

Attila the Hun and the Failure of the *Divide et impera* Roman Policy



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ABSTRACT

Throughout the whole existence of their Empire, the Romans used the *divide et impera* polity against the European barbarians. The Romans tried to prevent the establishment of larger and more powerful political entities which could endanger them. Simultaneously, they supported rivalry amongst the tribal chieftains and provided the friendly ones with gold and goods. The arrival of the Huns into Europe did not initially bring any change to this international system. Since the 420s the Huns unified their own tribe and created close alliances with other tribes in Middle and Eastern Europe. This alliance had at last the military power to clash with the Romans and disrupt Roman international order across Europe. Because the Hunnic military power was not sufficient, their state was more of a tribal confederacy than a hierarchical and tightly controlled empire. The Hunnic Empire was also a short-termed affair limited to Attila's life.

KEYWORDS

Attila the Hun, Huns, barbarians, Migration Period, Barbarian Invasions, Later Roman Empire, Germanic peoples, Priscus of Panion, late antiquity

It is not entirely clear who said *divide et impera* — divide and rule. Usually, it is attributed to the Roman politician Gaius Julius Caesar, but there is no mention of this phrase in his *Commentario de Bello Gallico* or in his *Life* written by Plutarch. According to other opinions, the author of this quote was Macedonian ruler Philippos II (382–336 BC), father of the famous Alexander the Great, or French king Louis XI (1423–1483) who faced the growing power of the House of Habsburg. This political principle appeared in the works of late Italian authors like Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) in his *Dell'Arte della Guerra* and later satirist Trajano Boccalini (1556–1613). The *divide et impera* strategy of lies in creating internal division between foreign parties, blocking the possibility of forming larger unions and alliances, direct dealings with smaller units on the other side and ignoring their main government and encouraging mistrust, jealousy, and competition within foreign elites. This strategy serves to conquer enemy lands, helps to control the subjugated territories, or is simply used in everyday dealings with foreign political entities.



The Romans used this policy when dealing with European barbarians across *limes*¹ at rivers of the Danube and the Rhine. In Africa, the desert Berber did not pose such a threat as the Celtic and Germanic people in Europe. Berber tribes occasionally raided Roman territory and since the second century AD, the Roman province of Africa was guarded by a fortified defensive structure called *Fossatum Africae*, similar to the Hadrian's Wall in Britain. The Parthian Empire and later the Persian Empire under the Sasanian dynasty were located in the East. These two states were the only empires equivalent to the Roman one. The armed conflicts between these states were common and frequent, although neither side could claim dominance over the other. It would be a mistake to consider the tribes from the European *Barbaricum* as a potential threat to the Roman Empire. Throughout its existence, the Empire maintained military superiority and dominance over the barbarians. However, the tribes of Europe could cause a major setback to the Roman expansionist policy. The most famous example is the Roman catastrophic defeat by the Germanic tribes in 9 AD in the battle of the Teutoburg Forest. As other examples, we could mention the destruction of the army of Marcus Lollius by tribes of Usipeti and Sicambri in 16 BC and the Dacian victory over the Roman expedition sent against them by the emperor Domitian in 86 AD.

For the Romans, the disunity of their enemies was one of the key elements of their imperial ideology. It gave them the feeling of superiority of their civic society over the tribal society of the barbarians beyond the *limes*. Simultaneously it gave the Romans hope, that their Empire would not be defeated by their enemies, who were fighting with each other at the same time as they were fighting the Romans. This idea can be found, for example, in the work of Tacitus. In his *Germania* he wrote that the Germanic people were Rome's most dangerous enemies even more dangerous than the Kingdom of Arsacids (Parthia) but their mutual battles and struggles hold them back and the discord between Germanic tribes was Rome's greatest advantage.² The same motives can be found in Roman literature: from Caesar's description of his campaigns against the Gallic tribes to the early Byzantine authors who mentioned new enemies of the Empire — the Slavic people. Although this was a motive of a classical Roman author, the image of quarrelsome and still fighting barbarians displays the reality of these tribes. Several contemporary historians point out that the idea of Germanic unity or at least the idea of common identity among these people was non-existent in the age of classical antiquity and it is just a mere conception of some 19th-century authors.³

1 For more informations about Roman frontier and *limes* see H. ELTON, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire*, London 1996; W. MOSCHEK, *Der Limes: Grenze des Imperium Romanum*, Darmstadt 2010; C. R. WHITTAKER, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire: A Social and Economic Study*, London 1994.

2 TACITUS, *Germania*, in: P. Cornelii Taciti Libri qui supersunt: *Germania, Agricola, Dialogus de oratoribus*, Bibliotheca Teubneriana, Tom. II, Fasc. 2, (ed.) E. KOESTRMANN, Leipzig 1970, 33 and 37.

3 W. GOFFART, *Barbarian Tides*, Philadelphia 2006, pp. 40–50; G. HALSALL, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376–568*, Cambridge 2007, p. 27.

DIVIDE ET IMPERA IN ROMAN PRACTICE

Besides all that the *divide et impera* strategy was a cornerstone of Roman policy at their European frontier. Caesar proceeded in the spirit of this doctrine during his conquest of Gaul. He formed alliances with individual Gallic tribes and supported them against their traditional local rivals and he slowly spread Roman influence over Gaul through that. The first Roman emperor Augustus acted similarly after his defeat at the battle of Teutoburg Forest. After the battle, two larger units were formed in *Germania*, one along the Rhine River led by chieftain Arminius of the Cherusci tribe and the second one on the bank of the Danube led by Marobud of the Marcomanni tribe. Augustus accelerated their rivalry which led to the war between the Marcomanni and Cherusci tribes and he supported their rebellious and splinter factions. The imperial diplomacy led to the dissolution of both Germanic confederacies and to the creation of several smaller tribal client kingdoms. During the reign of the emperor Marcus Aurelius, the Germanic and Sarmatian tribes on the middle Danube began to cooperate and they launched a series of raids on Roman territory reaching the Italian city of Aquileia. These events started the Marcomannic wars lasting from 166 until 180 AD. In 171 the emperor Marcus Aurelius negotiated a separate peace with the Quadi and allied with the Vandalic tribes of Astingi and Lacringi as part of the preparation for the upcoming campaign against the Marcomanni. He thereby isolated the Marcomanni from their former allies and then he attacked them in 172. In the following year, the Quadi were defeated by the Romans.⁴

Constantine the Great followed this strategy when dealing with the Gothic tribes of Thervingi expansion. The Goths living on the plains north of the Lower Danube (today's Romania) were stopped after they raided the territory of the Empire at the end of the third century, and they began to expand westward. There they encountered the Sarmatian tribes living around the Tisza River, which were in the Roman sphere of influence. In 332 Constantine's Roman army supported the Sarmatians against the Gothic attackers and repelled their invasion. However, in 334 Constantine attacked these Sarmatian tribes which in his previous campaign he had saved from the Gothic threat.⁵ Constantine pursued two goals through these actions. Firstly, he unsuccessful-

4 DIO CASSIUS, *Historia Romana*, in: Dio's Roman History III, LCL No. 53, (ed.) E. CARY, London 1925, 72, 11–12. More about Marcomannic Wars and the reign of Marcus Aurelius see F. MCLYNN, *Marcus Aurelius: A Life*, Cambridge 2009; A. BIRLEY, *Marcus Aurelius: A Biography*, New York 2001; P. KOVÁCS, *Marcus Aurelius' Rain Miracle and the Marcomannic Wars*, Leiden 2009; H. FRIESINGER — J. TEJRAL — A. STUPPNER, *Markomannenkrige: Ursachen und Wirkungen*, Wien 1993.

