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ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER



Some notes on the date of Attila's death

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ABSTRACT

In his paper the author deals with the date of Attila's death. Several scholarly works dealt already with Attila's death and the written sources. The antique source dates his death to the year 453 shortly before Attila's planned campaign against Marcian. On the other hand, Leo the Great's letters has not been examined regarding this issue. In one of his letters written 11 March 451, the pope mentions the still existing dangers (*flagella*) where obviously refer to Attila and the Huns. This means nothing was known about Attila's death in the middle of March of 453 in Rome, so the Hun king must have died a little bit later.

KEYWORDS

Attila, Leo the Great, history of the Huns, the Council of Chalcedon

All antique sources dealing with Attila and his death (cp. the [Appendix](#)) agree apart from one or two exceptions that the Hun ruler suddenly died shortly following his Italian campaign in 452 during that famous wedding night (most probably because of haemorrhage, but an assassination cannot be excluded either).¹ The date of his death is given as 453, most scholars mention the beginning of the year (beginning, early in 453, before the campaigning season, early spring, *inizio*, *Frühjahr*, *Anfanges des Jahres*).² In this paper I intend to deal with these sources and Attila's death based on a source that was surely written before the Hun king's death.

Almost all Greek and Latin sources dealing with the latest period of Attila's life go back to Priscus Rhetor's lost historical.³ Based on his account, Jordanes in his *Getica* gave a detailed report on the Hun king's death and burial (XLVIII.253–XLIX.259). In his report one can find the widely known cause of death, the nose bleeding too, but the Goth historian gave only a relative chronology (attested elsewhere) on the date of his death (following the campaign in Italy, during the wedding night, just before the planned campaign against East Rome).⁴ In the *Romana* Jordanes mentions Attila's death only in the account of Marcianus' reign (Rom. 333). Ioannes Malalas admittedly and following him the *Chronicon Paschale* used also Priscus (probably not directly, but through Eustathius Eiphaneus) concerning Attila's wedding (XIV.10 359 = Priskos Exc. 3a = Frag. 21.1 Blockley, *Chron. Pasch.* 588). On the other hand, Malalas added the assassination version where he used another source(s): ἔτεροι δὲ συνεγράψαντο. The other source could have been Eustathius (cp. the version in Nicephorus' work) who in his *Epitome* dealt with the historical events 503 AD and he preferred to cite

¹Cp. Babcock 2005's detailed study.

²Cp. the detailed studies Bierbach (1906) 50–54; Moravcsik (1926); de Boor (1932), esp. 19–30; Németh (1940) 134–135, 153–154, 157; Szász, B. (1943). *A hunok története. Attila nagykirály.* Budapest, pp. 365–368; Homeyer (1951) 175–184; Gordon (1960) 109–111; Maenchen-Helfen (1973) 143–144; Bóna (1991) 99, 203–206; Thompson (1999) 163–167; Beckmann, G.A. (2010). *Gualter del Hum – Gaiferos – Waltharius.* Berlin and New York, pp. 93–114; Williams (1981); Cordt (1984).

³Still best summaries are Moravcsik (1926) and de Boor (1932), esp. 19–30.

⁴Grillone, A. (a cura di) (2017). *Jordanes, Getica. Edizione, traduzione e commento.* Paris, pp. 405–406; van Nuffelen, P., and van Hoof, L. (2020). *Jordanes, Romana and Getica.* Translated with an introduction and notes. Liverpool, pp. 83–85, 339, n. 791–793.

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several different sources.⁵ According to this variant, Attila would have been murdered by his own military commander (σπαθάριος: most probably Edica) at the instigation of Aetius, but the story could have also come from Priscus' account too (cf. Exc. 7 = Frag. 11.1 Blockley, Exc. 8.32, Exc. 8.1).⁶ A possible (and witty) explanation of Aetius' role would be that a Latin chronicle that would have been the common source of Malalas and Marcellinus Comes most probably gave the consular date of the next year (454) as *Indictio VII Aetii et Studii* and this information would have been misunderstood by the Greek author and he would have interpreted the second consul's name (Studius) as a noun: *Aetii studio*, i. e. at the instigation of Aetius.⁷ If it would have been true Malalas' source would have dated Attila's death before 454. It must be added that the *Chronicon Paschale* dated the event to the year 450. The only solution of this inaccuracy was that the composer of the chronicon compressed several events to the year when Theodosius II died (the consular date is correct): the events of last years of Theodosius' rule, Attila's campaigns in Gallia, Italy, Constantinople and his death, the council of Ephesus, the story of Cyrus praefectus, the earthquake in Constantinople, Theodosius' death and Marcian's elevation.⁸ The author himself mentions this compression in the preface of the chapter: Ἐπὶ τῆς βασιλείας Θεοδοσίου καὶ Οὐαλεντινιανοῦ Αὐγούστου.

