

Byzantine Diplomacy and the Huns

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The term “Byzantine diplomacy” basically defines the principles, methods, mechanisms and techniques that were used by the Byzantine Empire in negotiations with other countries, i.e. tribes, and in the promotion of the interests of its foreign policy.

Understanding diplomacy as a war driven by other principally peaceful means is a notion characteristic to the Byzantines. For them, “peace bought with tributes” in each case was cheaper than any war. Therefore, the security of the Empire largely depended not only on its military capabilities, but also on its diplomatic activities.

Because of the increased dangers imposed by the barbarian world¹, and generated by the Great Migration of Peoples, weapons alone were not

¹ The term “barbarian” and the word itself comes from the Greek language. In the classical era, the ancient Greeks using this word indicated a person who spoke a language unknown or incomprehensible to them, who neither thought Greek nor behaved Greek. Byzantium also used this term in that cultural context. In the eyes of the Byzantines, the barbarians were those tribes and peoples who lived in an educational darkness, beyond the borders of the empire and who, by their culture, religion and lifestyle, did not belong to the Universe (oecumene). In the narrow sense the Barbarian was a pagan who was not directly a subject to Emperor’s laws or, indirectly through membership of the Byzantine commonwealth, to the Emperor’s power. In theory, a pagan who already accepted the Orthodox faith was not a pagan anymore. Cf. D. Obolensky, *The Principles and Methods of Byzantine Diplomacy*, Actes du XII congrès international d’études Byzantines, Ohrid, 10-16. sep. 1961, t. 1, 55; W. R., Jones, *The Image of the Barbarian in Medieval Europe*, CSSH, Vol. 13, No. 14 (1971), 387-389; Д. Оболенски, *Византијски комонвелт*, Београд 1991, 326.

enough. Skillful diplomatic games were also necessary, as the barbarians became a permanent concern for the Byzantine politicians. The interest regarding the barbarians covered a very wide range. The character, traditions, essence, customs, weaknesses and strengths, and their friends and enemies were studied and analyzed. Particular attention was given to the opportunity for bribery².

This diplomatic activity with the barbarian world especially intensified after the start of the Great Migration of Peoples, initiated by the Huns. Because of this, Byzantium was doomed to continuously run exhausting battles on two fronts – a fight which lasted until the end of the Byzantine Empire³. The first emperor who led this fateful war on the two fronts was Valens (364-378). He lost his life in 378 near Adrianople in the devastating battle with the new barbarians who penetrated the Byzantine territory from the north through the Danube⁴. The defeating outcome of the battle for the Byzantine Empire, in which the emperor's army was overrun, was caused by the Visigoths, accompanied by the Ostrogoths, the Alans and the Huns⁵.

The cavalry squads of Ostrogoth-Alan-Hun's groups led by Alatheus and Safrax played a key role in the defeat of the Byzantine army during this battle⁶. The Huns, who constituted an integral part of this group, were

² Г. Бакалов, *Византия*, София 2000, 193.

³ Г.Острогорски, *Историја на Византија*, Скопје 1992, 70.

⁴ Amm. Marcell. XXXI. 13.; Cf. J. B. Bury, *The Invasion of Europe by the Barbarians*, New York 1963, 58-59; Th. Burns, *The Battle of Adrianopol*. *Historia* 22, 1973. 336-338; Буданова В. П., *Варварский мир в эпохи Великого преселения народов*, Москва 2000, 46; M. Springer, *Novi odgovori in stara vprasanja o bitki pri Adrianopolu*, *Zgodovinski Casopis*, 48/4 (1994), 433-442.

⁵ Г. Острогорски, *Историја на Византија*, 71.

⁶ The Huns, who came from Asia and formed a tribal alliance in the middle of the IV century in the area between the rivers Don and Volga and the Caucasus Mountains, exerted pressure on the Alans and the Ostrogoths. The latter, led by the leaders Alatheus and Safrax, withdrew with them part of the Huns, thus forming a separate group, crossed the Danube and penetrated on the Byzantine territory, probably towards the end of 376. Amm. Marcell. XXXI. 3; Cf. J. B., Bury, *The Invasion of Europe by the Barbarians*, 48-51, 55-56; Ђ. Николов, *История на средновековния свят, том първи*, Ст. Загора 1997, 113; Ф, Успенски, *Историја византијског царства*, т. 1, Београд 2000, 137; Буданова В. П., *Варварский мир*, 41.

actually the first Huns that appeared on the territory of the Byzantine Empire⁷.