5 EUSEBIOS, *Vita Constantini*, in: *Eusebius Werke 1. Über das Leben Constantins, Constantins Rede and die heilige Versammlung*, GCS, (ed.) I. HEIKEL, Leipzig 1902, I, 8; *Anonymus Valesianus pars prior*, in: *Chronica minora saec. IV V. VI VII. (I)*, MGH, Auct. ant. IX, (ed.) T. MOMMSEN, Berlin 1892, 32; and *Consularia Constantinopolitana*, in: *Chronica minora saec. IV V. VI VII. (I)*, MGH, Auct. ant. IX, (ed.) T. MOMMSEN, Berlin 1892, 332. Further reading about Constantine the Great's campaigns against Goths and Sarmatians: M. KULIKOWSKI, *Constantine and the Northern Barbarians*, in: *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine*, Cambridge 2006, pp. 347–369; M. KULIKOWSKI, *Rome's Gothic Wars*, Cambridge 2007, pp. 81–86; H. WOLFRAM, *Geschichte der Goten*, München 1983, pp. 46–48.



fully dreamed of restoration of the abandoned Roman province of *Dacia* north of the Danube and secondly, he tried to prevent every tribe from gaining a dominant position in the *Barbaricum*. His son Constantius II continued this policy and he took advantage not only of the rivalry between the individual tribes but also of the social tensions within the tribes. In 357–358, he campaigned against the Sarmatians between the Danube and the Tisza rivers whereas he supported a Sarmatian aristocratic group called *Agaragantes* in their fight against an inferior subordinated population of the *Limigantes*.⁶ Constantius II showed a fascinating use of the *divide et impere* strategy. When in 360 the Gallic armies revolted against Constantius II and elevated his cousin Julian to the position of *Augustus*, he secretly incited Alemannic king Vodomorius, a former Roman enemy, to launch raids on the Roman territory. It should have slowed down Julian's advance to the east against Constantius II.⁷

We can say that the main Roman objective in their policy toward the Germanic people in the *Barbaricum* was an effort to prevent the appearance of larger political entities and the creation of a functional and dangerous Germanic tribal leaders' alliance. The Romans were seemingly terrified of the possibility of larger barbarian coalitions. Historian Ammianus Marcellinus witnessed this. In 367 a series of violence and plunder spread all over Roman Britain. The Picts from Scotland, the tribes of *Scotti* and *Attecoti* from Ireland, the Germanic Franks and the Saxons from the northern coast of Europe and even the Roman deserters were involved in these raids.⁸ It was more likely a coincidence that several barbarian groups took advantage of the weakening of the Roman province. From Ammianus' point of view, it was a dangerous coalition of Rome's enemies and he called it *barbarica conspiratione* — 'The Great Conspiracy'. According to Ammianus, the raiders were even supported by the local

6 AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS, *Res gestae*, in: *Ammiani Marcellini Rerum gestarum libri qui supersunt*, Bibliotheca Teubneriana, Vol. II, (ed.) W. SEYFARTH, Stuttgart — Leipzig 1999, XVII, 12–13.

The exact nature of the relationship between *Agaragantes* and *Limigantes* is unknown. After the war, Constantius II relocated some parts of *Agaragantes* on Roman soil and *Limigantes* were pushed to the other bank of the Tisza. Further readings: J. SZIDAT, *Der Feldzug Constantius' II. an der mittleren Donau im Jahre 358 n. Chr.*, in: *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, Bd. 21, H.4, 1972, pp. 712–720; P. BARCELÓ, *Constantius II. und die Limiganten: Einige Präzisierungen zu Amm. Marc. XIX 11*, in: *Klio*, Vol. 74, 1992, pp. 422–430; P. KOVÁCS, *The literary sources of Constantius II's war against the Sarmatians*, in: *Mensa rotunda epigraphica Napocensis*, Cluj-Napoca 2016, pp. 161–192.

7 AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS, *Res gestae*, XXI, 3–4.

Julian learned of the dealings between Vodomarius and Constantius II through the capture of their envoys. Vodomarius was subsequently captured and imprisoned in Hispania. Emperor Julian's wars against Alemanni are described in T. ZOTS, *Die Alemannen um die Mitte des 4. Jahrhunderts nach dem Zeugnis des Ammianus Marcellinus*, in: D. GEUENICH (ed.) *Die Franken und die Alemannen bis zur "Schlacht bei Zülpich" (496/97)*, Berlin 1998, pp. 384–406; J. DRINKWATER, *The Alamanni and Rome 213–496*, Oxford 2007, pp. 217–265; D. WOODS, *Ammianus Marcellinus and the "Rex Alamannorum Vodomarius"*, in: *Mnemosyne*, Vol. 53, Fasc. 6, 2000, pp. 690–710; K. BRINGMANN, *Kaiser Julian*, Darmstadt 2004, pp. 52–76.

8 AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS, *Res gestae*, XXVII, 8.



Roman secret service *areani*.⁹ It seemed obvious that these events in Britain created substantial concerns across the Empire and they were exaggerated and mystified.

Emperors Augustus and Tiberius successfully caused the dissolution of the Cherusci tribal confederation led by Arminius and the Marcomanni one led by Marobud. 150 years later, the emperor Marcus Aurelius eliminated the barbarian coalition formed by the Marcomannic king Ballomar. In 106 his predecessor Emperor Trajan conquered the kingdom of Dacia. Thus perished the last centralized monarchy north of the Danube. Korean-Australian scholar Hyun Jin Kim argues that the tribal polities of the Germanic people were decentralised and unstable in the fourth century and that they lived in merely chaotically organised warbands. The hierarchized and centralised creation of the Germanic kingdoms began after their closer encounter with steppe nomadic people such as Sarmatians, Alans and especially Huns.¹⁰ It could be conceivable that the absence of an organized and centralized monarchy, regardless of the presence of such a political establishment in the Hunnic society, was caused by Roman influence and interventions. I do not want to accuse the Romans of some advanced social engineering towards the barbarian population in Europe but maintaining *status quo* in the *Barbaricum* was always one of Rome's main interests.

While practising the *divide et impera* strategy used a method of 'carrot and stick'. The Roman *limes* were not an insurmountable barrier, they allowed movement in both directions. For example, amber travelled through the *Barbaricum* to the Roman territory. And vice versa, the Romans supplied barbarian tribes with luxury items, jewellery, wine, and gold. This way they wanted to maintain the cooperation of the barbarian tribes and ensure stability in the border area. In case of the hostility of the neighbouring tribe, the Romans supported their rivals inhabiting remote regions of the *Barbaricum*. The Roman aid to the Burgundians against the Alemanni and the Gepids (a Germanic tribe living in the Carpathians) against the Goths during the fourth century could be an example of such support. Tribes across the border could make a diplomatic agreement with the Romans. These agreements could form actual alliances, or they could be only prestigious and honorary. In the age of the Republic, it was the *socius et amicus populi Romani* (ally and friend of the Roman people) title.¹¹ In the early Empire, this old republican designation prevailed but nowadays historians called these dependent rulers 'client kings'. They were mostly rulers of monarchies in the Middle East, however, kings of the Quadi tribe Vangio and Sido could be included

9 Ibidem., XXVII, 8 and XXVIII, 3.

10 H. J. KIM, *The Huns, Rome and the Birth of Europe*, Cambridge 2013, pp. 50–53; H. J. KIM, *The Huns*, New York 2016, pp. 67–72. Hyun Jin Kim applies some of Peter Heather's thoughts about the Goths to the Hunnic society, although he is heavily criticized by contemporary scholars for creating a 'Hunno-centric' version of later Roman history and for exaggerating the Hunnic influence on Europe.

11 More information about the system of allies of the Roman Republic in L. MATTHAEI, *On the Classification of Roman Allies*, in: *The Classical Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 2/3, 1907, pp. 182–204; M. F. CURSI, *International Relationships in the Ancient World*, in: *Fundamina*, Vol. 20, 2014, pp. 186–195; M. R. CIMMA, *Reges socii et amici populi Romani*, Milano 1976. There is a work about Roman diplomacy C. EILERS, *Diplomats and Diplomacy in the Roman World*, Leiden 2009.



among them.¹² A treaty of *foedus*, which established semi-autonomous military units from barbarian tribes and provided them annual Roman payments, was a matter of business in the fifth century. The relocation of barbarians was another possible option for the Romans. They often settled defeated enemies on Roman soil, dispersing them, placing them under the administration of Roman officials and giving them the *laeti* or *dediticii* status.¹³

The 'stick' example could be the Roman counterattacks reacting to the barbarian raids. These punitive expeditions were in some cases more brutal and destructive than barbarian plunder.¹⁴ During the fourth and at the beginning of the fifth century the Romans sustained significant military superiority over the barbarians and in addition to that from an ideological point of view, the Roman leaders needed a victory over a foreign enemy to stabilize the political situation of the Empire. These Roman counterattacks did not stop even during the Migration Period. In 392 or 393 Roman *magister militum* Arbogast campaigned against the Franks and he crossed the Rhine into the *Barbaricum*¹⁵, he was probably the last Roman commander to do so. Overall, this happened at the time when the Goths had settled in the province of *Thracia* for several years. In the fifth century, although the initiative was for most of the time in the Roman hands, their attacks were directed against barbarian groups located already in the territory of the Empire.