Theophanes Confessor who also Priscus' account described the nose bleeding version and he dated Attila's death to 453–454, to the fourth year of Marcian's reign (elevated on 25 August 450⁹), but erroneously he put the event following Aetius' murder (21 or 22 September 454¹⁰).¹¹ Marcellinus Comes who wrote his work in Latin, but he lived in Constantinople and used Byzantine Greek sources also mentions Priscus' version (as *quidam*), but he unified the two variant and according to him, Attila would have been killed by his new wife during the wedding: *mulieris manu cultroque confoditur*. His version could have been based on contemporary gossips of the court that were probably considered by Priscus as unreliable. Theophanes

dates Attila's death to *Indictio VII*, under the consulship of Aetius and Studius i. e. 454,¹² but before Aetius' assassination.¹³ The most plausible reason of his inaccuracy was that the beginning of the consular year and the *indictio* was different (1 January and 1 September) and Marcellinus' source probably enumerated the events in chronological order within an *indictio*, therefore Theophanes could have connected Attila's and Aetius' death to the same year.¹⁴ Three contemporary events (Attila's Gaulish and Italian campaigns, the Honoria affair and the king's death in his wedding night) but in Italy are mixed in the lost (but several Old Slav versions survived) 9th century Greek short historical work (*Hellenischer Chronograph*) who probably used Malalas' work (cp. the appearance of Alaric instead of Theoderic).¹⁵ Later, the Eustathius-Malalas tradition (as the mention of Alaric) can be observed in Nicephorus Callistus' work too where Attila fell in the battle along the Danube (transferred from Gaul) (XIV.57).¹⁶ It cannot be ruled out that his story is the paraphrase of the second Greek version where the murderer is Attila's commander at the instigation of Aetius because Nicephorus mentioned Eustathius as his source in this chapter (otherwise, he cited Priscus several times).

In the Western tradition a much shorter version became widely known that on reported on Attila's death and its date.¹⁷ The most reliable and contemporary source is Prosper Tiro who remarked that Attila died *in sedibus suis* in 453 (*Chron. min.* I p. 482).¹⁸ Later Tiro was followed by Cassiodorus and Victor Tonnenensis (*Chron. min.* I p. 157, 443).

Hydatius dates correctly Attila's campaign in Italy to the second year of Marcian's reign and he added that the Hun king shortly (*mox*) following his return (*Chron. min.* II p. 27).¹⁹ Based on Hydatius, Isidore of Seville (*Hist. Goth.* 27 *Chron. min.* II p. 27) and Fredegarius (II.53) used the same temporal adverb concerning Attila's death. Paulus Diaconus copied Jordanes' account (*Hist. Rom.* XIV.13). The exact year was not given by Isidore either who dated the events according to the Spanish era in most of the cases (as Thorismund' reign, 30–31: *Aera CCCCXC–CCCCXCI*).

⁵Treadgold, W. (2007). *The early Byzantine historians*. Basingstoke and New York, pp. 114–120.

⁶Jeffreys, E. (2017). Malalas' sources. In: Jeffreys, E. et al. (Eds.), *Studies in John Malalas*. Leiden and Boston, pp. 180, 191, 215.

⁷Babcock (2005) 128–129.

⁸Blockley (1981) 391, fn. 111; Blockley (1983) 116; Whitby, M., and Whitby, M. (2007) *Chronicon Paschale 284–628 AD*. Translated with introduction and notes. London, p. 78, fn. 260.

⁹Stickler, T. (2010). Marcianus. In: *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, 24: *Manethon – Montanismus*. Stuttgart, col. 77–78.

¹⁰Stickler (2002) 71, Ann. 366.

¹¹Blockley (1981) 391, fn. 117; Mango, C. and Scott R. (1997). *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor. Byzantine and Near Eastern history AD 284–813*. Translated with an introduction. Oxford, p. 166, fn. 2.

