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**Military Elites and their Influence on the Eastern  
Roman Empire during the reigns of Theodosius  
II, Marcian, and Leo I**

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## **List of Contents**

<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	6
<b>Introduction</b> .....	7
Who Constitutes the ‘Military Elites’? .....	7
<i>Magistri Militum</i> and their Forces .....	8
The <i>Foederati</i> and <i>Bucellari</i> .....	9
The Changes in the Military System .....	11
Tenures and <i>Magistri Militum Vacantes</i> .....	13
Military Elites in Politics and Society .....	14
The Overview of the Sources.....	15
<b>Chapter I - The Military Elites during the Reign of Theodosius II</b> .....	21
The Regime of Anthemius .....	22
The Fall of Anthemius and the New Regime of Pulcheria.....	26
The War with Persia .....	29
The Campaign Against the Usurper John.....	35
The First Vandal Expedition.....	37
The Huns in the Twenties and Thirties and Plintha .....	39
The Second Vandal Expedition (441) .....	44
The Developments in the East .....	48
The War against the Huns of 441-442.....	49
The Road to the Next War .....	51
The War of 447. A Conflict Shrouded in Mystery .....	52
The Course of the War .....	54
The Peace of 447 .....	59
The Straw that Broke the Camel’s Back. The Conflict over the Hun Question.....	61
The Curious Case of Berichus.....	62
The Developments of 448-450 .....	64
Conclusion .....	66
<b>Chapter II - The Military Elites during the Reign of Marcian</b> .....	67
The Perception of Marcian by his Contemporaries and in the Scholarship.....	67
Accession to the Throne.....	68
... and Its Presentation.....	69

The Month of Power Struggle .....	71
Aspar's Right Hand Man .....	72
All Marcian's Men.....	75
The Wars of Marcian .....	79
The War of 452 .....	82
The Conclusion of the Hun Problem.....	86
The Northern Border and the Career of Procopius Anthemius.....	89
The Problem of the Vandals .....	90
The Eastern Policy of Marcian.....	93
The Arab Raids.....	94
Blemmyes and Nobades .....	95
The Expeditions to Lazica .....	96
The Soldier Emperor.....	97
The Emperor of the Soldiers .....	98
The Puzzling Last Years of Marcian's Reign .....	99
Conclusion .....	101
<b>Chapter III - The Military Elites during the Reign of Leo I .....</b>	<b>102</b>
The Question of Succession .....	102
The Role of Aspar in the Succession.....	103
A Dangerous Precedent.....	104
Leo, the <i>comes et tribunus Mattiariorum</i> .....	105
The Influence of Aspar.....	107
Leo's Own Ambitions .....	108
The Ostrogoths and Marcellinus of Dalmatia .....	109
Timothy Ailuros and the Religious Unrest in Alexandria.....	111
463 – the Birth of Leo's Dynastic Ambitions .....	112
The Aftermath of 463.....	114
The Arrival of Tarasikodissa and the Situation in the East .....	116
The Conflict between the Goths and the Sciri .....	117
The War with Dengizich.....	120
The Turn to the West.....	124
Aspar's Opposition.....	126
The Expedition of Basiliscus .....	127
The Aftermath of the Defeat .....	132

The Campaign of Heraclius and Marsus .....	134
The Revolt of Anagastes.....	136
Aspar's Return to Power.....	139
Leo the Butcher.....	141
A Pyrrhic Victory.....	142
Conclusion .....	144
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>145</b>
Ethnicity – Solidarity and Division .....	145
Kinship and Family Matters.....	147
Faith and Religious Policy.....	149
Closing Thoughts .....	150
<b>List of Abbreviations.....</b>	<b>154</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>156</b>
Primary Sources.....	156
Secondary Literature.....	160