THE HUNS IN EUROPE

Initially, it might seem that the arrival of the Huns in Europe would not anyhow change the situation in Europe. Before the year 370, the Huns appeared in the area of the rivers Volga and Don and they subjugated local tribes of Alans, subsequently the defeated Gothic people of Greuthungi in the Pontic steppe. Another victim of the Hunnic advance was the Gothic tribe Thervingi, which was defeated in 375 near the Danaster (Dniester) river.¹⁶ The Thervingi then crossed the Danube and sought refuge

12 TACITUS, *Annales*, in: *Tacitus: The Annals, Books 4–6, 11–12*, LCL 312, (ed.) J. JACKSON, XII, 30.

13 About *laeti* and *dediticii* in: C. J. SIMPSON, *Laeti in the Notitia Dignitatum*. „Regular“ Soldiers vs. „Soldier-Farmers“, in: *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, tom. 66, fasc. 1, 1988, pp. 80–85; R. MATHISEN, *Peregrini, Barbari, and Cives Romani: Concepts of Citizenship and the Legal Identity of Barbarians in the Later Roman Empire*, in: *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 111, No. 4, 2006, pp. 1011–1040; H. ELTON, *Warfare in Roman Europe, AD 350–425*, Oxford 1996, pp. 129–132; G. HALSALL, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West*, pp. 152–153; S. WILLIAMS — G. FRIELL, *Theodosius: The Empire at Bay*, London 1998, pp. 75–90.

14 G. HALSALL, *Barbarian Migrations and the Birth of Medieval Europe: From Unity to Diversity*, in: P. LÓPEZ QUIROGA (ed.), *In tempore Sueborum: el tiempo de los suevos en la Gallaecia (411–585): el primer reino medieval de Occidente: volume de estudios*, Ourense 2018, p. 16.

15 GREGORY OF TOURS, *Libri historiarum Francorum X*, in: *Gregorii Turonensis Opera*, MGH, *Script. rerum. Merov. I/1*, (ed.) B. KRUSCH, Hannover 1951, II, 9; and H. DESSAU, *ILS*, Vol. I, Berlin 1892, 790.

For date see U. NONN, *Die Franken*, Stuttgart 2010, p. 62; S. WILLIAMS, G. FRIELL, *Theodosius*, p. 126.

16 AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS, *Res gestae*, XXXI, . 3–4.



among the Romans, but this chain of events culminated in a catastrophic Roman defeat and the death of emperor Valens in the battle of Adrianople in 378. The Romans did not face the incursion of eastern nomadic people for the first time. In the times of Caesar and Augustus, the Sarmatian tribes of Iazyges and Roxolani migrated westwards from the Pontic steppes and they came in the area of the Danube River.¹⁷ However, these tribes settled on the left bank of the Danube and did not move farther. In 135 large groups of the Alans went through the Caucasus and tried to ransack Roman provinces in Asia Minor but they were defeated by the local Roman governor Flavius Arrian.¹⁸ In addition to that, the Huns remained in the area of the Pontic steppe after 375. Therefore, the Romans might not have considered them a threat.

The Huns also originally did not bring any disturbances to the Roman system of *divide et impera*. From the Roman perspective, they were probably seen as a reinforcement for this system. Above that, in contrast to the opinion of some historians¹⁹, the Huns did not arrive in Europe as one united cooperating group under unified leadership. From our literary sources, we can identify several distinguished Hunnic groups and some of them may or may not be identical to each other.

- In the second century, Geographer Claudius Ptolemy recorded the presence of a tribe called *Χοῦνοι* — Chunoι in the region between the rivers of Dnieper and Don.²⁰ They could be the first Hunnic group in Europe after the Chinese destroyed the Xiongnu state (ancestors of Huns) in 91 AD while the majority of their fellow tribesmen remained in the steppes around the Altai Mountains.
- Group consisted of the Alpidzuri, Alicidzuri, Itimari, Tuncarsi/Tunsuri and Boisci tribes. Around 370 they lived near Maeotian lake (Sea of Azov) and together with the Alans they became the first objective of the main Hunnic mass westward

17 PLINIUS SECUNDUS, Gaius *Naturalis historia*, in: *C. Plinii Secundi Naturalis Historiae Libri XXXVII*, Sammlung Tusculum, (ed.) R. KÖNIG — G. WINKLER, Regensberg 2002, IV, 12 and TACITUS, *Historiae*, in: *Tacitus: Histories*, LCL 111, (ed.) C. MOORE, London 1930, I, 79. Readings about arrival of Iazyges and Roxolani to the Roman *limes* in T. SULMIRSKY, *The Sarmatians*, London 1970, pp. 133–137; V. BÂRCĂ, *Nomads of the Steppes on the Danube Frontier of the Roman Empire in the 1st Century CE. Historical Sketch and Chronological Remarks*, in: *Dacia: Revue d'archéologie et d'histoire ancienne*, vol. 57, 2013, pp. 99–125; R. BATTY, *Rome and the Nomads: The Pontic-Danubian Realm in Antiquity*, Oxford 2007, pp. 229–236.

18 ARRIAN, *Acies contra Alanos*, in: *Flavius Arrianus Vol. II, Scripta minora et fragmenta*, Bibliotheca Teubneriana, (ed.) A. G. ROOS — G. WIRTH, Leipzig, 2002, 1–31 and DIO CASSIUS, *Historia Romana*, 69, 15

19 The view that the Huns were united and politically organized already when they came to Europe can be found in the writing of Hungarian archaeologist István Bóna — I. BÓNA, *Das Hunnenreich*, Stuttgart 2001, pp. 9–13, 35.

20 CLAUDIUS PTOLEMY, *Geographike*, in: *Claudii Ptolemaei Geographia*, (ed.) K. F. NOBBE, Leipzig 1843, III, 5.

This mention in Ptolemy's map is highly questionable. Hyun Jin Kim believes in the possibility that they were a splinter group of Huns that arrived first in Europe (H. J. KIM, p. 66). Quite contrary, according to sinologist O. Maenchen-Helfen there was no relationship between the Chunoι and later Huns and it was the mere coincidental similarity of their names (O. MAENCHEN-HELFFEN, *The World of the Huns: Studies in Their History and Culture*, Berkeley 1973, pp. 447–452).



expansion.²¹ Their names suggest that they were of Turkic origin and were related to the Huns. After their defeat, they retreated westward and settled on the left bank of the lower Danube. They gained permission to relocate to the Roman bank and live in the province of *Thracia*²². There they were attacked in 422 or 434²³ by the main group of the Huns under king Rua.

- The Hunnic *foederati*. This group together with the Alans crossed the Danube River in 377²⁴ and joined the warring Goths. They played a pivotal role in the battle of Adrianople in 378. On the Roman soil they, together with the Alans and the Gothic Greuthungi, formed a tribal federation which Austrian historian W. Herwig named ‘*Dreivölker-Könfederation*’.²⁵ In 380 they were all defeated by emperor Gratian and settled in the provinces of *Pannonia I* and *Valeria* as local military garrisons — *foederati*. The Alans and the Greuthungi left the Pannonia for Italy and the Hunnic *foederati* have never been mentioned again. They probably remained in the Pannonian provinces²⁶ until the year 427 when they were expelled from Pannonia.²⁷
- Another Hunnic group which arrived at the Roman border at the Danube river is the one ruled by king Uldin. They appeared at the lower Danube in 400 and in January 401 they defeated a rebellious Roman commander Gainas.²⁸ Uldin then allied with a Roman military commander in the West *magister militum* Stilicho, and in 406 he helped him to defeat a host of barbarians of king Radagaisus that invaded Italy. As time went on, Uldin broke up his alliance with the Romans and in 408 he unsuccessfully attacked the Roman fortress *Castra Martis* (modern Kula in Bulgaria).²⁹ We know nothing more about Uldin’s fate, though his group operated in 400–410 in the Wallachian Plain.