¹²Bagnall, R.S., Cameron, A., Schwartz, S.R., and Worp, K.A. (1987). *Consuls of the later Roman Empire*. Philological monographs of the American Philological Association, 36. Atlanta, GA, p. 443.

¹³Moravcsik (1926) 96; de Boor (1932) 20–21; Croke, B. (2001). *Count Marcellinus and his Chronicle*. Oxford, p. 59.

¹⁴Croke, B. (1995). *The Chronicle of Marcellinus*. Translation and commentary (with a reproduction of Mommsen's edition of the text). Sydney, pp. 92–93. The possibility that Attila would have died following September 453 (beginning of the next *indictio*) in my opinion, can be excluded.

¹⁵Moravcsik (1926) 96–108.

¹⁶According to Moravcsik (1926) 94, Ann. 27, it goes back to Eustathius' lost work, followed by Blockley (1981) 391, fn. 111; Blockley (1983) 116–117, 117–118. According to this hypothesis, Alaric's erroneous mention would go back to Eustathius too.

¹⁷Moravcsik (1926) 108–109; de Boor (1932) 20–21.

¹⁸Becker und Köttler (2016) 317.

¹⁹Köttler and Scardino (2019) 311.



Among the western Latin sources, the only exemption is the Gallic Chronicle (redaction of 511, Chron. min. I p. 663) as it says in fourth year of the sole reign of Valentinian (following Theodosius II's death 28 July 450) after Thorismund's death Attila was murdered too: *Attila occiditur*.²⁰ The problem is that the passive form of the predicate *occiditur* can come from the verb *occido* 3 -idi, -isum with the meaning 'to kill somebody', but from the verb *occido* 3 -idi, -asurus (*obcado*) with the meaning 'to fall or die' too,²¹ but the use of the passive form makes the former the one more plausible. The same verb was used in the story of Thorismund (or later Avitus) who was killed by his brothers: *a fratribus suis occisus*. For those who died naturally, one can find the predicates *defunctus est* or *obiit* in the work. Based on this observation, the assassination of version concerning Attila's death first emerged in the Chronica Gallica in the western literature and the chronicle remains the only Latin source with this variant. All other sources mentioned only the uncertain situation in the Carpathian Basin following Attila's death (as Eugippius did in the vita Severini: v. Sev. 1) or used Jordanes' account as Paulus Diaconus did (Hist. Rom. XIV.13). The assassination story became popular only in the Carolingian court. According to this variant, Attila would have been killed by the Burgundian king's daughter who wanted the revenge her father's death. The story can be based on a Byzantine source, but on German heroic legends as well.²² The earliest author who follows this variant (the vengeful bride's story) was Poeta Saxo who around 890 dealt Charlemagne's campaign against the Avars (III v. 25–37).²³ In Agnellus Liber Pontificalis Ecclesiae Ravennatis (also from the 9th century) appears the variant in connection with Attila's campaign in Italy (on the basis of the word usage, the author followed Marcellinus Comes' account) (XX.37).²⁴ Later historian works as the Annales Quedlinburgenses from the 11th century (MGH Script. III, p. 32) or Chronographus Saxo from the 12th century (who follows the previous one word by word, MGH Script. XVI p. 127) already used the revenge variant of Poeta Saxo et the Edda (survived in its older and newer versions too: Atlakviða/Attilied (9th century) and the more detailed

Atlamál (12th century) where the arrogant, violent, and greedy Atli-Attila was killed by Gudrun in several versions²⁵). The other medieval sources followed Jordanes' story (through Paulus Diaconus' work).²⁶ These works say nothing on the date of Attila's death (cp. for instance, Chronographus Saxo's works who dates the death to 561 A. D.).

