival of the towns that were the centers thereof and the merchants who were its instruments, is explained by the continuation of Mediterranean trade. In all the chief characteristics it was the same, from the fifth to the eighth centuries, as it had been just after Constantine. If, as is probable, the decline was the more rapid after the Germanic invasions, it remains none the less true that there is presented a picture of uninterrupted intercourse between the Byzantine East and the West dominated by the barbarians. By means of the shipping which was carried on from the coasts of Spain and Gaul to those of Syria and Asia Minor, the basin of the Mediterranean did not cease, despite the political subdivisions which it had seen take place, to consolidate the economic unity which it had shaped for centuries under the imperial commonwealth. Because of this fact, the economic organization of the world lived on after the political transformation.

In lack of other proofs, the monetary system of the Frankish kings would alone establish this truth convincingly. This system, as is too well known to make necessary any lengthy consideration here, was

purely Roman or, strictly speaking, Romano-Byzantine. This is shown by the coins that were minted: the *solidus*, the *triens*, and the *denarius*—that is to say, the *sou*, the *third-sou* and the *denier*. It is shown further by the metal which was employed: gold, used for the coinage of the *solidus* and the *triens*. It is also shown by the weight which was given to specie. It is shown, finally, by the effigies which were minted on the coins. In this connection it is worth noting that the mints continued for a long time, under the Merovingian kings, the custom of representing the bust of the Emperor on the coins and of showing on the reverse of the pieces the *Victoria Augusti* and that, carrying this imitation to the extreme, when the Byzantines substituted the cross for the symbol of that victory they did the same. Such extreme servility can be explained only by the continuing influence of the Empire. The obvious reason was the necessity of preserving, between the local currency and the imperial currency, a conformity which would be purposeless if the most intimate relations had not existed between Merovingian commerce and the general commerce of the Mediterranean. In other words, this commerce continued to be closely bound up with the commerce of the Byzantine Empire. Of such ties, moreover, there are abundant proofs and it will suffice to mention merely a few of the most significant.

It should be borne in mind, first of all, that at the start of the eighth century Marseilles was still the great port of Gaul. The terms employed by Gregory of Tours, in the numerous anecdotes in which he happens to speak of that city, make it seem a singularly animated economic center. A very active shipping bound it to Constantinople, to Syria, Africa, Egypt, Spain and Italy. The products of the East—papyrus, spices, costly textiles, wine and oil—were the basis of a regular import trade. Foreign merchants, Jews and Syrians for the most part, had their residence there, and their nationality is itself an indication of the close relations kept up by Marseilles with Byzantium. Finally, the extraordinary quantity of coins which were struck there during

the Merovingian era gives material proof of the activity of its commerce. The population of the city must have comprised, aside from the merchants, a rather numerous class of artisans.² In every respect it seems, then, to have accurately preserved, under the government of the Frankish kings, the clearly municipal character of Roman cities.

The economic development of Marseilles naturally made itself felt in the hinterland of the port. Under its attraction, all the commerce of Gaul was oriented toward the Mediterranean. The most important market-tolls of the Frankish kingdom were situated in the neighborhood of the town at Fos, at Arles, at Toulon, at Sorgues, at Valence, at Vienne, and at Avignon. Here is clear proof that merchandise landed in the city was expedited to the interior. By the course of the Rhône and of the Saone, as well as by the Roman roads, it reached the north of the country. The charters are still in existence by which the Abbey of Corbie (Department of Pas-de-Calais) obtained from the kings an exemption from tolls at Fos on a number of commodities, among which may be remarked a surprising variety of spices of eastern origin, as well as papyrus. In these circumstances it does not seem unwarranted to assume that the commercial activity of the ports of Rouen and Nantes, on the shores of the Atlantic Ocean, as well as of Quentovic and Duurstede, on the shores of the North Sea, was sustained by the ramifications of the export traffic from far-off Marseilles.

But it was in the south of the country that this effect was the most appreciable. All the largest cities of Merovingian Gaul were still to be found, as in the days of the Roman Empire, south of the Loire. The details which Gregory of Tours supplies concerning Clermont-Ferrand and Orleans show that they had within their walls veritable colonies of Jews and Syrians, and if it was so with those towns which there is no reason for believing enjoyed a privileged status, it must

² It is impossible, in fact, not to infer that at Marseilles there was a class of artisans at least as important as that which still existed at Arles in the middle of the sixth century. See F. Kiener, *Verfassungsgeschichte der Provence*, Leipzig, 1900, p. 29.

have been so also with the much more important centers such as Bordeaux or Lyons. It is an established fact, moreover, that Lyons still had at the Carolingian era a quite numerous Jewish population.

Here, then, is quite enough to support the conclusion that Merovingian times knew, thanks to the continuance of Mediterranean shipping and the intermediary of Marseilles, what we may safely call a great commerce. It would certainly be an error to assume that the dealings of the oriental merchants of Gaul were restricted solely to articles of luxury. Probably the sale of jewelry, enamels and silk stuffs resulted in handsome profits, but this would not be enough to explain their number and their extraordinary diffusion throughout all the country. The traffic of Marseilles was, above all else, supported by goods for general consumption such as wine and oil, spices and papyrus. These commodities, as has already been pointed out, were regularly exported to the north.