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## Introduction

The object of interest of this dissertation is the military elite and its influence on the functioning of the Eastern Roman Empire during the reigns of Theodosius II, Marcian, and Leo. One of the reasons to take on a such subject was the realization, made during the author's previous research, about how complex the political scene of the Eastern Roman Empire was. It was primarily a time of outstanding individuals, such as general Aspar or the emperors Marcian and Leo I; each one of them having his own particular interests, political visions, and most importantly - ambitions. Such a situation led to numerous political conflicts, making the court in Constantinople an arena for constant intrigues. Simultaneously one has to take into account that it was the period of the Great Migrations, characterized by numerous barbarian invasions and wars with the Huns, the Goths, and the Vandals. The fifth century A.D. was therefore a turning point in the history of Europe, and observing how the political elites of the still powerful, yet shaken Empire, dealt with the aforementioned problems, leads to valuable conclusions. This dissertation concentrates on the military elites because of their prominent role in the political system, and the period it concerns is marked out by two events, the revolt of Gainas at its beginning and the brutal murder of Aspar and his family ordered by the emperor Leo at its end. The main similarity they share is that they are both culminations of the conflict between the central government and powerful military figures. The aim of this work is to explore how the dynamics between the emperors and their generals developed. What differences led to open conflicts and how both sides pursued their particular ambitions.

### **Who Constitutes the 'Military Elites'?**

Firstly, the somewhat vague term 'military elites' needs to be defined. It has already appeared in the scholarship, most notably in Glushanin's work, who uses the term Военная Знать<sup>1</sup>. The German translator of his work chose the term 'Militäradel', which refers more directly to aristocracy, a term which is close, but not entirely synonymous. The term 'aristocracy' usually bears a specific meaning and indicates a group that is generally firmly embedded in the social structures. It tends to have strong group cohesion and common identity due to its special status, traditions, and function that generally stem from a long history of its prominence in society. The term aristocracy understood in such a way could not be used to describe the group of prominent military

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<sup>1</sup> Е.П. Глушанин, *Военная знать ранней Византии*, Барнаул 1991

commanders in the fifth century. The aforementioned group was very diverse and fluid, examples of its members rising up to senior offices thanks to grand achievements were commonplace; so were plain, uneventful careers forgotten by history. That being said, a similarity of station and situation was certainly a unifying factor, one that is best encompassed in the broad term used by this work – the military elites.

### ***Magistri Militum* and their Forces**

The members of this group were primarily those who served the Empire in the rank of *magistri militum* (masters of army or arms), the highest military office of the Eastern Roman Empire; they were the commanders of the field armies. The title itself was created by the emperor Constantine to whom many of the reforms of the late Roman army are attributed. The field army accompanying the emperor, *comitatus*, was greatly expanded by permanently attaching to it frontier units. To lead the new force, the emperor created two new offices, *magister equitum* leading cavalry units and *magister peditum* in charge of the infantry. This system slowly went through transformations over the course time, eventually leading to the stationing of field armies in different regions of the Empire and permanently creating territorial offices of *magistri militum*. That is the state of affairs recorded by the *Notitia Dignitatum*, which is the main source of information on the Late Roman military<sup>2</sup>.

According to it, there were five field armies in the Eastern Roman Empire, each commanded by a *magister militum*. One was stationed in the East, likely in Antioch, led by *magister militum per Orientem*. Two were located in the Balkans, one in Thrace in Marcianopolis, and one in Illyria. Two armies were stationed ‘in the presence’ of the emperor, by the capital city. Those were generally the forces of the highest quality, meant to be used in offensive campaigns, and consequently the offices of their commanders, *magistri militum praesentales*, were considered the most prestigious of all the senior commanding posts.

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<sup>2</sup> On the topic of Late Roman Army, cf. A.H.M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire 284–602. A Social, Economic and Administrative Survey*, vol. I–II, Oxford 1964, p. 607–686; W. Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army 284–1081*, Stanford 1995; Y. Bohec, *L’Armée Romaine sous le Bas-Empire*, Paris 2006; M. Whitby, *Army and Society in the Late Roman World: A Context for Decline?*, [in:] *A Companion to the Roman Army*, ed. P. Erdkamp, Oxford 2007, p. 515–531; M. Whitby, *The Army c. 420–602*, [in:] *CAH*, vol. XIV, ed. A. Cameron, B. Ward-Perkins, M. Whitby, Cambridge 2008, p. 288–314; H. Elton, *Military Forces*, [in:] *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Warfare*, vol. II, ed. P. Sabin, H. van Wees, M. Whitby, Cambridge 2008, p. 270–309, H. Elton, *Military Developments in the Fifth Century*, [in:] *Companion to the Age of Attila*, ed. M. Maas, Cambridge 2015, p. 125–139.