Based on the source, it seems to be sure that Attila died in 453 shortly before the campaign against Marcian. On the other hand, another contemporary source has not yet been examined. The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon held in 451 and the imperial and papal letters included the corpus (the letters were written in Latin, but they were translated into Greek, sometimes only the translation remained) are very important sources for the Hun history too. In the letters there are numerous references for Attila's Gaulish campaign, moreover a Hun incursion on the Lower Danube in September 451. Because of this incursion Marcian personally had to visit the provinces (i. e. the troops) and the council had to be postponed for weeks and the place was transferred from Nicaea to Chalcedon (ACO II.2.4 p. 41 (Ep. 82.2), Ep. 41 ACO II.2.4 p. 43 (Ep. 83.2), Ep. 13 ACO II.1 p. 28. (two Latin translations of the original Greek letter exist: Epist. ante Gesta coll. 31, Coll. Vat. 1), Epist. ante Gesta coll. 31, Coll. Vat. 1, Ep. 46 ACO II.2.4 p. 47 (Ep. 102), Ep. 47 ACO II.2.4 p. 48 (Ep. 90.1), Ep. 48 ACO II.2.4 p. 48 (Ep. 91), p. 32 ACO II.2.3 p. 21 Epist. ante Gesta coll. 32, Ep. 14 ACO II.2.1 p. 28 Epist. ante gesta coll. 34, Coll. Vat. 2 (with two Latin translations), Ep. 16 ACO II.2.1 p. 30 (with two Latin translations: Coll. Vat. 3, Epist. ante Gesta coll. 35)).²⁷ Following the council, Pope Leo wrote letters concerning the council even in March 453. One of them was addressed to Julian, the bishop of Cos on the 11th of March. The original Latin letter remained in the letter corpus of the pope too.

ACO II.4 p. 45 Ep. Nr. 60 = Ep. CXIII.1.1 11 March 453

1 *Agnovi in dilectionis tuae litteris fraternae charitatis affectum: quod de malis, quae multa et saeva pertulimus, pio nobiscum dolore compateris.* 2 *Sed utinam haec, quae nos perpeti Dominus aut permisit aut voluit, ad correctionem proficiant servatorum, et ut desinant adversitates, finiantur offensae.* 3 *Quod utrumque de magna erit misericordia Dei, si et flagella removeat, et ad se suorum corda convertat.* 4 *Sicut*

²⁰Moravcsik (1926) 108; Kötter, J.-M., and Scardino, C. (2017). *Gallische Chroniken*. Ediert, übersetzt und kommentiert. Einleitung und Text. Kleine und fragmentarische Historiker der Spätantike (KFHist), G7–8. Paderborn, p. 246.

²¹ThLL IX/2 (1978–1981) col. 344–347, 347–351, esp. 348–349.

²²Moravcsik (1926) 110–115; de Boor (1932) 10–30; Williams (1981); Cordt (1984).

²³Moravcsik (1926) 111–112; de Boor (1932) 21–22.

²⁴Mainly through Maximianus' Chronicon: Mauskopf Deliyannis, D. (2004). *Agnellus of Ravenna, The book of pontiffs of the church of Ravenna. Translated with an introduction and notes*. Medieval texts in translation. Washington, p. 144, fn. 15; Mauskopf Deliyannis, D. (2006). *Angelli Ravennatis Liber pontificalis ecclesiae Ravennatis*. Corpus Christiannorum continuation mediaevalis, 199. Turnhout, p. 105.

²⁵de Boor (1932) 16–18; Gottzmann, C.L. (1973). *Das Alte Attilied. Untersuchung der Gestaltungsprinzipien seiner Handlungsstruktur*. Heidelberg; Reichert, H. (2007). Attila in altnordischer Dichtung. In: Koch, A. (Hrsg.), *Attila und die Hunnen. Begleitbuch zur Ausstellung im Historischen Museum der Pfalz Speyer 2007*. Stuttgart, pp. 349–355. Attila's figure is in contrast here to the Hildebrandslied (8th c.), the Waltharius- (9th c.), and the Dietrich epos and the Nibelungenlied (13th c.) where Attila/Etzel was depicted as a rich and generous ruler whom Krimhild married in order to revenge Sigfried's murderers in Attila's court.

²⁶Moravcsik (1926) 77–78.

²⁷Kovács, P. (2022). A Chalcedoni Zsinat levelezése, mint a hun történelem forrása. In: Kovács, P. and Szabó Á. (Eds.), *Az Alföldy Géza Emlékkülés előadásai és egyéb közlemények 2021-ből*. Studia epigraphica Pannonica, 13. Budapest, pp. 127–138; Kovács, P. (2022). Valerianus Bassianensis. A Pannonian bishop at the Council of Chalcedon? *Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 73: 51–55.



autem fraternitatem tuam ea quae apud nos desaeviit contristavit hostilitas, ita me anxium facit ...