The oriental merchants of the Frankish Empire were virtually engaged in wholesale trade. Their boats, after being discharged on the quays of Marseilles, certainly carried back, on leaving the shores of Provence, not only passengers but return freight. Our sources of information, to be sure, do not tell much about the nature of this freight. Among the possible conjectures, one of the most likely is that it probably consisted, at least in good part, in human chattels—that is to say, in slaves. Traffic in slaves did not cease to be carried on in the Frankish Empire until the end of the ninth century. The wars waged against the barbarians of Saxony, Thuringia and the Slavic regions provided a source of supply which seems to have been abundant enough. Gregory of Tours speaks of Saxon slaves belonging to a merchant of Orleans, and it is a good guess that this Samo, who departed in the first half of the seventh century with a band of companions for the country of Wends, whose king he eventually became, was very probably nothing more than an adventurer trafficking in slaves. And it is of course obvious that the slave trade, to which the Jews still assiduously

applied themselves in the ninth century, must have had its origin in an earlier era.

If the bulk of the commerce in Merovingian Gaul was to be found in the hands of oriental merchants, their influence, however, should not be exaggerated. Side by side with them, and according to all indications in constant relations with them, are mentioned indigenous merchants. Gregory of Tours does not fail to supply information concerning them, which would undoubtedly have been more voluminous if his narrative had had more than a merely incidental interest in them. He shows the king consenting to a loan to the merchants of Verdun, whose business prospers so well that they soon find themselves in a position to reimburse him. He mentions the existence in Paris of a *domus negociantium*—that is to say, apparently, of a sort of market or bazaar. He speaks of a merchant profiteering during the great famine of 585 and getting rich. And in all these anecdotes he is dealing, without the least doubt, with professionals and not with merely casual buyers or sellers.

The picture which the commerce of Merovingian Gaul presents is repeated, naturally, in the other maritime Germanic kingdoms of the Mediterranean—among the Ostrogoths of Italy, among the Vandals of Africa, among the Visigoths of Spain. The Edict of Theodoric contained a quantity of stipulations relative to merchants. Carthage continued to be an important port in close relations with Spain, and her ships, apparently, went up the coast as far as Bordeaux. The laws of the Visigoths mentioned merchants from overseas.

In all of this is clearly manifest the vigorous continuity of the commercial development of the Roman Empire after the Germanic invasions. They did not put an end to the economic unity of antiquity. By means of the Mediterranean and the relations kept up thereby between the West and the East, this unity, on the contrary, was preserved with a remarkable distinctiveness. The great inland sea of Europe no longer belonged, as before, to a single State. But nothing yet gave

reason to predict that it would soon cease to have its time-honored importance. Despite the transformations which it had undergone, the new world had not lost the Mediterranean character of the old. On the shores of the sea was still concentrated the better part of its activities. No indication yet gave warning of the end of the commonwealth of civilization, created by the Roman Empire from the Pillars of Hercules to the Aegean Sea. At the beginning of the seventh century, anyone who sought to look into the future would have been unable to discern any reason for not believing in the continuance of the old tradition.

Yet what was then natural and reasonable to predict was not to be realized. The world-order which had survived the Germanic invasions was not able to survive the invasion of Islam.

It is thrown across the path of history with the elemental force of a cosmic cataclysm. Even in the lifetime of Mahomet (571–632) no one could have imagined the consequences or have prepared for them. Yet the movement took no more than fifty years to spread from the China Sea to the Atlantic Ocean. Nothing was able to withstand it. At the first blow, it overthrew the Persian Empire (637–644). It took from the Byzantine Empire, in quick succession, Syria (634–636), Egypt (640–642), Africa (698). It reached into Spain (711). The resistless advance was not to slow down until the start of the eighth century, when the walls of Constantinople on the one side (713) and the soldiers of Charles Martel on the other (732) broke that great enveloping offensive against the two flanks of Christianity.

But if its force of expansion was exhausted, it had none the less changed the face of the world. Its sudden thrust had destroyed ancient Europe. It had put an end to the Mediterranean commonwealth in which it had gathered its strength.

The familiar and almost “family” sea which once united all the parts of this commonwealth was to become a barrier between them. On all its shores, for centuries, social life, in its fundamental characteristics,

had been the same; religion, the same; customs and ideas, the same or very nearly so. The invasion of the barbarians from the North had modified nothing essential in that situation.

But now, all of a sudden, the very lands where civilization had been born were tom away; the Cult of the Prophet was substituted for the Christian Faith, Moslem law for Roman law, the Arab tongue for the Greek and the Latin tongue.

The Mediterranean had been a Roman lake; it now became, for the most part, a Moslem lake. From this time on it separated, instead of uniting, the East and the West of Europe. The tie which was still binding the Byzantine Empire to the Germanic kingdoms of the West was broken.