At the end of 378 and at the beginning of 379 the first breakthrough of the Huns occurred in Pannonia. These were the Huns from the group of Alatheus and Safrax who, according to Jordanes, crossed from Thrace to Pannonia⁸. Nothing stood in the way of their devastation in Pannonia. This is confirmed by sources that explicitly talk about the devastating suffering of Stridion and Mursa, and it seems that Poetovio also suffered⁹. Due to the increased risk the armies of both Emperors were forced to act collectively in the year 380 in order to deal with the enemies¹⁰. However, the situation in Pannonia was not resolved on the battlefield but, according to source reports, it was settled with signing an alliance-foedus¹¹ with the conquerors¹². Thus, the Ostrogoths of Alatheus and Safrax, the Alans and the Huns received permission to inhabit the empire territory and, in addition, took on the responsibility to guard the border and, according to the needs of the Empire, deliver their squads in specified times in exchange for an annual salary and regular delivery of products¹³. The cavalry squads of the Pannonic federate, especially those of the Huns, on multiple occasions readily responded to the calls from the imperial Government and its representatives. Although

⁷ Gračanin H., *Huni i Južna Panonija*, *Scrinia slavonica* 5 (2005), 10.

⁸ *Iordanis Romana et Getica*, rec. Th. Mommsen, Berlin: Weidmann 1882, XXVII, 140.

⁹ Gračanin H., *Huni i Južna Panonija*, 13, note 14.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* n. 15.

¹¹ Foedus is a technical term for a contract, i.e. alliance, signed between the Byzantine Empire and federates-mercenaries in the Byzantine army of barbarians, settled on its territory. The deal regulated the obligations of both parties: the federates were responsible to guard the border of the Empire for full cash payments, while the Empire should provide protection and recognize their right to self-government. Cf. Ф., Успенски, *Историја византијског царства*, 207; R., Sharf. *Foederati. Von der völkerrechtlichen Kategorie zur byzantinischen Truppengattung*. Wien, 2001, 141; H. Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, Berkeley 1988, 13.

¹² *Iordanis Romana et Getica*, XXVII, 141; Zosimi, *Comitis et exadvocati fisci*, *Historia Nova*, ed. L. Mendelssohn, Lipsiae 1887, IV, 34. 2. Cf. Zosimus: *Historia Nova*, tans. By J. J., Bachanan, San Antonio, Texas, 1967. IV, 34. 2. Cf. Gračanin H., *Huni i Južna Panonija*, 14, n. 16.

¹³ Gračanin H., *Huni i Južna Panonija*, 14, n. 17.

Gratian, the Western Emperor, had signed the foedus with them, they appeared in the eastern Government's service: in 388, they helped Theodosius I against the usurper Magno Maxim, and these Panonic federates probably took part in the expedition of 394 in Theodosius' campaign against the new western usurper Eugenius¹⁴.

After the death of Theodosius I in 395 we find many sources that speak of the federates' rebellion in Thrace, and having in mind the new wave of barbarian invasions to the south of the Danube it is very likely that during this period the Pannonic federates also rebelled, which speaks of their failure to fulfill their federate obligations.

During this time the Byzantine Empire was not only faced with the conflict caused by the Gothic federates, but it also faced the second breakthrough of the Huns, which this time around was more massive. After crossing the Caucasus the Huns moved in two directions: one group went to the south and to the east to Persia, and another attacked the Byzantine territories in Armenia, Cappadocia and Syria, moving closer to the west of the cities of Antioch, Edessa and Cilicia¹⁵. The size of the Hun's attack can be determined not only in a geographical but also in a chronological frame. They were leading the war against the Byzantine Empire during 397 and probably in the year 398¹⁶. The direction and the magnitude of this attack confirm that in this period the capital of the Huns was still located to the east of the Byzantine Danubian frontier¹⁷.

Around the year 400 there is a new movement of the Hun's forces, specifically that of the Hun leader Uldin near the lower Danube, east of the Carpathians. In the same year Uldin killed Gaina – the *magister militum praesentalis*, who at the time was an enemy to Byzantium, and so by killing him Uldin did a service to the Empire. Uldin sent the head of Gaina to Constantinople and for this service he requested "a gift" which he obviously

¹⁴ Gračanin H., *Huni i Južna Panonija*, 17; P. Heather, *The Huns and the end of the Roman Empire in Western Europe*, EHR 1995, 9; Будагова В. П., *Варварский мир*, 51.

¹⁵ Marcellini I, (Marcellini V. C., *Comitis Chronicon*, AD A. DXVIII *Continvatvm* AD A. DXXXIV); ИБИ II - ЛИБИ I, 194, note 2. Cf. P. Heather, *The Huns*, 9.

¹⁶ P. Heather, *The Huns*, 9, n. 1.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 9.

received. Thus the alliance between him and the Empire was made, and it probably included tribute as well¹⁸.

Towards 406, the Hun leader Uldin was already far to the west acting in the service of Stilichon against the Gothic leader Radagaiz. The same Hun leader later dramatically changed his conduct in relation to Byzantium, crossed the Danube with his armies and in 409 invaded and conquered *Castra Martis* in *Dacia Ripensis*¹⁹.

After a period of some lull, we find that in 412 Byzantium was again in diplomatic relations with the Huns or, at any rate, with some of them. Thanks to fragments from Olympiodorus we have information that that year he took part in an embassy sent from Constantinople to the barbarians. The envoys were sailing northwest by the Black Sea and caught by a storm they almost perished on their way. Finally, they arrived before the Hun king Donath, whose sphere of activity was obviously far from that of Uldin. After exchanging the oath of friendship with Donath the envoys insidiously killed him. His successor, Karato, who had hostile feelings towards Olympiodorus and his companions, was restrained to keep the peace with expensive gifts sent by Theodosius II²⁰.