21 JORDANES, *Getica*, in: *Iordanis Romana et Getica*, MGH, Auct. ant. XI, (ed.) T. MOMMSEN, Berlin 1882, 126.

22 PRISCUS, in: R. C. BLOCKLEY, *The Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire: Eunapius, Olympiodorus, Priscus and Malchus*, Liverpool 1983, fr. 2 (*Exc. de Leg. Rom. 1*). All fragments of Priscus of Panium and Olympiodorus of Thebes are quoted according to the bilingual edition of R. C. BLOCKLEY. This edition used a different numbering of the fragments than the older editions of Karl Müller and Ludwig Dindorf.

23 For the date 422 see E. SCHULTHEIS, *The Battle of the Catalaunian Fields, AD 451*, Barnsley 2019, p. 4 and the date 434 is suggested in H. J. KIM, Huyn Jin, *The Huns*, p. 80; I. BÓNA, *Das Hunnenreich*, p. 54.

24 AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS, *Res gestae*, XXXI, 7,4.

25 H. WOLFRAM, *Geschichte der Goten*, p. 100.

26 H. GRAČANIN, *The Huns and South Pannonia*, in: *Byzantinoslavica*, Vol. 64, 2006, pp. 34–49.

27 MARCELLINUS COMES, *Chronicon*, in: *Chronica minora saec. IV V. VI VII. (II)*, MGH, Auct. ant. XI, (ed.) T. MOMMSEN, Berlin 1894, 427, 1.

This passage is controversial and difficult to interpret because *comes* Marcellinus wrote that in 427 after 50 years Huns were expelled from Pannonia. However, in his previous text, he never mentioned Huns in Pannonia, so we don’t know about which group of Huns he spoke about and under what circumstances they settled in Pannonia.

28 ZOSIMOS, *Nea historia*, in: *Zosimi comitis et exadvocati fisci Historia nova*, Bibliotheca Teubneriana, (ed.) L. MENDELSSOHN, Leipzig 1887, V, 21–22.

29 SOZOMENOS, *Historia ecclesiastica*, in: *Patrologia graeca LXVII*, (ed.) J. P. MIGNE, Paris 1864, IX, 5.

- In 408 emperor Honorius made an alliance with 10 000 Hunnic warriors to support him in a war against the Gothic ruler Alaric.³⁰ This alliance was made after the murder of *magister militum* Stilicho and it is unclear which Hunnic group these warriors belonged to. Therefore, they are here listed separately.
- Olympiodorus of Thebes mentioned a mysterious group of the Huns ruled by kings Donatus and Charaton. In 412 they received an embassy from Constantinople.³¹ The problem is that we do not know where these Huns lived, they were either settled somewhere in the Pannonian Basin north of the Danube or in the Pontic steppe north of the Black Sea.³²
- The main group of the Huns could be addressed as ‘the Attila’s clan³³’. After 370 they remained in the Pontic steppe and in 395, they led a large raid through the Caucasus and ravaged Armenia, Persia and Roman Cappadocia and Syria³⁴. Later they moved westward and settled in the Great Hungarian Plain alongside the Danube. According to recent historians, these Huns arrived in the middle Danube shortly after 420³⁵, but it is possible that could have settled there sooner, sometime after 410. In the 420s they were ruled by two brothers Rua and Octar and thanks to *magister militum* Flavius Aëtius they gained a new land in the former Roman

30 ZOSIMOS, *Nea historia*, V, p. 50.

31 OLYMPIODORUS, *Historiae*, in: R. C. BLOCKLEY, *The Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire: Eunapius, Olympiodorus, Priscus and Malchus*, Liverpool 1983, fr. 19 (Bibl. cod. 80).

See note 22. For the route of the embassy, see W. TREADGOLD, *The Diplomatic Career and Historical Work of Olympiodorus of Thebes*, in: *The International History Review*, Vol. 26, No. 4, 2004, p. 714.

32 Initial discussion is in E. A. THOMPSON, *The Huns*, Malden 2004, p. 34; O. MAENCHEN-HELFFEN, pp. 74, 423. For the relationship between Donatus and Charaton, see D. SINOR, *The Hun Period*, in: *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia*, Cambridge 1994, p. 186; BÓNA, *Das Hunnenreich*, p. 35; P. HEATHER, *Der Untergang des Römischen Weltreichs*, Reinbek bei Hamburg 2017, p. 376; M. KELLY, *The End of Empire: Attila the Hun and the Fall of Rome*, New York 2010, p. 70.

33 Firstly, German scholar B. von Arnim called the European Huns “*Attilahunnen*” (B. von ARNIM, *Bemerkungen zum Hunnischen*, in: *Zeitschrift für Slavische Philologie*, Vol. 13, No. 1/2, 1936, p. 100). This was followed by the eminent scholar on the Hunnic topic O. Maenchen-Helfen who used the term “*Attilanic Huns*” (O. MAENCHEN-HELFFEN, *The World of the Huns*, p. 477). In the sources Priscus had been using the designation ‘*βασιλῆιοι Σκύθαι* — Royal Scythians’ (PRISCUS, fr. 11, 2, 600–603 (*Exc. de Leg. Rom.* 3)). However, it cannot be contemporary terminology, because Priscus took over this name from Herodotus according to which Royal Scythians were one of the tribes living in the Pontic steppe in fifth century BC.

34 PRISCUS, fr. 11, 2, 600–603 (*Exc. de Leg. Rom.* 3).

For a detailed description of the Hunnic raid in Asia, see O. MAENCHEN-HELFFEN, *The World of the Huns*, pp. 51–59. Contrary to Maenchen-Helfen, E. A. Thompson and Hyun Jin Kim dates this raid to approx. 420 (E. A. THOMPSON, *The Huns*, p. 35 and H. J. KIM, *The Huns, Rome and the Birth of Europe*, p. 54).

35 P. HEATHER, *The Huns and the End of the Roman Empire in Western Europe*, in: *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 110, No. 435, 1995, pp. 16–18; I. BÓNA, *Das Hunnenreich*, p. 46; W. GOFFART, *Barbarian Tides*, pp. 76–78.



provinces of *Pannonia* in 433. In 435 two brothers Attila and Bleda, nephews of the previous kings became their rulers.

As we can see, during the first quarter of the fifth century, the Huns were politically fragmented and divided into several independent groups and warbands ruled by tribal chieftains. Except for the above-listed Hunnic groups mentioned by the Roman literary sources, there had to exist other groups operating in the regions of the Pontic steppe and North Caucasus. These groups also belong to the period before the reign of Attila and Bleda. After Attila's death the Roman sources, especially Jordanes' *Getica*, mention even more Hunnic groups and tribes, which after the collapse of the Hunnic realm operated independently. Apart from the political division the Hunnic groups suffered from internal struggles and low cohesion of their warriors. In 408 Hunnic king Uldin captured Castra Martis and began to negotiate with Roman officials about a new treaty between him and the Empire. However Roman envoys and agents talked during their visits to Castra Martis with Uldin's subordinate commanders and noblemen — 'οἰκείους καὶ λοχαγούς'. As a result that some of his warriors betrayed him and joined the Roman army.³⁶ Even the succession of Attila and Bleda after the death of their uncle Rua was not without problems. There were two other pretenders to the throne among the Huns — Mama and Atakam. They fled to the Roman territory and sought asylum. During the negotiation of the new peace treaty with Constantinople in 435 in Margus (Serbian city of Požeravec), Attila and Bleda requested the repatriation of Hunnic refugees, including Mama and Atakam. The Romans handed over the refugees to the Huns, and Mama and Atakam were executed near the Carsum fortress (in the vicinity of the Romanian town Hârșova).³⁷

The Huns were threatened that they would become the next victim of Roman diplomacy toward barbarians. According to Roman politicians and military leaders, the Huns were just another tribe that could be exploited during the Roman power struggle and during the struggle within the *Barbaricum*. As a result of mutual fights, the local tribes would not have an opportunity to attack the Roman territory. However, the Huns went through the unification process in the 420s and 430s. At the time of their arrival in Europe, the Huns were a conglomerate of many warbands of different strengths. Instead of the usual term 'tribal confederacy', it would be more suitable to use a designation created by German scholar R. Wenskus 'Stammeschwarm — a tribal swarm,³⁸ because the Hunnic groups operated independently without any cooperation. Despite the Roman effort, the Huns successfully created their own kingdom with its main base situated in the former Roman *Pannonia*. The establishment of

³⁶ SOZOMENOS, *Historia ecclesiastica*, IX, 5.