I acknowledge in your letter, beloved, the feelings of brotherly love, in that you sympathize with us in true grief at the many grievous evils we have borne. But we pray that these things which the Lord has either allowed or wished us to suffer, may avail to the correction of those who live through them 475, and that adversities may cease through the cessation of offences. Both which results will follow through the mercy of God, if only He remove the scourge and turn the hearts of His people to Himself. But as you, brother, are saddened by the hostilities which have raged around us, so I am made anxious ...

(translation by Philip Schaff)

Julian, the bishop of Cos attended the synod of Chalcedon as member of the papal delegation in autumn 451, but following the council, he remained at Constantinople. Among the acts remained Leo the Great's letter from March 453,²⁸ where he thanked Julian for his compassion earlier regarding the events of 452 (in a lost letter) and asked for more information about the situation in the East (rebellions of the monks in Palaestina and Egypt, Aetius archidiaconus' deposal). The pope also commissioned Julian to represent him instead of Anatolius who became ill and asked for the Latin translation of the acts of the council too.²⁹ In the above cited passage, Leo referred to the troubles of the previous year(s) (*mala multa et saevia*). These bad things must be identified with Attila's campaign in Italy in 452³⁰ that totally surprised the unprepared imperial leadership (cp. Prosper Chron. 1367 (Chron. min. I, p. 482), moreover Aetius advised the emperor to leave Italy.³¹ The most famous event of the campaign when the Roman delegation led by Leo met Attila and the concluded a peace treaty. Several legendary elements were added later to the story.³² According to Hydatius 154, Attila accepted the peace and returned due to epidemic and lack of food among the Hun troops and the

news about an Eastern Roman incursion into the territory of the Huns (on the delegation: Prisc. Exc. 17 (22.1 Blockley) = Jord. Get. XLII.222–223; Prosper, Chron. 1367 (Chron. min. I, p. 482); Victor Tonnennensis, Chron. s.a. 449 (Chron. min. II, p. 185); Symmachus, Ep. 12 (A. Thiel, Epistolae Romanorum pontificum genuinae I. Braunsberg 1867, 714); Cassiod. chron. 1256 (Chron. min. II, p. 157), Jord. Get. XLII.222–223, Paulus, Hist. Rom. XIV.11–12, Liber Pont. 47.7).³³ The delegation could reach the treaty because Rome paid a huge amount of gold for peace and the release of the prisoners of war. The results of the cannot be denied as Pope Symmachus in a letter written in 511 referred to the fact that Leo negotiated with Attila the exchange of the Christian, the Jewish and pagan prisoners of war too (Ep. 12 PL 62.59D–60A). There were numerous prisoners of war who were deported from the region of Aquileia (and Ravenna that was not depopulated during the campaign) to Hun territory as they were mentioned in two letters of Pope Leo written in 458 (Leo Ep. CLIX (21 March 458 1, Nicetas Aquileia), CXLVI (24 October 458 4, Neo Ravenna: cp. Agn. Lib. Pont. XX.37) but see also Maximus Sermo 94 PL 57,472).³⁴ Anyhow, in the most reliable contemporary source, in Priscus' historical work Attila's campaign was not depicted as failure: Exc. 19 μετὰ τὸ τὴν Ἰταλίαν ἀνδραποδίσασθαι (cp. Euagr. I.17, Proc. Bell. I.4.29). If eastern Roman auxiliary troops would have come to Italy as Hydatius reported (most probably he misinterpreted the news about the Eastern Roman incursion³⁵) they had no time to defeat Attila and his troops.³⁶ On the other hand, Prosper Tiro did not say anything about these Eastern troops and the only hope that only hope was negotiate with the Huns: *nihilque inter omnia consilia principis ac senatus populi que Romani salubrius visum est, quam ut per legatos pax truculentissimi regis expeteretur*.³⁷

In the letter written to Julian Pope Leo must have referred to these events when he wrote: *mala, quae multa et*

²⁸In these days Leo wrote separately to Marcian and his (Ep. 111–112), shortly later (21st of March) again to Julian (Ep. 117), and to the bishops who attended the council, and again to the emperor and Pulcheria (Ep. 114–116).

²⁹Price, R., and Gaddis, M. (2005). *The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon. Translated with introduction and notes*. Translated texts for historians, 45. Liverpool, vol. I, pp. 11, 19, 42, 83, vol. III, pp. 187–188, 192, 262; Wessel, S. (2008). *Leo the Great and the spiritual rebuilding of a universal Rome*. Vigiliae Christianae, Supplements, 93. Leiden and Boston, pp. 271, 326, 328, 333.