As of 420 the Huns definitely occupied the middle Danube and the regions west of the Carpathians. Around 427 some Huns were expelled from Pannonia to the areas behind Danube, but for decades they continued to be stationed in the region. So, somewhere between 395 and 425 the capital of the Huns was founded west of the Carpathians²¹.

At the end of the 20s of the fifth century a certain Rugila stood as the head of the Huns and ruled together with his brothers Mundiuh and Octar²². Each of the brothers probably ruled over a separate part of the

¹⁸ Zosimi, *Comitis et exadvocati fisci, Historia Nova*, E, 22.1-17. Cf. Zosimus: *Historia Nova*, V, 22. 1-18; *Chron. Min. ii*, p.660=[MGH AA9, *Chronica minora I*], Berlin: Weidmann 1892.

¹⁹ Procopii, *Caesariensis Opera omnia. Rec. J. Haury*, III 2, *De aedificiis, Lipsiae* 1913. iv, 6, 33. ИБИ I-ГИБИ I, 67; Cf. P. Heather, *The Huns* 14. 15; Cf. J. B. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire from the death of Theodosius I to the death of Justinian (395-565)*, vol. I, New York 1958, 271.

²⁰ Olympiodorus, fr 19. pp. 182. 1-7. ed. R. C. Blockley 1983; E. A. G., *Thompson A History of Attila and the Huns*, Oxford 1948, 34.

²¹ P. Heather, *The Huns*, 18.

²² *Iordanis Romana et Getica*, xxxv, 180.

Huns and their subordinate peoples. The convergence of power of any common area seems, in general, unknown to this tribe. From 432 Rugila was the sole ruler of the Hun union, and his brothers, as it seems, had passed away. As a result of an agreement with Aetius from 433 these Huns gained the Pannonia Prima from the Western Government²³.

Considering the fact that in 429/30 Byzantium was faced with the passage of the Vandals to Africa, as the Empire had taken responsibility for dealing with them, and the scale of commitments against Persia in the east, the pressure from the Huns was already too much for the Empire's military resources. Understanding the complexity of the situation, the Empire was forced to settle with the Huns around 430/31²⁴. We do not know with certainty the year when the agreement with the Hun leader Rugila was reached, but it was explicitly stated in the sources at the conclusion of the next contract with the Huns, reached in 435, as an agreement which terms were revised. According to the agreement that the Byzantines reached with Rugila, they committed to pay annual taxes of 350 liters of gold to the Huns, give them commercial rights at the markets in some cities and return the Byzantine captives that had escaped or instead pay 4 solidi as a ransom for each of them. The fact that an accurately predicted annual tribute was determined with this agreement explains the peace that existed on the Danube frontier in the first several years after Aspar left for Africa with a large Byzantine army in 431 to fight against the Vandals. As a result of Aspar's absence Rugila most likely extorted this agreement. However, the Hun leader was not satisfied with the agreement and at the beginning of 434 through his diplomat Esla instructed strong requests to the Byzantine Government for the return of some of his subordinate people or otherwise he threatened them with war²⁵. The Hun could not have chosen a more convenient moment, since at the time Byzantium had a lack of military forces as the Byzantine army led by Aspar, along with the Western Roman army, acted against the Vandals in Africa. For Rugila it was a moment of opportunity that he was ready to grasp²⁶. But in the same year the Hun leader unexpectedly died during the

²³ J. B. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire I*, 272.

²⁴ Priscus, fr. 2, pp. 224-5, ed. R. C. Blockley 1983; Cf. P. Heather, *The Huns*, 25; E. Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire*, I, 1959, 289.

²⁵ E. A. G., Thompson, *A History of Attila*, 65.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 71.

military expedition²⁷. He was succeeded by his two grandchildren, the older Bleda and the younger Attila²⁸. Despite the death of Rugila and the replacement at the Hun's throne, Byzantine decided to send the planned embassy to the Huns, led by Plint. In 435 in the city of Margus in Upper Moesia the Byzantine embassy reached a deal with Attila and Bleda²⁹. According to this agreement, the Byzantine Government committed not only to accept those who fled from Scythia, i.e. from the Huns, in the future, but also those who had fled had to be returned along with the Byzantine prisoners who had returned home or otherwise it had to pay a ransom of 8 solidi per head for those who get captured in war. Furthermore, it was agreed that the Byzantine Empire will not enter into alliance with any tribe that was hostile with the Huns. Referring to the old agreement reached with the Rugila, the Huns demanded to have their trading rights reaffirmed, to be allowed to trade on equal terms with the Byzantine merchants and have complete reliability. Plint also agreed the annual tribute which was paid by Byzantium to be doubled to 700 liters of gold³⁰. Both sides swore according to their traditional ways.