³⁷ PRISCUS, fr. 2 (*Exc. de Leg. Rom. 1*).

About Atakam and Mama Priscus only says that they belonged to the Hunnic royal family. Hungarian archaeologist I. Bóna believes that they were Atilla's and Bleda's cousins, probably sons of Rua or Octar (BÓNA, *Das Hunnenreich*, p. 61).

³⁸ R. WENSKUS, *Stammesbildung und Verfassung*, Köln 1961, pp. 53–54.

Wenskus used the term "Stammeschwarm" when he talked about Frankish tribes in the third and fourth centuries in opposition to E. Zollner who had been using the term 'Stammesbund' more corresponding to the "tribal confederacy".



Hunnic/Attila's Empire was more a result of a Roman internal power struggle rather than their effort. In the fifth century, the Romans were much more willing to make concessions to the barbarians to secure their support than in the previous century. Anyway, the Huns together with migrating Goths (the later Visigoths) were barbarian pioneers in the field of tribal unification and the foundation of kingdoms. The remaining large groups (Franks, Ostrogoths and possibly Alemanni) went through the unification process later at the end of the fifth century. The unification of the Huns had to be a very violent procedure similar to the unification of the Franks by Merovingian king Clovis. We know from literary sources that Hunnic leader Donatus was murdered in 412, Mama and Atakam were executed in 435, and in 445 Attila killed his own brother Bleda.

The importance, influence and political power of the Huns in the 440s and early 450s are undisputable. During Attila's reign, his residence located between the Danube and the Tisza played the role of the major centre of power similar to Ravenna, Constantinople and Persian Ctesiphon.

But how did the Huns achieve their importance? It is necessary not to get carried away and realize that the Hunnic hegemony in *Barbaricum* was a short-term affair related only to the reign of Attila and Bleda. Older authors linked the Hunnic success in war to their military tactic of mounted archers and their composite bows. This is highly unlikely. Mounted archers were common in the Pontic steppe. The Scythians, Sarmatians and Alans fought this way. And in the Roman army, there were units of mounted archers as well. So, the Huns did not bring any innovations to Europe, not even in military technology. Stirrups and single-edged sabres appeared in Europe much later after the arrival of the Avars. The Huns were using composite bows made of wood and animal bones. Some authors³⁹ consider these weapons to be the cause of Hunnic success that gave them a tactical advantage over their enemies. Composite bows had already been known to the Scythian, Sarmatian and Germanic tribes. Although from archaeological finds that it is noticeable that the Hunnic bows were asymmetrical and slightly larger than the Scythian and Sarmatian ones.⁴⁰ They could have been more effective than the ones of their enemies, but they did not play a pivotal role in creating the Hunnic Empire. Likewise, the trilobate arrowheads commonly used by the Huns had been used by the Sarmatians already in the previous centuries.⁴¹

In the military field, the Huns surprisingly could not be boasting about glorious and decisive victories over the Roman armies. They tried to take advantage of every weakness of their enemies. Their raids were carefully scheduled so that the Roman response and resistance were minimal. In the winter of 395, the Huns crossed the

39 J. MAN, *Attila: The Barbarian King Who Challenged Rome*, New York 2006, pp. 79–104.

40 I. BÓNA, *Das Hunnenreich*, pp. 167–172.

The best-preserved remnants of the Hunnic bow were found in a burial in Wien-Simmering. Among Hunnic archaeological finds, bows were quite rare.

41 A. BITNER-WRÓBLEWSKA — B. KONTNY, *Controversy about three-leaf arrowheads from Lithuania*, in: *Archeologia Litwana*, Vol.7, 2006, p. 108; A. KHAZANOV, *Очерки военного дела сарматов*, Москва 1971, pp. 38–41.



frozen Danube and raided *Thracia*.⁴² It happened at the time when a majority of the East Roman army including the Gothic *foederati* was still in Italy after the campaign against the emperor Eugenius, and the emperor Theodosius was dying in Mediolanum (today's Milan, where he died on 17 January 395). Uldin's attack on Castra Martis in 408 overlapped with the death of emperor Arcadius in May 408 and the murder of *magister militum* Stilicho in August 408.

Before Stilicho's death, there was a possibility that a war would break out between Ravenna and Constantinople. And even later in 422, the Huns attacked *Thracia* while the Eastern Roman army fought against the Persians in Mesopotamia and Armenia.⁴³ When in 434 Rua escalated the tension between the Huns and Constantinople and demanded more concessions, parts of the Eastern Roman army were under the command of Flavius Aspar and deployed in Africa against the Vandals. The situation repeated in 441 when Attila and Bleda ravaged the provinces of *Thracia* and *Moesia*. At that time emperor Theodosius II had his armies scattered in the East against Persians and in Sicily to support the West Roman army against the Vandals. Attila's great raid across the Danube in 447 was initiated by an earthquake in Constantinople which damaged city walls and the East Roman army took part in rescue and relief operations.⁴⁴ Since then, Attila felt strong enough to start his campaigns against Gaul and Italy regardless of the Roman military and political situation.

According to the reflections mentioned above we can assume that the Hunnic, particularly Attila's, success was not a result of the Hunnic military and tactical superiority over the Romans and the rest of the barbarian tribes. It also could not have been caused by the Hunnic social hierarchy and their centralised political organization, even though Hyun Jin Kim thinks that and his idea is used by Evan Schultheis⁴⁵ as well. Therefore, as mentioned above, the Huns at the end of the fourth century and the beginning of the fifth century were politically fragmented equally as the Germanic tribes.

42 PHILOSTORGIUS, *Ecclesiastica historica*, in: Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller 21, (ed.) J. BIDEZ, Berlin 1913, XI, 8; and CLAUDIANUS, *In Rufinum*, in: *Claudian I*, LCL 135, (ed.) M. PLAUTNER, London 1956, II, 26–28.

About Hunnic raid on *Thracia* in 395 in E. A. THOMPSON, Edward, *The Huns*, pp. 30–31; M. KELLY, *The End of Empire*, p. 50. The raid could have been a trigger to the Gothic rebellion led by Alaric. Otto Maenchen-Haelfen dated this event to the winter of 384/385 and he identified it with the Gothic assault on Halmyris fortress (O. MAENCHEN-HELFEN, *The World of the Huns*, p. 38). More recently P. Heather disregard this raid as a misreading of the sources (P. HEATHER, *The Huns*, p. 9).

43 For Hunnic raid on *Thracia*, see MARCELLINUS COMES, *Chronicon*, 422, 3 and mentions of the Roman-Sasanian war of 421–422 are in SOCRATES SCHOLASTICUS, *Ecclesiastica historica*, in: *Sokrates: Kirchen Geschichte*, Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller, Neue Folge, Band 1, (ed.) G. HANSEN, Berlin 1995, VII, 18 and 20 and THEOPHANES HOMOLOGETES, *Chronographia*, in: *Theophanis Chronographia*. Bibliotheca Teubneriana, (ed.) C. DE BOOR, Leipzig 1883, AM 5918.

44 MARCELLINUS COMES, *Chronicon*, 447, 1–5.

45 H. J. KIM, *The Huns*, pp. 43–47, 54–60; E. SCHULTHEIS, *The Battle of the Catalaunian Fields*, pp. 40–46.

FORMATION OF THE HUNNIC EMPIRE/CONFEDERACY

At the end of his writing about the Huns Edward A. Thompson provided his judgment about Attila the Hun.⁴⁶ Although the historian should not judge the historical events but describe and analyse them, Thompson's conclusion about Attila's reign should not be omitted. According to him, Attila was a poor military strategist — his victories were acquired by bloody losses and he was a clumsy and unimaginative diplomat because he failed to use the barbarian tribes settled on the Roman territory and the Roman opposition against the imperial rule. It is a misunderstanding of Attila's policy. He was a raider, not a conqueror. In the Hunnic society, success was measured by the acquired loot, not by the number of conquered cities or the extent of occupied lands. Therefore, the allies who could immediately strengthen the ranks of Attila's warriors were more relevant to him than the ones that could support his political goals. The Visigoths and the Gallo-roman nobility were rather an object of Hunnic plunder and source of spoils than potential allies. Acquiring spoils and strengthening the army were Attila's instruments of cohesion.