Each of those armies counted approximately 20,000 soldiers<sup>3</sup>. They were generally of a higher quality than the various border and garrison troops spread on the frontier, and were meant to be the main force that would react to foreign incursions, as well as being capable of offensive operations. However, the realities of the fifth century sometimes challenged those assumptions. The aforementioned strength was nominal, as losses in many wars, attrition, desertions, and corruption meant that it was unlikely that the army would keep the numbers that *Notitia* officially recognized. Budget constraints and problems with finding suitable recruits were the primary obstacles for the government in making up for the losses. Furthermore, lower quality frontier troops were commonly used as *ad hoc* replacements.

In addition to the armies, *magistri militum* were expected to command Imperial fleet during major campaigns. In the discussed period naval operations again became an important aspect of warfare due to the emergence of a new danger, the Vandals, who terrorized the *Mediterraneum* with their corsair raids<sup>4</sup>.

### **The *Foederati*<sup>5</sup> and *Bucellari*<sup>6</sup>**

One of the solutions to the dangers facing the Empire was the practice of using allied barbarian tribes in the defence system. This was done under an agreement, called *foedus*, that obliged the allied tribe to fight against the enemies of the Empire, for which it received land and tribute. The primary difference between relying on those tribes and the recruitment of barbarians into the Roman army is that in case of the former, the warriors remained under the command of their tribal leaders and were not included directly in the Roman military system. It was a much more common practice to employ *foederati* in the military forces in the West, due to the fact that maintaining a regular Roman army was much more of a problem there than in the East. However, the conclusion of a *foedus* was also a means to normalize the relationship between the Empire and the barbarians. Most often the *foederati* tribes were settled on the frontier to serve as a buffer against foreign

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<sup>3</sup> W. Treadgold, *Byzantium...*, p. 63.

<sup>4</sup> On the Roman fleet in this period, cf. M. Redde, *Mare Nostrum. Les infrastructures, le dispositif et l'histoire de la marine militaire sous l'empire romain*, Roma 1986, p. 647–652; Pryor J.H., Jeffreys E.M., *The Age of Dromon. The Byzantine Navy ca. 500-1204*, Leiden 2006, p. 123-161.

<sup>5</sup> T. Stickler, *Foederati*, [in:] *A Companion to the Roman Army*, ed. P. Erdkamp, Oxford 2007, p. 495–514. Ralph Scharf (*Foederati. Von der völkerrechtlichen Kategorie zur byzantinischen Truppengattung*, Wien 2001, p. 52–55) claims this formation existed in the East only since the reign of emperor Zeno, however, there are sources that contradict this claim, cf. Malalas, XIV, 40.

<sup>6</sup> H.J. Diesner, *Die Bucellariertum von Stilicho und Sarus bis auf Aetius (454/455)*, K 54, 1972, p. 321–350; O. Schmitt, *Die Bucellari. Eine Studie zum militärischen Gefolgschaftswesen in der Spätantike*, Ty 9, 1994, p. 147–174.

incursions. However, there were instances when the interests of the leaders of *foederati* tribes and those of the Romans collided, sometimes resulting in open conflicts.

It is of note, that usually the intermediaries between the tribe and the emperor were *magistri militum*<sup>7</sup>. This contributed to their influence and at times meant that the tribe developed a much closer bond with the general, than it was bound to the Empire. That allowed the generals to use such *foederati* as a political asset. In the East, this was most notably the case with the Thracian Goths and their relationship with Plintha and later Aspar<sup>8</sup>.

It was also relatively common practice for the powerful military commanders, who had such opportunities, to employ private retinues. Such forces were called *bucellari*, and undoubtedly contributed to the status and power of those who possessed them. Some powerful generals, most notably Flavius Zeno or Aspar, were known to have had considerable retinues of loyal followers. It must have been an important asset, as emperor Leo forbade the possession of such armed bands when he was in conflict with Aspar<sup>9</sup>.

Some ancient authors lamented the diminishing capabilities of the Late Roman army<sup>10</sup>, and the common perception is that the Roman military in the fifth century was a shade of former self. However, despite the problems, the Late Roman legions remained a competent fighting force. Most of the successes achieved by the foes of the Empire were only possible when the Roman forces were absent. It was arguably the Roman army and its ability to adapt that allowed the Empire to weather the storm of the turbulent period of migrations.