In the period of 435 to 440, the Byzantine Empire was not bothered along its northern border. However, when in 439 the Vandals occupied Carthage, Byzantium was forced to send military squads to the Western Government as assistance against them. The Huns saw a great opportunity to use the fact that the imperial armies were preoccupied with the Vandals, as well as with the Persians in the east. So, under the pretext that Byzantium had broken the terms of the treaty, i.e. that the Empire did not hand over refugees as it was agreed, the Huns penetrated across the Danube, and in the autumn of 440 they occupied Viminacium. They relentlessly advanced and conquered Margus, Singidunum and Sirmium³¹ (441). Furthermore, they

²⁷ Chron. Min. I, p. 660; Cf. E. A. G., Thompson, *A History of Attila*, 72; J. B. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire* vol. I, 272.

²⁸ Theophanes, p 102.16 (*Theophanis Chronographia* I, ed. C. de Boor, Leipzig 1883) ; Cron. Min I p660 s.a. 343; Cf. Thompson E. A. G., *A History of Attila*, 73.

²⁹ Priscus pp. 274, 24-27.7.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 277. 11-27.

³¹ We do not have accurate information about when Sirmium was conquered. Priscus spoke of the siege of the city as a well-known event, but gives no timeline details. (Cf. Priscus, fr. 11, pp. 262.332-333). Therefore, in historiography the event is dated differently, as in 441, 447 or 448 AD. For different dates

turned to the interior of the Imperial provinces. Riding up the valley of the river Morava they came to the city of Naissus and ruined it. After that, the Huns turned south-west up the valley of the river Nischava and conquered another great city, Serdica³². In the same year, Aspar agreed to a truce for a period of one year. But at the end of the next year, the Hun's attacks were renewed, and Illyric and Thrace were devastated. Ratiaria and Esco on the estuary of the Iskr in Danube were attacked³³. Moving along the river Hebrus, the Huns reached Philippopolis which fell into their hands. While Heraclides and Hadrianopolis declined their attacks or were circumvented, Arcadiopolis was occupied. As a result of rapid maneuvers by the Huns, the Byzantine armies sent against them were cut off from Constantinople and were redirected to Chersones. The attackers approached the sea by three points, Gallipoli and Sestus south of the City, and at an unspecified place north of it. The Athyras fortress, located very close to the walls of the capital city, was also occupied³⁴. It was hopeless for the ill-equipped nomad squadrons to attack the new fortifications of Constantinople and it seems that no farther steps were made against the City itself. Instead, Attila turned to the remaining Aspar army in Chersones (Galipol Peninsula) and in the decisive battle he destroyed the rest of the Byzantium forces³⁵. Following this defeat, Theodosius II had no choice but to pray for peace. Negotiations were entrusted to Anatoly – the magister militum per Orientem, who successfully completed the recent war with Persia. The conditions given by Attila were sharp, but considerably smaller than expected. Namely, the refugees were to be delivered at once. Outstanding debt had to be calculated for 6,000 liters of gold and this amount was to be paid without delay. In addition,

of the event, compare: M. Mirković, Sirmium, its History of the I century A. D. to 582 A. D., Sirmium I, Arheološki institut SAN, Београд 1971, 48; П. Милошевић, Археологија и Историја Сирмијума, Нови Сад 2001, 205.

³² About the chronology of this Hunnic invasion see: Marcelini, s. a. 441; ВИНИЈ, I, 11-12., Н., Граћанин, Хуни и Јужна Панонја, 32; Е.А.Г. Томпсон, А History of Attila, 83-84, 104; Баришић Ф., Византијски Сингидунум, ЗРВИ 3, Београд 1955, 21; Велков В., Градът в Тракия и Дакия през късната античност, София 1059, 40-41.

³³ J. B. Bury, History of the Later Roman Empire, vol. I, 274.

³⁴ Theoph. P. 102. 25 ff; Agathias, The Histories, CFHB, trans. by J. D., Frendo, Berlin 1975, V, 14. 5; Cf. E. Stein, De Bas-Empire, 291.

³⁵ Priscus p. 282.25. Cf. E. A. G., Thompson, A History of Attila, 80-84.

the annual tax paid to the Huns on the basis of the agreement in 435 now had to be increased on 2,100 liters of gold. Furthermore, each Byzantine prisoner who had escaped from the Huns had to be redeemed for 12 solidi per head and not 8 solidi as agreed with the previous agreement. Attila also required that in the future not a single barbarian-refugee from the Huns should be allowed in the Byzantine Empire³⁶. This agreement was temporarily signed on August 27, 443, and ratified in the autumn of that year³⁷. But despite the agreement, true peace never really happened for the Empire. Through Scottas Attila sent another embassy in the Byzantine capital who had gone to Constantinople to receive the gold and refugees increasing the difficulty for the return of refugees. This embassy was followed by a second, a third and a fourth one. In each occasion, the ministers of Theodosius II were giving beautiful gifts to the envoys, which was in common for granting the ambassadors³⁸, but they insisted that not a single refugee should stay on Byzantine soil. Innumerable minor complaints of the Huns were reviewed by Byzantine officials and the deputies of Atilla gathered greater and greater wealth.