The formation of the Hunnic empire is not utterly written down in the sources. According to common belief, the Huns defeated and subjugated the barbarian tribes of Europe one by one. On this point, we must partly agree with Canado-American scholars of the Toronto School. They diminish the Hunnic influence on other barbarian tribes and deny the Hunnic conquest and subjugation of the tribes located along the Danube and in Middle Europe because as such it lacks proof in the sources.⁴⁷ We only have literary mentions of the Hunnic victory over the Greuthungi and Alans in the Pontic steppe in 370s⁴⁸, the subjugation of an otherwise unknown tribe of Sorosgi in 435⁴⁹ and the conquest of the Burgundian kingdom in 436/437⁵⁰. The absence of reference in the Roman texts is caused more by the Roman lack of interest in events in the *Barbaricum* than by Hunnic inactivity. The establishment process of the Hunnic empire had to be realized equally through the violent subjugation of defeated tribes and peaceful agreements and alliances.

The initial Hunnic military success in the Pontic steppe was a crucial element because it secured their reputation as capable and feared warriors. In the following period this probably also helped the Huns in their negotiations with other barbarians. Jordanes mentioned that one of the Gothic kings, Gesimund, had decided to cooperate with the Huns and had sworn loyalty to the Hunnic king Balamber.⁵¹ We could as well

46 E. A. THOMPSON, *The Huns*, pp. 227–230.

47 W. GOFFART, *Barbarian Tides*, pp. 75–80; M. KULIKOWSKI, *Imperial Tragedy: From Constantine's Empire to the Destruction of Roman Italy (AD 363–568)*, London 2019, pp. 77–80.

48 AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS, *Res gestae*, XXI, 3.

49 PRISCUS, fr. 2 (*Exc. de Leg. Rom. 1*)

50 PROSPER TIRO, *Epitoma chronicon*, in: *Chronica minora saec. IV V. VI VII. (I)*, MGH, Auct. ant. IX, (ed.) T. MOMMSEN, Berlin 1892, 1322, HYDATIUS LEMICENSIS, *Chronica*, in: *Chronica minora saec. IV V. VI VII. (II)*, MGH, Auct. ant. XI, (ed.) T. MOMMSEN, Berlin 1894, 108; CASSIODORUS, *Chronicon*, in: *Chronica minora saec. IV V. VI VII. (II)*, MGH, Auct. ant. XI, (ed.) T. MOMMSEN, Berlin 1894, 435 and *Chronica Gallica ad 452*, in: *Chronica minora saec. IV V. VI VII. (I)*, MGH, Auct. ant. IX, (ed.) T. MOMMSEN, Berlin 1892, 118.

51 JORDANES, *Getica*, 248.



use an example of the Sciri tribe, which was a minor Germanic tribe probably related to the ancient Bastarnae. By the time the Huns arrived, they lived presumably in the Eastern Carpathians. They joined one of the earliest Hunnic raids on the Roman territory in 381⁵², later they were part of Uldin's army that conquered Castra Martis in 408 and during Attila's reign Scirian nobleman Edeko was part of Attila's retinue and he served as his envoy and guardsman. After the death of Attila, Edeko became king of Sciri and his kingdom was located on the bank of the Danube opposite the province of *Pannonia*.⁵³ The Sciri are mentioned in our sources always as allies of the Huns and there are no mentions of the Hunns defeating the Sciri. Voluntary cooperation with the Huns was in the case of minor tribes such as the Sciri mutually beneficial. The tribe did not suffer casualties in the fight with the Huns and got a chance to participate in large-scale raids organized by the Huns. In return, the Huns gained new warriors and they were certainly aware that the loot from such tribes would not at all reach the value of the booty from the Roman cities. Archaeological findings may possibly confirm this claim. In Şimleu Silvaniei there was discovered a golden treasure buried here by the Gepids probably around the time of Attila's death. This treasure is considered to be a Gepid royal treasure similar to those mentioned in the Frankish and Visigothic sources. In the hoard golden medallions of Roman emperors Maximianus Herculus, Constantine I, Valens and Gratianus were deposited.⁵⁴ Gepid kings gathered this treasure since the end of the third century and it was kept in their hands even after the arrival of the Huns. If the Huns had clashed in a battle with the Gepids and defeated them, they would have definitely seized their royal treasure. The fact that the treasure remained in the Gepid's possession proves a peaceful arrangement between the Huns and the Gepids.

Who were all members of the Hunnic tribal confederacy? Ammianus Marcellinus in the 380s recorded only a coalition of the Huns, Alans and Gothic Greuthungi led by the Huns. The texts of Attila's contemporaries from the Western Empire do not also give us any essential information. Prosper of Tiro, *Chronica Gallica*, and bishop Hydatius wrote only about Attila and the Huns and they did not mention any other tribes under Attila's rule. We can find the first more or less appropriate list of members of the Hunnic Confederacy in a poetic panegyric on emperor Avitus written by bishop Sidonius Apollinaris. According to him, the tribes participating in Attila's Gallic campaign in 451 were the Rugians, Gelonians, Gepids, Sciri, Burgundians, Huns, Bellonoti, Neuri, Bastarnae, Thuringians, Bructeri and Franci.⁵⁵ Sidonius wrote that they fought side by side with the contemporary tribes under Attila's leadership the tribes that had

52 ZOSIMOS, *Nea Historia*, IV, 34

53 JORDANES, *Getica*, 275–277.

The supposed seat of Edeko and his Sciri is located in Bakodpuszta on the left bank of Danube — see A. KISS, *Die Skiren im Karpatenbecken, ihre Wohnsitze und ihre Materielle Hinterlassenschaft*, in: *Acta Archeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, Tom. 35, Fasc. 1–2, 1983, pp. 95–131.

54 R. HARHOIA, *Der Schatzfund von Simleul Silvaniei und die Schlacht von Nedao*, in: *Banatica*, Vol. 23, 2013, pp. 111–117.

55 SIDONIUS APOLLINARIS, *Carminae*, in: *Gaii Solii Apollinaris Sidonii Epistulae et carmina*, MGH, Auct. ant. VIII, (ed.) CH. LUETJOHANN, Berlin 1887, VII, 321–325.



already disappeared (Bastarnae and Bructeri), the ancient tribes of Scythia from the work of Herodotus (Gelonians and Neuri) and a fictional tribe of the Bellonoti. Other lists of tribes of the Hunnic Confederacy can be found in the *Getica* of Jordanes, although this work was written around 550. He listed tribes of Attila's battle formation during the battle of Catalaunian fields (Huns, Ostrogoths and Gepids), then the tribes fighting in the battle of Nedao after the death of Attila in 454 (Goths, Gepids, Rugians, Suebi, Alani and Heruli)⁵⁶ and later he added the Sciri, Sarmatians and Sadagarii.

In the fragments of Priscus, we could read that Attila was a ruler of all Scythia and he ruled even over the islands in the *Okeanos* (i. e. that his empire reached the shores of the Baltic Sea).⁵⁷ However, his power was not so enormous and the Hunnic state incorporated the territories between the Danube River and the Carpathians and marginally controlled areas of Moravia, Silesia and southern Poland and its eastern border was formed by the river Dniester inhabited by the Hunnic tribe of Akatziri under Attila's loose control.⁵⁸ In the West, the Alemanni are never mentioned in connection with the Huns, neither as their allies nor enemies. The Thuringians and Rhenish Franks were probably recent allies for Attila and the Huns did not join their forces with them until the invasion of Gaul in 451. The Langobards, who at that time lived around the Ore Mountains, according to O. Maenchen-Helfen successfully resisted the Huns and maintained their independence.⁵⁹ And even though this is not supported by written sources, some scholars argue that warbands of Scandinavian origin and from the forest zone of Eastern Europe (Slavic tribes' ancestors) were part of Attila's army.⁶⁰ In one of the latest works concerning the Huns, Evan Schultheis estimated the strength of Attila's army to 71 000 men.⁶¹ The Hunnic Empire thus could

*Pugnacem Rugum comitante Gelono
Gepida trux sequitur; Scyrum Burgundio
cogit;
Chunus, Bellonotus, Neurus, Bastarna,
Toringus,
Bructerus, ulvosa vel quem Nicer alluit
unda,
prorumpit Francus;*

Warlike Rugian accompanied with Gelonian
follows up fierce Gepid, Burgundian
encourages the Scir
The Hun, Bellonotian, Neurian, Bastarnian,
Thuringian,
Bructer burst out even with the Frank,
which is washed
by the waves of the Neckar river
(translation of the author).