³⁰Pais, E. (1910). *Studi storici per l'antichità classica*, III. Pisa, pp. 88–96, esp. 94; Maenchen-Helfen (1973) 141, fn. 679; Zecchini (2021) 119, fn. 33.

³¹Sources: Jord. Get. XLII.222, Pseudo-Maximus Sermo 94 PL 57, 469–472, Cons. It. Addit. ad Prosp. Haun. Chron. min. I, p. 502, Euagr. I.17, Paul. Diac. Hist. Rom. XIV.11, Suda K 2123, M 405, ICUR II p. 161, and Hydatius 154 Chron. min. II p. 26–27 whom Isidore follows word by word Isid. Hist. Goth. 27 and Fredeg. II.53.

³²Blodgett, M. (2010). Calming an angry enemy: Attila, Leo I, and the diplomacy of ambiguity, 452. In: Frakes, R.M., De Palma Digeser, E., and Stephens, J. (Eds.), *The rhetoric of power in Late Antiquity: Religion and politics in Byzantium, Europe and the early Islamic World*. Library of classical studies, 2. London and New York, pp. 63–74.

³³Hodgkin, Th. (1880). *Italy and her invaders, II: The Hunnish invasion*. Oxford, pp. 163–189; Maenchen-Helfen (1973) 132–142; Zecchini, G. (1983) *Aezio, l'ultima difesa dell Occidente romano*. Roma, pp. 273–278; Zecchini, A. (1993) Attila in Italia: ragioni politiche e sfondo «ideologico» din un'invasione. *Aevum*, 67: 189–198; Bóna (1991) 98–99; Calzolari, M. (1994). L'itinerario di Attila nella Pianura Padana: aspetti topografici. In: Blason Scarel, S. (a cura di), *Attila flagellum Dei? Convegno internazionale di studi storici sulla figura di Attila e sulla discesa degli Unni in Italia nel 452 d.C.* Studia historica, 129. Roma, pp. 118–130; Thompson (1999) 157–163; Stickler (2002) 145–150; Zecchini (2021) 113–121.

³⁴Duval, Y.-M. (1980). Nicéta d'Aquilée. Histoire, légende et conjectures anciennes. In: *Grado nella storia e nell'arte. Atti della 10. Settimana di studi aquileiesi, 28 aprile – 4 maggio 1979*. Antichità altoadriatiche, 17. Udine, pp. 161–206; Cuscito, G. (1994). La lettera di S. Leone Magno a Niceta di Aquileia. Contributo alla comprensione storica del mito di Attila. In: Blason Scarel, S. (a cura di), *Attila flagellum Dei? Convegno internazionale di studi storici sulla figura di Attila e sulla discesa degli Unni in Italia nel 452 d.C.* Studia historica, 129. Roma, pp. 216–228.

³⁵Kötter and Scardini (2019) 310–311; Burgess (1988).

³⁶The possibility that a Hun rear guard would have been left in Italy cannot be ruled out either: Thompson (1999) 163.

³⁷Becker and Kötter (2016) 312–315.



saeva pertulimus; desinant adversitates, finiantur offensae; si et flagella removeat; autem fraternitatem tuam ea quae apud nos desaevit contristavit hostilitas. Among them the most important one is the clause beginning with the conjunction *si* as it surely concerns the Hunnic danger despite their retreat at the end of 452. Because of the use of this word Attila's campaign cannot be treated as a total failure. During Attila's lifetime the expression *flagellum Dei* that was widely known in medieval tradition was not in use for him (Augustine used it first for Alaric: *De civ. Dei* I.8). A similar term concerning the Huns can be observed first in Isidore's Gothic history (*Chron. min. II p. 279 virga furoris Dei*).³⁸ Pope Leo used in this passage the same word (*flagellum*) concerning the events of the Hun campaign. Based on this argumentation, Attila who planned a punitive campaign against Marcian in the nearest future still had to live at the time of writing the letter (11 March, 453). It cannot be ruled out either that the Hun king already died but the news did not reach Rome yet (it needed at least two weeks from Pannonia).³⁹ According to the sequence of events preserved in Jordanes' *Getica* (based on Priscus), Attila only started preparations for the war against Marcian, scheduled for 453, after his return from Italy, in which he was prevented only by his unexpected death (*Jord. Getica XLIII.225, Theoph. Chron. AM 5946*). As the Hun campaign on the Lower Danube did not happen Attila had to die shortly following the date of the creation of the letter, so it can be assumed that the fateful wedding can be dated to March 453.