The Huns invaded the Byzantine Empire again in 447, led by Attila who after killing Bleda (445) became the sole ruler of the Hun Union. The sources do not report for the reason or the excuse that was used, but the attack was planned on a higher level than the one in 441³⁹. This attack was carried out not only by the Huns, but also by their subordinate contingents of tribes. The Gepids were led by their king Ardarih, the Goths by Valamir⁴⁰, but there were also others whose names are not listed in the sources⁴¹. The Attack was directed through the provinces of Lower Moesia and Scythia, which was far more to the east than the attack in 441. In the same year when the Huns were preparing for the expedition, Byzantium was affected by a disastrous series of earthquakes, during which a large number of cities and fortresses suffered in Thrace, the Hellespont and Cyclades, and also the

³⁶ Priscus fr. 9, pp. 236. 1-10; Cf. J. B. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire*, vol. I, 275.

³⁷ Priscus, pp.284.26-284.28; Cf. E. A. G. Thompson, *A History of Attila*, 85-86.

³⁸ Priscus fr.10, pp. 240.1-4, 242.5-17; Malchus fr 3, p. 389. 9 .

³⁹ Marcelini, s. a. 447; Cf. J. B. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire*, vol. I, 275.

⁴⁰ E. A. G. Thompson, *A History of Attila*, 90.

⁴¹ Iordanis *Romana et Getica*, 331.

walls of the capital⁴². Near the river Utus (today Vit) in Dacia Ripensis, Attila was drawn into the struggle of the imperial army, which ranged from Marcianopolis towards him and in which the Byzantines were completely defeated. However, despite the victory, the Huns suffered significant losses and just this battle alone did irreparable damage to the Hun's power⁴³. In fact, during the battle, Attila achieved his last victory over the Byzantines. The immediate result from the battle was the collapse of Marcianopol, the capital of Moesia Secunda. According to sources, during this period the Huns also destroyed Illyric and Thrace, two provinces of Dacia and Moesia with Scythia⁴⁴. Because the attackers then demanded new areas for raiding, they moved down to the south of Greece and only stopped on the Thermopylae⁴⁵. The further direction of this invasion is not known. According to sources, during this campaign, the Huns won no fewer than 70 cities (Gallic chronicle)⁴⁶, and Comes says "Attila stranded almost whole Europe into the Dust"⁴⁷.

The three years following the great invasion of 447 were filled with diplomatic encounters between the Huns and the Byzantines, and since the latter remained without military resources, they could now rely only on the skill of their diplomats. Even so, their smartness and patience brought them greater successes than they probably expected. The diplomatic history in these years is much better known to us today thanks to the historian Priscus, who took part in a Byzantine embassy (449), paying great attention to it in his book in order to present to us what he saw and did⁴⁸.

In 448 peace was restored on the northern border⁴⁹. The negotiations from the Byzantine side were led by Anatoly. Attila wanted a broad belt of the area south of the Danube to be completely evacuated by the Byzantines. This area was supposed to extend from Singidunum on the border with Pannonia to Novae in a distance of some 300 miles and to be on a path of

⁴² E. A. G. Thompson, *A History of Attila*, 91.

⁴³ E. A. G. Thompson, *A History of Attila*, 92; E. Stein, *Bas-Empire*, 292.

⁴⁴ *Iordanis Romana et Getica*, 331.

⁴⁵ Marcelini, s.a. 447.

⁴⁶ *Chron. Min.*, I, p. 662.

⁴⁷ Marcelini, s.a. 447; ИБИ II - ЛИБИ I, 310; E. A. G. Thompson, *A History of Attila*, 94.

⁴⁸ E. A. G. Thompson, *A History of Attila*, 95.

⁴⁹ Marcellini, s.a. 448.

five days in depth, which is about 100 or 120 miles. In other words, all Dacia Ripensis and parts of three other provinces, which had to be abandoned, and the new border was now to go through Naissus. The Danube with its fortifications and the major border cities, which were now in ruins, were no longer to border with the Empire⁵⁰. We do not know for another term of the treaty. The tribute continued to be paid, but at what price we cannot say. In the next two years, the Byzantine diplomacy was aimed towards the goal of providing some mitigation of these conditions.

In the spring of 449⁵¹, one of the most powerful supporters of Attila, Edeco, arrived in Constantinople. Edeco handed a letter from Attila to the Emperor in which he accused the Byzantine Government regarding the refugees. He intimidated them that he would resort to arms if they were not delivered and if the Byzantines did not give up cultivating the land conquered by him. Attila also asked him to get envoys, not random people, but the most prominent among the consuls to discuss contentious issues⁵². During the stay of this envoy of the Huns in Constantinople, a Byzantine eunuch named Chrysaphius tried to bribe and persuade him to assassinate Attila⁵³.