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<sup>7</sup> M. Wilczyński, *Germanie w służbie zachodniorzymskiej w V w. n.e.: studium historyczno-prosopograficzne*, Kraków 2001, p. 53.

<sup>8</sup> A. Urbaniec, *Wpływ patrycjusza Aspara na cesarską elekcję Leona*, USS 11, 2011, p. 188-189; A. Laniado, *Aspar and his Phoideratoi: John Malalas on a Special Relationship*, [in:] *Governare e riformare l'Impero al momento della sua divisione. Oriente, Occidente, Illirico*, ed. U. Roberto, L. Mecella, Roma 2016, p. 325–344.

<sup>9</sup> CJ, IX, 12, 10. Cf. E.A. Thompson, *The Isaurians under Theodosius II*, Her 68, 1946, p. 25.

<sup>10</sup> Vegetius, I, 28. He does, however, recognise the improvements in certain fields, especially in the cavalry, cf. Vegetius, III, 26. On the topic of Late Roman heavy cavalry, cf. M. Mielczarek, *Cataphracti and Clibanarii: Studies on the Heavy Armoured Cavalry of the Ancient World*, Łódź 1993, especially p. 73–85; V. Nikorono, *Cataphracti, Catafractarii and Clibanarii: Another Look at the Old Problem of their Identifications*, [in:] *Military Archeology. Weaponry and Warfare in the Historical and Social Perspective*, ed. G.V. Vilinbakhov, V.M. Masson, St. Petersburg 1998, p. 131–138.

## The Changes in the Military System

The adaptability of the Roman defence system arguably concerned its chain of command as well. The state and composition of the Roman army and its command in the fourth century<sup>11</sup> was completely different from that in the sixth century<sup>12</sup>. Thus it would be unwise to assume that the Late Roman military order of battle, recorded in the previously mentioned *Notitia Dignitatum*, was static over the discussed period. Tracking the changes is, however, difficult. The eastern part of the document was not updated after ca. 395<sup>13</sup>, and any changes to the Eastern Roman military system would not be recorded in it. As a result, this problem warrants a more detailed look.

The office that very likely underwent some changes was the Thracian mastery of arms. Some scholars have argued that it was created years before the events pertinent to this dissertation<sup>14</sup>. However, it must have been a temporary measure, or the office was disbanded, since there is no evidence for its existence under the reign of Arcadius<sup>15</sup>. Alexander Demandt assumes the office was created, or rather transformed from the *comitiva Thraciae* during the reign of Arcadius, or just after his death<sup>16</sup>. Evgeniy Glushanin links it to *praefect* Anthemius and his attempts to strengthen the borders of the Empire. It is very much possible that the Thracian mastery was

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<sup>11</sup> On the formation of Late Roman army, cf. W. S e s t o n, *Dioclétien et la Tétrarchie*, Paris 1946, p. 295–320; W.

K u h o f f, *Diokletian und die Epoche die Tetrarchie. Das römische Reich zwischen Krisenbewältigung und Neuaufbau (284–313 n. Chr.)*, Frankfurt am Main 2001, p. 411–483.

<sup>12</sup> On the Byzantine forces in the sixth century, cf. C. K o e h n, *Justinian und die Armee des frühen Byzanz*, Berlin 2018. For a similar work to this one (however, different in scope and focus, partially due to much better source coverage of the period) but on the commanders of the sixth century, cf. D.A. P a r n e l l, *Justinian's Men. Careers and Relationships of Byzantine Army Officers 518-610*, London 2017.

<sup>13</sup> M. K u l i k o w s k i, *Notitia Dignitatum as a Historical Source*, *Hi* 49, 2000, p. 372.

<sup>14</sup> Ernst S t e i n (*Histoire du Bas-Empire*, Paris 1959, p. 123 n. 149) claims that the Thracian mastery was created around 380. He infers that from Zosimus (IV, 27), who claims that Theodosius increased the number of generals from two to five. This information has to be however treated very carefully. Firstly, the historian mentions that only to criticize the emperor Theodosius I and claims that it only caused unnecessary expenses for the state. Secondly, it should be noted that the number of *magistri militum* at that point was changing according to military needs, therefore it cannot be taken as a proof of the state of affairs. Irrespectively from Stein, Arnold J o n e s (*The Later...*, p. 158) mentions *magister militum per Thracias* in 386, a certain Flavius Promotus, who was dispatched against an Ostrogoth Odotheus. However, according to the original passage in Z o s i m u s (IV, 35) he could have been a commander of infantry (most likely *magister peditum*) in Thrace, meaning where him and his forces were stationed, not necessarily the office of Thracian territorial command.