APPENDIX

The relevant sources in chronological order

Prosper Chron. min. I p. 482 a. 453

1370 *Attila in sedibus suis mortuo ...*

Hydatius 154 Chron. min. II p. 26-27 secundo regni anno principis Marciani Huni, qui Italiam praedabantur, aliquantis etiam civitatibus irruptis divinitus partim fame, partim morbo quodam, plagis caelestibus feriuntur missis etiam per Marcianum principem Aëtio duce caeduntur auxiliis pariterque in sedibus suis et caelestibus plagis et per Marciani subiguntur exercitum. et ita subacti pace facta cum Romanis proprias universi repetunt sedes, ad quas rex eorum Attila mox reversus interiit

Chron. Gall. a. DXI Chron. min. I p. 663

622 *Attila occiditur.*

Cassiod. Chron. Chron. min. II p. 157 a. 453

1258 *His cons. Attila in sedibus suis moritur.*

Eugippius v. Sev. I

Tempore, quo Attila, rex Hunnorum, defunctus est, utraque Pannonia et cetera confinia Danuvii rebus turbabantur ambiguis.

Victor Tonnenensis Chron. min. II p. 449 a. 453

453.2 *Eo tempore Attila moritur ...*

Malalas XIV.10 359 (Priscus Exc. 3a = Frag. 21.1 Blockley)

ὥσαύτως δὲ καὶ ὁ Ἀττίλας ἐτελεύτησε καταφορᾷ αἵματος διὰ τῶν ῥινῶν ἐνεχθείσῃ νυκτός, μετὰ Οὔννας παλλακίδος αὐτοῦ καθεύδων· ἥτις κόρη καὶ ὑπενοήθη ὅτι αὐτὴ αὐτὸν ἀνείλε. περὶ οὗ πολέμου συνεγράψατο ὁ σοφώτατος Πρίσκος ὁ Θράξ. ἕτεροι δὲ συνεγράψαντο ὅτι Ἀέτιος ὁ πατρικίος τὸν σπαθάριον αὐτοῦ ὑπενόθευσε, καὶ αὐτὸς κεντήσας ἀνείλεν αὐτόν· καὶ ἐπέστρεψεν ἐν Ῥώμῃ ὁ πατρικίος Ἀέτιος νικήσας.

Chron. Pasch. 588 a. 450 (Priscus Exc. 3a = Frag. 21.1 Blockley)

Ἰνδ. γ'. μβ'. ὑπὸ Οὐαλεντινιανοῦ Αὐγούστου τὸ ζ' καὶ Ἀβιηνοῦ·

ὥσαύτως δὲ καὶ ὁ Ἀττίλας τελευτᾷ καταφορᾷ αἵματος διὰ τῶν ῥινῶν ἐνεχθείς νυκτός μετὰ Οὔννας παλλακίδος αὐτοῦ καθεύδων, ἥτις κόρη καὶ ὑπενοήθη ὅτι αὐτὴ ἀνείλεν αὐτόν· περὶ οὗ πολέμου συνεγράψατο ὁ σοφώτατος Πρίσκος ὁ Θράξ.

Euagrius Hist. Eccl. I.17

Ἐν τούτοις τοῖς χρόνοις ὁ πολὺς τῷ λόγῳ πόλεμος ἐκεκίνητο Ἀττίλα τοῦ τῶν Σκυθῶν βασιλέως· ὃν περιέργως καὶ ἐς τὰ μάλιστα λόγιως Πρίσκος ὁ ῥήτωρ γράφει, μετὰ πολλῆς τῆς κομψείας διηγούμενος ὅπως τε κατὰ τῶν ἐφῶν καὶ ἐσπερίων ἐπεστράτευσεν μερῶν, οἷας τε καὶ ὅσας πόλεις ἐλὼν κατήγαγε, καὶ ὅσα πεπραχῶς τῶν ἐντεῦθεν μετέστη.