The Emperor decided to send the embassy requested by Attila and as his agents he sent Maximinus, who stood at the head of the embassy, Priscus as his secretary and Bigilas in the role of a translator. The letter from the Emperor which Maximinus was to deliver to the Hun ruler stated that Attila should not break the treaty and attack the Byzantine country, and in relation to the refugees it emphasized that in addition to those that had been handed over he was also sending 17 more, because he had no others⁵⁴. This Byzantine embassy sent to the Huns actually had two purposes. The first objective was to discover and act to resolve the refugee problem, i.e. to establish harmony in the relations between Byzantium and the Huns. The second goal was a secret one – to perform an assassination on Attila, for

⁵⁰ Priscus, pp. 286. 32-287.7; J. B. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire*, vol. I, 275-6.

⁵¹ Regarding new datings of this event see more: M. Š. Kos, *Romulovo poslanstvo pri Atili (Ena od zadnjih pomemb Petovine v antični literaturi)* *Zgodovinski Casopis*, Let. 48 št. 3, Ljubljana 1994, 290.

⁵² Priscus, fr. 11, p. 242. 11-18, ИБИ I-ГИБИ I, 99.

⁵³ Priscus, fr. 11, p. 244. 24-56. ИБИ I-ГИБИ I, 101.

⁵⁴ Priscus, fr. 11, p. 246. 9-13. Cf. ИБИ I-ГИБИ I, 103; ВИННЈ, I, 13-16; Cf. J. B. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire*, vol. I, 276.

which only Bigilas from the Byzantine embassy knew about. Byzantines tried to achieve their goal by bribing the most prominent people of Attila, i.e. Edeco and Onegesius⁵⁵. The method of bribery which the Byzantine diplomacy tried to use on this occasion did not have any results, because Attila's men remained loyal to their master and they did not kneel under the alluring offers by the Byzantines. They did not allow the image of their ruler to be devalued. Namely, in one occasion the Byzantine deputies made a comparison between Attila and Theodosius II, pointing out that the Byzantine Emperor was a God against the Hun ruler who was a man, and the Huns reacted sharply. The precaution and doubt expressed by the Huns against the Byzantine envoys were evidently manifested in them banning the envoys to put their tent on a higher level than Attila's tent.

After Attila thwarted the attempt of the Byzantines to assassinate him, he sent envoys back to Constantinople with a promise to keep the peace if one of his secretaries got a rich woman for a wife. In this way the Hun ruler once again displayed his irresistible thirst for accumulation of the Byzantine heritage⁵⁶.

While the Byzantine embassy was among the Huns, adhering to the maxim of Byzantine diplomacy "divide et impera" using rich gifts Theodosius II tried to convince the aggressive tribe Akatziri, situated on the Pontus, to annul the alliance with Attila and make one with the Empire. Such attempts were unsuccessful because in the decisive battle Attila won a strong victory over the tribe and completely subdued it⁵⁷.

Again in 450 the Byzantine embassy headed by Anatoly and Nomus was referred to Attila. The meeting between them and Attila took place near the unknown river Drekon. The Byzantine envoys persuaded Attila to give an oath to abide by the terms of peace from the agreement of 448. They also convinced him to swear that he would not cause problems to Theodosius II regarding the exchange of the refugees accepted from the Hun Empire. But their greatest success is in convincing Attila to withdraw from the area south of the Danube, which he ordered to be completely evacuate by the Byzantines in 448.

⁵⁵ Priscus, fr. 11, p. 272; 274. Cf. Ф. Успенски, Историја Византијског царства, I, 138.

⁵⁶ Priscus, fr. 11, 246, 248, 250, fr. 14, 240.

⁵⁷ Priscus, fr. 11, 258. 244-246; Cf. E. A. G. Thompson, A History of Attila, 96-97.

Bigilas, who had previously been detained by Attila due to suspicion of a planned assassination, was now released with a ransom and the demand for the delivery of Chrysaphius, the initiator of the attempt on Attila, was withdrawn⁵⁸. As a special and personal favor for both Byzantines Attila agreed to release most of the Byzantine prisoners without a ransom. Before the envoys left, Attila granted them with horses, and leather and fur which the Hun's rulers loved to wear⁵⁹. During these negotiations, Attila was very tolerant with Anatoly and Nomus, since he intended to launch the invasion of Gaul and needed a safe back.

Even since 450 Attila announced his intents to attack the Visigoth Kingdom located around Toulouse and an ally to Valentinian, but his real intention was to reign with the Western Empire and remove Aetius as a commander of the West⁶⁰. He manifested this intention in his request to receive half of the Western Empire as a dowry in marriage with Honoria, the sister of Valentinian⁶¹. To achieve his purpose, he gained allies in the Vandals⁶² and part of the Franks⁶³.