<sup>15</sup> Е.П. Г л у ш а н и н, *Военная...*, p. 96; A. D e m a n d t, *Magister militum*, [in:] *RE*, t. 12 suppl., 1970, p. 737.

<sup>16</sup> A. D e m a n d t, *Magister...*, p. 744.

recreated *ad hoc* to counteract the invasion of Uldin in 408 or 409<sup>17</sup>, but afterwards remained a stable part of the system.

The example of the *magister militum* of Thrace goes to show that there were changes to the organization of the Eastern Roman military command structure during the period with which this dissertation is concerned. Considering how early the Thracian mastery was established, this realization does not impact the narrative, even if it stands in contrast with some of the established scholarship, as it existed for the greater part of the discussed period. There is however a similar subject, which appears more contentious.

The Illyrian mastery of arms is the fifth one named in the *Notitia Dignitatum*. Thus it must have existed at the time of the writing of the document, and the established position in the literature is that it was a stable part of the Eastern Roman military system.

However, the existence of that office later in the fifth century is almost untraceable in the sources. Martindale counts four Illyrian *magistri militum* in that period<sup>18</sup>, however, out of them three could have just as well served in different offices, and the only ‘certain’ one, Arintheos, referenced in the sources in 449, is directly mentioned as a commander of the forces that were in Illyria at the time<sup>19</sup>. That means he could have served in almost any other territorial mastery, could have been a *magister militum vacans*, or even just a *comes rei militaris*. The diocese of Illyricum was transferred to the Western Roman Empire after the death of Theodosius I, however, it was returned later in 437 as part of an agreement after the Eastern intervention against usurper John. The province often fell victim to barbarian raids, and much of the Illyrian territories were captured and settled by the Huns and their allies. In the 450s the coastal territories of Illyricum achieved a *de facto* independence, being ruled by the local warlord, Marcellinus of Dalmatia. It is possible that he later received the mostly honorary title of *magister militum* of Dalmatia or Illyria<sup>20</sup>. However, he made use of his own troops and was largely independent politically.

Considering the political instability of that region, as well the silence of the sources, it appears that the title of *magister militum* of Illyria did not exist as part of the Eastern Roman chain of command for the majority of the described period<sup>21</sup>. It is most likely that the Illyrian army was disbanded when that territory was given to the Western Roman Empire, and as opposed to the

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<sup>17</sup> It would also explain why resorting to military action was not deemed the best option, but subterfuge. The newly created command was just too weak to counter the Hunnic forces.

<sup>18</sup> *PLRE*, vol. II, p. 1291.

<sup>19</sup> *Priscus*, fr. 11: τὸν ἐν Ἰλλυριοῖς ταγμάτων ἡγούμενον.

<sup>20</sup> F. W o z n i a k, *East Rome...*, p. 359; P. M a c G e o r g e, *Late...*, p. 40–41; J.B. B u r y, *History...*, p. 333.

<sup>21</sup> Alexander D e m a n d t (*Magister...*, p. 737) observes the relative silence and lack of information regarding the Illyrian mastery, however, claims it was likely due to the hardships of keeping records in such uncertain times.

Thracian army, it was never permanently reinstated<sup>22</sup>. Thus, in the process of assigning generals to their posts the author assumes that for the majority of the discussed period, there were four permanent, territorial offices of *magistri militum* with corresponding field armies.

### **Tenures and *Magistri Militum Vacantes***

Another important consideration that should be taken into account when researching the military elites is the fact that military offices in the Roman Empire were held for a limited time. Unfortunately, there is no legislation on this matter, but it appears from the general observation that in the fifth century it was around five years<sup>23</sup>. Slight deviations to that rule were likely possible, however, considering that the office came with benefits, both in terms of wage as well as influence, it was in everyone's interest that the rules were followed. As Arnold Jones observes, exceptionally long tenures, or ones that were cut short, probably coincided with some extraordinary circumstances<sup>24</sup>.