⁵⁶ JORDANES, *Getica*, 198–199; 261 and 264–266.

⁵⁷ PRISCUS, fr. 11, 2, 590–593 (*Exc. de Leg. Rom.* 3).

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 241–263 and pp. 550–551.

⁵⁹ O. MAENCHEN-HELFFEN, *The World of the Huns*, pp. 127–129.

The textual source for his theory is PAULUS DIACONUS, *Historia Langobardorum*, in: *Scriptores rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum saec. VI–IX*, MGH, SS rer. Lang. I, (ed.) L BETHMANN — G. WAITZ, Hannover 1878, I, 16–17.

⁶⁰ E. SCHULTHEIS, *The Battle of the Catalaunian Fields*, pp. 33,49 and U. NÄSMAN, *Scandinavia and the Huns: A source-critical approach to an old question*, in: *Fornvännen*, Vol. 103, No. 2, 2008, pp. 111–118.

⁶¹ E. SCHULTHEIS, *The Battle of the Catalaunian Fields*, pp. 54–56.

According to E. Schultheis, up to 27 000 Huns might have attended the battle of Catalaunian fields and the rest of the army (44 000 men) was formed from allied Germanic and barbarian tribes.



as the only one in the first half of the fifth century endanger the Romans, similarly the most tremendous barbarian raids in the 260s during the crisis of the third century. We must realize that the barbarian invasions at the turn of the fourth and fifth centuries were mostly unsuccessful. Even the groups which penetrated the Roman *limes* were defeated later like the Goths that crossed the Danube in 376 and were defeated later and settled by the Romans in *Thracia* in 382 or the barbarians from the Great Rhine crossing in 406 were expelled from Gaul in 409 and escaped in Hispania. In comparison to them, the Huns were repeatedly able to clash with the Roman Imperial army and even if they were defeated, they were always able to launch a new campaign the against Romans.

Nevertheless, it is not entirely clear how the Hunnic Empire/Confederacy controlled its internal affairs. For Jordanes this topic was unambiguous. Each tribe under Attila's command had its own tribal king. The most powerful and influential kings were Ostrogothic king Valamir and Gepid king Ardaric. Attila acted as a supreme commander and leader, and he had the last say. The subordinate rulers served as Attila's advisers which meant that they were occasionally present at Attila's court, and they were able to keep some influence over the decision-making process of the Hunnic empire.⁶² Jordanes probably exaggerated the importance of the Amal dynasty in Hunnic society. In the fragments of Priscus, a different situation is described. Priscus with his friend and superior Maximinus visited Attila's court as the diplomatic envoy of Constantinople in 449. Priscus wrote about the negotiation with Attila, and he mentioned no subordinate Germanic king was present during the negotiations. Although Attila should hold the supreme power amongst the Huns, the envoys had to

⁶² JORDANES, *Getica*, 199–201.

'Inter quos Ostrogotharum praeminebat exercitus Valamire et Theodemire et Videmere germanis ductantibus, ipso etiam rege, cui tunc serviebant, nobilioribus, quia Amalorum generis eos potentia inlustrabat; eratque et Gepidarum agmini innumerabili rex ille famosissimus Ardaricus, qui ob nimiam suam fidelitatem erga Attila eius consiliis intererat. Nam perpendens Attila sagacitate sua, eum et Valamerem, Ostrogotharum regem, super ceteros regulos diligebat. Erat namque Valamir secreti tenax, blandus alloquio, dolis gnarus; Ardaricus fide et consilio, ut diximus, clarus. (...) Reliqua autem, si dici fas est, turba regum diversarumque nationum ductores ac si satellites notibus Attilae attendebant, et ubi oculo annuisset, absque aliqua murmuratione cum timore et tremore unusquisque adstabat, aut certe, quod iussus fuerat, exequebatur. Solus Attila rex omnium regum super omnes et pro omnibus sollicitus erat.'

'Amongst them the prominent was the host of Ostrogoths led by brothers Valamir, Theodemir and Vidimir, they were more noble than the king they served, because the might of the Amal family made them illustrious. And with the countless troops of the Gepids there was their most glorious king Ardaric, who thanks to his excessive loyalty to Attila participated on his council meetings. For Attila compared him and Ostrogothic king Valamir in his keen mind and he appreciated them above all other kings. Valamir was good in keeping secrets, flattering speeches and he was skilled in deceptions; Ardaric, as we have said, was famous for his loyalty and wisdom. (...) The rest of the crowd of kings, if we could call them so, and the leaders of various nations were turned to Attila as his attendants, and even when he blinked, every single one of them was standing without murmur and in fear and trembling and was ready to follow his order. Only Attila, the king of all kings, was above all and he was concerned about everyone.'



stay longer at Attila's court, because the Huns were waiting for Attila's chief counselor Onegesius who was at that time fighting with the rebellious Akatziri tribe. Among Attila's courtiers participating in the negotiations, there were Hunnic noblemen, Attila's sons and Romans from *Pannonia* and *Noricum*. Even Edeko, who later ruled the Sciri, was described by Priscus as Attila's envoy and bodyguard not as the ruler of this tribe.⁶³

As for the subordinate tribal kings, there are different points of view on them in recent literature. P. Heather states that tribes living further from the Hunnic core area were virtually autonomous.⁶⁴ Controversial thoughts can be found in the works of Hyun Jin Kim. According to him the tribes related to the Huns much more firmly. The tribal rulers of the Amal dynasty, Edeko, Odoacer and Ardaric were of Hunnic origin and they were installed to their posts by Bleda and Attila thanks to their service to Hunnic kings.⁶⁵ The kings were probably not participating in the common agenda of the Hunnic court. That explains their absence in the fragments of Priscus. Priscus also mentioned that Attila invited Akatziri King Kuridac to his court, but Kuridac refused to accept the invitation concerned about his own safety.⁶⁶ Attila probably usually organised the gatherings of subordinate kings in preparation for upcoming campaigns. After all the role of the Hunnic Confederacy was primarily military.

Attila's power over the confederacy consisted in picking up targets of raids and campaigns and in the redistribution of loot and the Roman financial payments between his people. Thus, he could organize punitive attacks against the tribes resisting his commands. It happened in the case of the Akatziri in 449. Attacks against individual tribes could have also facilitated the willingness of other tribes to cooperate with the Huns. Attila also controlled the cash flow of the Roman Empire. This had two main reasons. Firstly, Attila knew that direct subsidies from Constantinople to the individual tribes could be under the condition of resistance against the Huns. Confederacy would thus become another victim of the Roman *divide et impera*. This is also indicated by Priscus, the revolt of the Akatziri against Attila in 449 was instigated by gifts from emperor Theodosius II.⁶⁷ Secondly, the tribes knew that thanks to the growing power of Attila's Empire they could gain much higher tribute from the Romans, although this tribute would then be redistributed by Attila himself. In 435 according to the treaty negotiated in Margus Attila and Bleda gained an annual tribute of 700 pounds of gold.⁶⁸ Later, when Attila was at the peak of his power after the campaign of 447, the annual tribute from Constantinople increased to 2 100 pounds of gold and the Huns received an extraordinary payment of 6 000 pounds of gold. The gold from the tribute along with the loot from raids created considerable wealth thanks to which Attila controlled subordinate tribes.

Simultaneously with the Hunnic Confederacy formation, a population transfer occurred in the first half of the fifth century. The population from all Ponto-Danubian

63 PRISCUS, *fr.* 11, 2 (*Exc. de Leg. Rom.* 3).

64 P. HEATHER, *The Goths*, Oxford 1996, p. 113.

65 H. J. KIM, *The Huns*, pp. 56, 59 and 92–112.

66 PRISCUS, *fr.* 11, 2, 251–255 (*Exc. de Leg. Rom.* 3).

67 *Ibidem*, 241–263.