After the death of Theodosius II in August 450 and the change in the Byzantine throne there was also a change with regards to the Byzantine policy towards the Huns. When Attila sent an envoy to Constantinople to gather the tax from the Byzantines, Marcian, Theodosius II's successor, resolutely declared that the tax will no longer be paid and if the Huns threatened with war he will respond accordingly with all their military forces⁶⁴. Attila could not immediately take actions against the Emperor and punish him for his disobedience in fulfilling the contractual obligations of paying the tax, because he went west to realize the campaign against the Western Governments.

In Gaul, at the place known as Campus Mauricianus (Catalaunian Plains) near the town of Troyes, a fierce battle took place in the summer of

⁵⁸ Priscus, fr. 15, pp. 300. 2-8.

⁵⁹ E. A. G. Thompson, *A History of Attila*, 123.

⁶⁰ Priscus, fr. 17, pp. 300.2, 302.12-13.

⁶¹ Priscus pp. 328.28-325.3, cf. p.330.6-10; Cf. J. B. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire*, vol. I, 290.

⁶² Iordanis *Romana et Getica*, XXXVI, 185.

⁶³ Priscus, fr. 20, p. 306. 1-3.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 329.3-14.

451 between the alliance of Aetius and the Hun union led by Attila⁶⁵, in which both sides suffered enormous losses, and after which Attila withdrew to Pannonia⁶⁶. This battle affected the fall of Hunnic power in a great deal. Meanwhile in the same year the Hun leader was visited by a Byzantine diplomatic mission led by Apollonius, which did not achieve any results as the envoys did not bring the expected income and so Attila refused to welcome them⁶⁷. In September 451 with the intrusion of a small group of Huns to robbery targets in eastern Illyric, Attila reminded Marcian what he can expect once the season for Hunnic raids starts⁶⁸.

Despite the large losses that Attila suffered it did not bother him to attack and plunder Italy the next year, but after receiving the rich gifts he returned back to Pannonia⁶⁹.

The goal that Attila had, to militarily avenge the new Byzantine Emperor, was not accomplished because he suddenly died in 453⁷⁰. After his death his sons divided the oppressed peoples among them⁷¹. The discordance among Attila's children led to a rebellion of the peoples they ruled. In 454 the decisive battle on the river Nedao took place in Pannonia between the oppressed peoples led by the Huns and Gepids with their supporters. Without a doubt the rebels received help and support from the Emperor Marcian. Attila's eldest son Elak died in this battle, and his surviving brothers and the rest of their supporters fled through the Carpathians to the

⁶⁵ For the tribes who took part in the battle from both sides see: B. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire*, vol. I, 291-293; В. П. Буданова, *Варварский мир*, 71; Л., Гумильов., *Хуните: Хегемонът на Азия*, София 2008, 72.

⁶⁶ Ф.Успенски, *Историја византијског царства*, т. 1, 142; Dž. Dž. Nogić, *Vizantija: Rani vekovi*, trans. by P. Urošević, 2009, 144.

⁶⁷ Priscus, fr. 18.

⁶⁸ E. A. G. Thompson, *A History of Attila*, 143.

⁶⁹ B. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire*, vol. I, 294.

⁷⁰ There are two versions given in the sources regarding the death of Attila. The first is that he suffocated in bed from excessive bleeding through the nose. (Priscus p. 316, fr. 24; Jordanes, *Get.* 49, 254-55, 256-58), and according to the second version, he was killed by his new wife. (Marcellinus, s. a. 454; Chron. Paschal, pp. 587).

⁷¹ *Cronicon Minor*. p. 482.

coast of the Black Sea⁷². Part of the Huns remained in Pannonia, and another part of them settled on Byzantine territory as federats to the Empire.

The last embassy from the Huns that came to Constantinople mentioned in the sources was sent by Attila's children in the 468/9⁷³. Its goal was to clarify the differences that existed between them and the Byzantine Government – apparently there was some fighting – and to negotiate for a peace deal that would renew the markets in cities along the Byzantine border for the Huns. But this embassy did not achieve anything. Emperor Leo I (457-474) saw no reason to give benefits to the people who did harm to the Empire. After the failure of this embassy, disagreements occurred between Hun leaders, Attila's sons – Dengizih and Ernak⁷⁴. Ernak refused to take part in the raid that Dengizih threatened upon the Empire, so the latter went alone⁷⁵. In this campaign Dengizih was defeated by the Byzantine army and killed on the battlefield in the 469. The fate of Ernak is not known, and he probably died under unclear circumstances as a mercenary of Byzantium⁷⁶.

The last raid carried out by the Huns during the fifth century on the low Danubian provinces began in an unprotected part of the river at the beginning of Zeno's reign, whose commander fought them off without major problems⁷⁷. The main forces of the Huns during the rule of Leo and Zeno remained at lower Danube, but no longer constituted a relevant force threatening the safety of the Byzantine Empire.

The negotiations that were conducted between Theodosius II and the Huns always included two important elements – the payment of tribute

⁷² E. A. G. Thompson, *A History of Attila*, 153; J. B. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire*, vol. I, 296.; J. B. Bury, *The Invasion of Europe by the Barbarians*, 154-155.

⁷³ Priscus, fr. 46; Marcelini s. a. 469.