The rigidity of that system could sometimes be a problem when faced with the realities of military operations. For that reason there was a practice of creating temporary military offices, called *vacantes*. *Magistri militum vacantes* were prominent especially in offensive operations, or any other campaigns that needed additional commanding officers irrespective of territorial divisions. They could also be appointed for political reasons. Their order in the hierarchy of offices was established clearly by the legislation of Theodosius in 441, likely in the anticipation of the expedition against the Vandals<sup>25</sup>.

The existence of that practice constitutes another problem in assigning territorial offices to generals. In essence, there is often little evidence that would allow to determine whether an individual held a permanent post, or was assigned one *vacans*. The above considerations have been taken into account in the research and in many cases, which are discussed in the following subchapter on the sources. This is one of the major reasons why in some cases the list of *magistri militum* in this work deviates from the established publications.

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<sup>22</sup> There is a possibility, that Leo tried to reinstate the office at some point in 460's, to appoint Marcellinus as one of the *magistri militum*, cf. p. 125 of this work.

<sup>23</sup> Е.П. Глушанин, *Военная...*, p. 24.

<sup>24</sup> A.H.M. Jones, *The Decline of the Ancient World*, London 1966, p. 145-146.

<sup>25</sup> *CJ*, XII, 8, 2.

## Military Elites in Politics and Society

Being a general of one of the Eastern Roman field armies brought a certain status and influence. It can be assumed that *magistri militum* were commonly present at the court of the emperor, taking part in *consistorium*<sup>26</sup> or otherwise advising the emperor, especially on military matters and foreign policy. This must have been most often the case in respect of those commanding the armies ‘in presence’ of the emperor, due to their proximity to the capital, which partially explains the prestige associated with such function.

Furthermore, even if the times of the Roman conquests had been long gone, the martial achievements were still held in high regard. Thus, successful generals were often rewarded with high honours, such as consulate, in recognition for their service. Those who were able to achieve that became as a result prominent members of the Senate and ranked high in the imperial hierarchy<sup>27</sup>.

In effect, the members of the military elite could become important figures in cultural and social life of the Eastern Roman Empire. Due to fragmentary sources, however, there is only limited evidence of their involvement in matters unrelated to military and politics. Aspar was recorded to have been involved in mitigating the effects of the fire that ravaged Constantinople<sup>28</sup>. The generals were also responsible for founding public utilities. The remains of a water reservoir built by Aspar can be seen in Istanbul to this day<sup>29</sup>. The inscription on the floor of a bathhouse in Seleucia in Isauria indicates that it was renovated by the wife of Flavius Zeno<sup>30</sup>.

The generals also exchanged letters with important intellectual figures of the time, as exemplified by several letters addressed to various members of the military elite by Theodoret of Cyrillus. Some commanders were also engaged in religious matters; most notably Dionysius and Anatolius on the orthodox side, while Plintha and Aspar were influential leaders of the Arian religious minority.

This cursory glance shows that the military elite was a prominent group in the Late Antiquity and their involvement in the life the Easter Roman Empire was not limited to military

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. A.H.M. Jones, *The Later...*, p. 333–341. *Consistorium* was an assembly of emperor and officials. In the discussed period it seems that it had mostly ceremonial functions, however, the emperor still met with the selected group of higher officials on a regular basis. Cf. p. 99–100

<sup>27</sup> Cf. p. 103 of this work.

<sup>28</sup> Candidus, fr. 1. On the fire, cf. Evagrius, *HE*, 12, 3.

<sup>29</sup> *Chronicon Paschale*, a. 459.

<sup>30</sup> Mentioned in the inscription as ‘dear to Ares’. Cf. K. Feld, *Barbarische Bürger: Die Isaurier und das Römische Reich*, Berlin 2005, p. 221; A.D. Lee, *Theodosius and his Generals*, [in:] *Theodosius II. Rethinking the Roman Empire in Late Antiquity*, ed. Ch. Kelly, Cambridge 2013, p. 98.

service. Naturally those examples do not exhaust all the ways in which generals impacted the workings of the Eastern Roman state. The exploration of various venues through which members of the military elite amassed power and exercised influence will constitute a major part of the following narrative.