68 *Ibidem*, *fr.* 2, (*Exc. de Leg. Rom.* 1)



regions moved to the area of the middle Danube. Together with the Huns the Goths, Alans and Heruli arrived from the east and the Rugians and Gepids from the north. Historians often argue that the core territory of the Huns was located on the Great Hungarian Plain alongside the Tisza River. According to the story written by Priscus Attila's court was somewhere near the Tisza in the vicinity of today's Hungarian town Szeged. That is why, historians suppose that subordinate tribes lived around the Huns, in former Roman *Pannonia*, in the Carpathians and along the lower Danube. However, newly found archaeological discoveries propose a different point of view on the Hunnic society. One of the most significant Hunnic finds are large bronze kettles, which in contrast with weapons and jewellery from the Hunnic period may be associated with the elites of Hunnic ethnic origin.⁶⁹ These kettles were probably used during Hunnic funeral rites; however, they did not serve as urns, but more probably as pots for preparing funeral meat. New numerous finds of these kettles enabled reinterpret of the Hunnic society and its settlements. Three kettles were discovered in Silesia (in both Czech and Polish Silesia), one was found on the northern bank of the Danube in Iža (Slovakia), four of them were found in the former Roman province *Pannonia Valeria*, seven kettles were found along the lower Danube in Romania and another three were located on the Moldavan-Ukrainian border along the Dniester.⁷⁰ The latest find was discovered even in Sanok in Poland on the north side of the Carpathians.⁷¹ However, only two of these kettles were found in the Great Hungarian Plain (Ócsa and Törtel), the supposed core area of the Hun territory. Recent Hungarian archaeologists recommend reconsidering the aim of the Hunnic settlement in the Danube region.⁷² The demographic situation of Attila's realm was in such a state, that Attila with his court and family lived in the area of confluence of the rivers Tisza and Mureş (based on fragments of Priscus and finds of golden hoards near Szikáncs and Szeged-Nagyszéksós). They were subsequently surrounded by subordinate tribes living all around the Great Hungarian Plain, such as the autochthonous Sarmatians in today's Banat and Bačka and the newly arrived Goths and Sciri living probably along the Danube, the Alans upon the upper Tisza and the Gepids from the Carpathians and the river Körös. This was noticed by Romanian archaeologist Daniela Tănase, who points out that Priscus met sedentary farmers of probably Sarmatian origin and not the Hunnic herders on the Hunnic bank of the Danube.⁷³ A majority of Hunnic warbands with their leaders and chieftains lived around the boundaries of Attila's Empire, predominantly in the abandoned province of *Pannonia Valeria*. It

69 I. BÓNA, *Das Hunnenreich*, pp. 140–143.

70 Z. MASEK, *A Fresh Look at Hunnic Cauldrons in the Light of a New Find from Hungary*, in: *Acta Archeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, Vol. 68, 2017, pp. 75–135.

71 M. OKOŃSKA-BULAS — J. BULAS, M. MAZUREKB — A. GARBACZ-KLEMPKA — M. PEREK-NOWAK, *A Newly Discovered Fragment of a Hunnic Cauldron from Site 59–60, Sanok, Poland*, in: *Acta Archeologica Carpathica*, Vol. LV, 2020, pp. 235–254.

72 E. ISTVÁNOVITS — V. KULCSÁR, *The "Argumentum ex Siletio": A Possible New Approach in the Research of the Hun Period*, in: Z. RÁCZ, G. SZENTEH (eds.), *Attilas Europe? Structural Transformation and Strategies of Success in the European Hun Period*, Budapest 2019, pp. 435–447.

73 D. TĂNASE, *Considerations on the Archeology of the Early Migrations Period in Banat*, in: *Dacia: Revue d'archéologie et d'histoire ancienne*, vol. 59, 2015.

is unknown, what the reason for the such arrangement of the Hunnic state was. We can only speculate whether this constellation was a result of Attila's suspicion and distrust toward the rest of the Hunnic nobles, or on the contrary that the borders should have been guarded by loyal units of Hunnic origin.



ROMAN RESPONSE TO ATILLA'S CONFEDERACY AND CONCLUSION

The Romans were not able to defeat Attila in a battle. The destruction of the Roman army in the battle of Utus in 447, a subsequent sack of the entire Roman Balkans and acceptance of Attila's peace terms were significant disasters for Constantinople. The Romans tried to diminish Attila's power and at first, they used their usual ways. Pursuing the *divide et impera* strategy the Romans with subsidies of gold instigated the revolt of the Akatziri tribe against Attila. These efforts brought no success, so Constantinople tried an unusual approach. In 449 Vigilas, a translator of the embassy of Maximinus and Priscus had a secret mission. By order of the eunuch Chrysaphius, chief minister of emperor Theodosius II, he, with the support of Attila's courtier and bodyguard Edeko, had to kill the Hunnic king himself. Priscus claims that he himself together with Maximinus did not know at all about the planned assassination. Edeko betrayed the Romans to Attila and Vigilas was banished from the embassy, while Attila himself demanded more gold from Constantinople as an apology.⁷⁴ This failed assassination of Attila is interesting because it was ordered directly by the imperial government. The fourth century's Roman assassinations of barbarian leaders and chieftains were initiated by local Roman governors and military commanders.⁷⁵ Attila was so imminent as a threat that the imperial court itself decided to take such vigorous action. In the spring of 450 new embassies of Anatolius and Nomus achieved mitigation of Hunnic peace conditions and in the autumn of the same year new emperor Marcianus revoked the peace treaty with Attila.

We should not overestimate the structure and functioning of the Hunnic Confederacy. Their influence on medieval society was much lower than the influence of the social and political structures that were formed after the fall of the Western Roman Empire. The purpose of the Hunnic Confederacy was not intertribal cooperation but raiding and ravaging. Attila's society was mainly based on the idea that more warriors could undertake larger attacks and gain more loot. Nevertheless, the barbarian tribes realized that their involvement in Attila's state was beneficial to them. Heretical patriarch of Constantinople Nestorius was entirely right in his statement that the Scythians (the Huns and their neighbouring tribes) were divided groups of robbers, that united and established their kingdom to become stronger.⁷⁶ However, Attila and

⁷⁴ PRISCUS, fr. 15, 1 (*Exc. de Leg. Rom.* 3)

⁷⁵ In 373, King Gabinius of Quadi was murdered by order the province *Pannonia Valeria* governor *dux* Marcellianus and in 376 Thervingi chieftain Alavivus was killed in Marcianople by the instigation of local Roman military commander *comes* Lupicinus (AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS, *Res gestae*, XXIX, 6 and XXXI, 5).

⁷⁶ NESTORIUS, *Liber Heraclidis*, in: *Nestorius: The Bazaar of Heracleides*, (ed.) G. DRIVER — L. HODGSON, Oxford 1925, 366.



Bleda succeeded whereas all the other barbarian leaders before them had failed. They established a functional and operational tribal alliance which posed a threat to the Romans.

The existence of the Hunnic Confederacy was rather a short-term affair. The Hunnic alternative⁷⁷, is that they represented another centre of power equivalent to Ravenna and Constantinople which functioned only in the years from 430/435 until Attila's death in 453. The Confederation then disintegrated and the speed and easiness, with which it happened, proved that the Hunnic state was more a loosely united voluntary confederation than a centralized empire. After Attila's death, the practice of *divide et impera* was resumed. In 455/456 the Romans made several separate treaties with each tribe individually. Constantinople negotiated *foedus* with the Pannonian Goths, Thracian Goths, Gepids, Huns, Sciri and Alans and Ravenna (the regime of emperor Eparchius Avitus) probably made treaties with the Suebi⁷⁸ and Rugians. The Roman foreign policy thus got back on track and the Romans were then faced more with serious domestic threats than with foreign cross-border invasions.

⁷⁷ H. WOLFRAM, *Das Römerreich und sein Germanen*, Köln 2018, p. 221.

⁷⁸ P. KOVÁCS, *Emperor Avitus in Pannonia?*, in: *Acta Archeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, Vol. 71, 2020, pp. 661–668.