⁷⁴ E. A. G. Thompson, *A History of Attila*, 156; Л., Гумильов., *Хуните: Хегемонът на Азия*, 78.

⁷⁵ Priscus, fr. 38.

⁷⁶ Marcelini s. a. 469; ИБИ II - ЛИБИ I, 311 ; Cf. E. A. G. Thompson, *A History of Attila*, 157.

⁷⁷ E. A. G. Thompson, *A History of Attila* , 157.

in gold and the return of refugees (Byzantine war prisoners) or their ransom, which was also supposed to be paid in gold⁷⁸.

The payment of tribute, which was a substitute for peace, was conceptualized differently by the Hun and the Byzantine side. While for Attila the tribute was a demonstration of the Hunnic superiority⁷⁹ over the Byzantine Empire, for Theodosius II the transfer of gold to Attila was a form of patronage, by the dominant partner in the relationship partner-client. Theodosius II and his advisers believed that the transfer of gold to Attila presented no payment of tax, but a normal part of the relationship between the Emperor and an imperial service of the highest rank in Byzantine society, including the Hun ruler himself as a part of that service. In that sense the statement of a western Roman ambassador, mentioned by Priscus, can be understood, saying that the gold was given to Attila because of his rank and that the rank was *magister militum*⁸⁰.

In conducting the negotiations the practice for sharing gifts was obligatory, and it was meant to express the position of friendly relations towards the client, and to impress or exceed the fellow diplomats. The suitability of the gift depended on their value as a provider as a recipient: Byzantine gifts aspire to be expensive due to their nature, i.e. intrinsic value, (e.g. silver cups) or their exotic origin (Indian pepper, silk dress and pearls). On the other hand, Priscus describes the Hun's gifts for the Byzantine embassy as valuable because of their association with the Hun's royal tradition, such

⁷⁸ Regarding the role of gold in Byzantine and Hunnic society see: P. Guest, *Roman Gold and Hun Kings: the use and hoarding of solidi in the late fourth and fifth centuries*, *Moneta* 82, Wetteren 2008, 299-300.

⁷⁹ According to Esla's words, which were given to us by carries Priscus, we learn that Theodosius paid the tax to Attila, and became his slave. Priscus, fr. 15, p. 296, 8-12.

⁸⁰ Priscus fr. 11.7, 627-631; According to Priscus, Attila possibly received an honorary title of a military commander from the Western Emperor Valentinian III. Priscus learned about from the West Roman Representatives. However, with regard to Priscus it should be noted that despite the tax that was paid to the Hun ruler the honorary rank assigned to Attila by Theodosius II is not ruled out. Cf.: Blockly 1983, 387 n. 69; A. Demandt, *Die Spätantike. Römische Geschichte von Diocletian bis Justinian 284-565*, München 1989, 168.

as horses and skins of wild animals with which the “Scythian Kings”⁸¹ were decorated.

Contemporary historians who wrote about this period did not support the strategy of Theodosius II to purchase peace with the Huns, because of the huge outflow of Byzantine gold in the Hun countries, which was collected from subjects of the Byzantine Empire with great pain⁸².

However, the claim that the Byzantine diplomacy with regards to the Huns was unsuccessful or disastrous for the Empire cannot be accepted. Considering the heaviness and complexity of the overall constellation in the environment during this period, when Byzantine forces were literally torn in two fronts – against Persia in the east and the Vandals in Africa – the Empire had to stifle internal unrest⁸³ as well; the only solution that remained to the Empire to offset the Huns was the payment of the tribute.

Given the fact that Byzantium applied agricultural taxes on its subordinates’ territories so that it can pay the powerful military, political and administrative officials, any loss of territory due to annexation or temporary destruction in war meant a loss of revenue and weakening of the state machinery⁸⁴.

Therefore, the Byzantine Government did not allow itself to fight the Huns on its territory during a long period and so decided to pay the tax – an act that the Hun ruler, Attila, felt very proud of, considering the Byzantine Emperor as his slave, grasped into his claws. Although Byzantium showed some weakness in reference to sufficient military forces, because it was forced to act on two fronts, the payment of the tax in vast amounts of gold proved its economic supremacy, which combined with the diplomatic games managed to tame the external enemy from the north.

The fragile power, demonstrated by Attila, felt proud by constantly keeping the Byzantine Government on alert with blackmails, yet fell apart in the first major clash with the Western army.

⁸¹ Priscus fr. 11, p. 262. 307-312. ИБИ I-ГИБИ I, 119; Cf. P. Guest, *Roman Gold*, 298.

⁸² Priscus fr. 9, 236. 22-31. ИБИ I-ГИБИ I, 95, 99; Cf. P., Guest, *Roman Gold*, 298.

⁸³ Priscus fr. 10, p. 242. 10-17; ИБИ I-ГИБИ I, 99.

⁸⁴ D., Miller, *Byzantine Treaties-Making, 500-1025*, *Byzantinoslavica*, 32, 1971, 56; P. Heather, *The Huns*, 21.

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