### **The Overview of the Sources**

Unfortunately, the research of the topic in question is limited by the availability of the sources. Even when establishing basic information on the Eastern Roman generals, the researcher has to realize there are only singular documental sources for the military elite in the period between 408 and 474 in Eastern Roman Empire. The most important one is the previously mentioned *Notitia Dignitatum*<sup>31</sup>, a list of offices of the Roman Empire. It is indispensable for any research of the military and administration in Late Antiquity. This document contains detailed lists of high military offices, including all posts of *magistri militum* alongside the units under their command. However, there are multiple problems with it, most of which were already discussed in previous parts of the chapter. In addition to *Notitia*, there are collections of laws, the codes of Theodosius and Justinian, which contain legislation pertaining to military matters, sometimes addressed to field commanders. That being said, compilations of laws provide only fragmentary information, only in regards to specific circumstances in which these laws were issued. It is far from representative as far as the development of the military elite and its influence on the Eastern Roman Empire is concerned. The documentary sources in this case are invaluable, but woefully insufficient for nearly any topic concerning the main part of the narrative. Thus, for the most part, they serve as credible but complementary sources.

Most of the information regarding the military elites has to be discerned from various narrative sources. Since the interests of ancient authors usually concerned political and military events, and the period in question was a turbulent one, the members of military elite are often recorded on the pages of histories and chronicles.

Probably the most important one for this period is the *History* of Priscus of Panium<sup>32</sup>, Eastern Roman historian and diplomat. This classicizing work concentrated mainly on the foreign policy of the Eastern Roman Empire. He was a state official involved in politics and diplomacy of

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<sup>31</sup> M. Kulikowski, *Notitia...*, p. 358–377.

<sup>32</sup> In the sources there are three different versions of the title and it is impossible to say what was it in reality. Thus, from now on I will continue to refer to it by that name for consistency sake. Cf. R.C. Blockley, *Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire*, t. I, Liverpool 1981, p. 49.

the time, thus likely had a very good understanding of the events that this work concerns<sup>33</sup>. Unfortunately, Priscus' *History* did not survive in full, but only in fragments collected in *excerpta de legationibus* of Constantine Porphyrogennetos and some references of other historians who used it. Thankfully, almost all authors who later wrote about the events of the fifth century used his work in some capacity.

One of those was famous Procopius of Caesarea, the author of *History of the Wars*<sup>34</sup>. Even though it concentrates on the conflicts fought by the emperor Justinian, the extensive digressions and references provide quite detailed information on the earlier periods, especially on the campaigns against the Vandals. That being said, the historian did likely modify the original account by Priscus to suit the needs of his narrative<sup>35</sup>. Priscus' *History* was also used by Antiochene authors: John Malalas and John of Antioch. The former was the author of *Chronographia* that described the events from the creation of the world to ca. 563-574<sup>36</sup>. It was a popular work concentrating primarily on the history of his hometown, sometimes confused on more distant events, however, still able to provide valuable and often unique information. The work of John of Antioch

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<sup>33</sup> On Priscus and his work, cf. *PLRE*, vol. II, p. 906 (s.v. *Priscus 1*); R.C. Blockley, *Fragmentary...*, p. 49–70; R.C. Blockley, *The developement of Greek Historiography. Priscus, Malchus and Candidus*, [in:] *Greek and Roman Historiography in Late Antiquity. Fourth to Sixth Century A.D.*, ed. G. Marasco, Boston 2003, p. 289–312; D. Rohrbacher, *Historians of Late Antiquity*, London 2002, p. 82–92; B. Baldwin, *Priscus of Panium*, B 50, 1980, p. 18–61. There are also several important works, focusing on certain problems – B. Croke, *The Context and Date of Priscus Fragment 6*, CP 78, 1983, p. 297–308; D. Brodka, *Priskos und der Feldzug des Basiliskos gegen Geiserich (468)*, [in:] *Griechische Profanhistoriker des fünften nachchristlichen Jahrhunderts*, ed. T. Stickler, B. Bleckmann, Stuttgart 2014, p. 103–120; D. Brodka, *Priskos von Panion und Kaiser Marcian. Eine Quellenuntersuchung zu Procop. 3,4,1–11, Evagr. HE 2,1, Theoph. AM 5943 und Nic. Kall. HE 15,1*, Ml 9, 2012, p. 145–162.