Marcellinus Chron. min. II p. 86 a. 454

454.1 *Attila rex Hunnorum Europae orbator provinciae noctu mulieris manu cultroque confoditur. quidam vero sanguinis reiectione necatum prohibent.*

Jordanes

Romana 333

... *obitumque Attilae et Zenonis Isauri interitum, antequam moriretur, felix conperit infelicitum ...*

Get. XLVIII.253

Nec aliter ab Hunnorum dominio divelli potuit gens aliqua Scythica, nisi optata cunctis nationibus in commune et Romanis mors Attilae proveniret, quae tam fuit vilis, ut vita mirabilis.

XLIX.254 (Priscus Exc. 23 = Frag. 24.1 Blockley)

Qui, ut Priscus historicus refert, exitus sui tempore puellam Ildico nomine decoram valde sibi in matrimonio post innumerabiles uxores, ut mos erat gentis illius, socians eiusque in nuptiis hilaritate nimia resolutus, vino somnoque gravatus resupinus iaceret, redundans sanguis, qui ei solite de naribus effluebat, dum consuetis meatibus impeditur, itinere ferali faucibus illapsus extinxit. Ita glorioso per bella regi temulentia pudendos exitos dedit.

Isid. Hist. Goth Chron. min. II p. 277

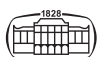
... *ad quas rex eorum Attila, mox ut remeavit, occubuit ...*

Fredegarius Chron. II.53

... *et mox Attila moretur.*

³⁸de Boor (1932) 6–7, 8; Németh (1940) 154, 163, 168, 171, 173, 186–187, 206, 215.

³⁹The *cursus publicus* needed at least 11–12 days to get from Aquincum to Rome even during the Principate (as it is attested in the case of Septimius Severus' acclamation: Pertinax died on the 28th of March, but Septimius Severus was informed and elevated on the 9th of April based on his *dies imperii*: *FDur II 3. 13*): Elliot, C.W. (1955). New evidence for the speed of Roman imperial post. *Phoenix*, 9: 76–80.



Paulus Hist. Rom. XIV.13

Qui reuersus ad proprias sedes supra plures quas habebat uxores puellam ualde decoram Ildicco nomine sibi in matrimonium iunxit; ob cuius nuptias profusa conuiuia exercens, dum tantum uini quantum numquam antea insemel bibisset, cum supinus quiesceret, eruptione sanguinis, qui ei de naribus solitus erat effluere, suffocatus extinctus est.

Poeta Saxo III v. 25–37

... rex donec eorum

Attila, multorum totiens victor populorum,

Feminea periit dextra sub tartara trusus.

Namque ferunt, quod cum vino somnoque gravatum,

Cum nox omnigenis animantibus alta quietem

Suggereret, coeptis crudelibus effera conjunx

Ducens insomnes odiis stimulantibus umbras,

Horrendo regem regina peremerit ausu.

Ultra necem proprii tamen est hoc crimine patris.

Agnellus Liber Pontificalis XX.37

Ex illo denique die non in tanta crudelitates perseveravit et sine bella commissa ad proprium reuersus est regnum. Et non tantum viribus fortior fuit, sed ingeniose praeliabat, unde de eo in proverbii dicitur: 'Attila rex, priusquam arma sumeret, arte pugnabat'. Et post haec omnia a vilissima muliere cultro defossus, mortuus est.

Theoph. Conf. AM 5946 a. 454 (Priscus Frag. 24.2 Blockley)

μεταξὺ δὲ κόρης εὐπρεποῦς τινοῦ ἐρασθεὶς καὶ τὸν πρὸς αὐτὴν γάμον ἐπιτελῶν οἰνωθεὶς τε σφόδρα καὶ ὕπνῳ βαρηθεὶς, αἵματος ἀθρόον διὰ ῥινῶν τε καὶ τοῦ στόματος ἐνεχθέντος, τελευτᾷ τὸν βίον.

Annales Quedlinburgenses MGH Script. III, p. 32

Attila rex Hunnorum et totius Europae terror, a puella quadam, quam a patre occiso vi rapuit, cultello perfossus interiit.

Chronographus Saxo (Annales Magdeburgenses) MGH S XVI p. 127 a. 561

Attila rex Hunnorum et totius Europae terror, a puella, quam a patre occiso vi rapuit, cultello perfossus interiit.

Nicephorus Call. XIV.57 Cf. Mal. XIV.10.

Ἐνθα δὴ καὶ Ἀττίλας αὐτῶν δόρατι κενθητεὶς διεθάρη...

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