<sup>34</sup> A. Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century*, London 1996; A. Kaldellis, *Procopius of Caesarea: Tyranny, History and Philosophy at the End of Antiquity*, Philadelphia 2004; D. Brodka, *Die Geschichtsphilosophie in der spätantiken Historiographie. Studien zu Prokopios von Kaisareia, Agathias von Myrina und Theophylaktos Simokattes*, Frankfurt am Main 2004, p. 14–151; For more thorough, recent (2003-2014) bibliography on this essential Byzantine historian alongside with a commentary, cf. G. Greatrex, *Perceptions of Procopius in Recent Scholarship*, HOJ 8, 2014, p. 76–121.

<sup>35</sup> A. Cameron, *Procopius...*, p. 211.

<sup>36</sup> Elisabeth Jeffreys (*Malalas' Sources*, [in:] *Studies in John Malalas*, ed. E. Jeffreys, B. Croke, R. Scott, Sydney 1990, p. 1–91) suggests that Malalas could have used Priscus' source via Epiphanius or directly. On Malalas and his work, cf. *Studies in John Malalas*, ed. E. Jeffreys, B. Croke, R. Scott, Sydney 1990; B. Croke, *Introduction*, [in:] *The Chronicle of John Malalas*, ed. E. Jeffreys, M. Jeffreys, R. Scott, Sydney 1986, p. XXI–XLI; M. Meier, C. Drohisn, p. Priwitzer, *Einleitung*, [in:] Johannes Malalas, *Weltchronik*, ed. C. Thurn, M. Meier, Stuttgart 2009, p. 1–37; E. Jeffreys, *The Beginning of Byzantine Chronography: John Malalas*, [in:] *Greek and Roman Historiography in Late Antiquity. Fourth to Sixth Century A.D.*, ed. G. Marasco, Boston 2003, p. 497–527; M. Kokoszko, *Descriptions of personal appearance in John Malalas' Chronicle*, Łódź 1998, p. 6–11.

unfortunately survived only in fragments, but because of his extensive usage of Priscus' work it is being used to reconstruct the latter parts of his *History*<sup>37</sup>.

Priscus was also extensively used by Theophanes the Confessor in his *Chronographia*<sup>38</sup>, when describing the events of the fifth century. He was a monk living at the turn of the eighth and ninth centuries, who continued the work of his friend, George Synkellos, of writing a history from the creation of the world<sup>39</sup>. Due to him being so distant to the events he described his account is prone to misunderstandings and inaccuracies, however, he seems to have related the narrative of his sources relatively directly and with little conscious alterations of his own.

Another historian that needs to be mentioned is Jordanes, the sixth century Gothic monk and author of *Getica* and *Romana*<sup>40</sup>. The former source is especially valuable, as it focuses on the history of the Gothic peoples. Thus provides many unique information, however, its veracity may at times be questionable due to pro-Gothic bias. It is also likely that Jordanes used Priscus as a source.

Unfortunately, another source that certainly would have been very helpful in researching this topic, the *History* of Candidus<sup>41</sup>, has not been used as extensively as that of Priscus. Only a short synopsis written by Photius remains, despite its brevity, still invaluable for understanding the reign of Leo.

Some information regarding the later periods of Leo's reign can be found in partially surviving *Byzantine History* of Malchus of Philadelphia, however, this historian focused primarily on the periods beyond the scope of this work<sup>42</sup>.

Even though they appear unrelated to the events at hand, western chronicles also provide some important data, especially for Eastern military involvement in the West. Out of those the

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<sup>37</sup> R.C. Blockley, *Fragmentary...*, p. 114.

<sup>38</sup> A. Kazhdan, *A History of Byzantine Literature (650–850)*, Athens 1998, p. 205–234.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. A. Koma, *In search of Syncellus' and Theophanes' own words: the authorship of the Chronographia revisited*, TM 19, 2015, p. 73–92.

<sup>40</sup> W. Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History (A.D. 550–800). Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede, and Paul the Deacon*, New Jersey 1988, p. 20–111; B. Croke, *Latin Historiography and the Barbarian Kingdoms*, [in:] *Greek and Roman Historiography in Late Antiquity. Fourth to Sixth Century A.D.*, ed. G. Marasco, Boston 2003, p. 367–375; R. Kasperski, *Teodoryk Wielki i Kasjodor. Studia nad tworzeniem „tradycji dynastycznej Amalów”*, Kraków 2013.

<sup>41</sup> H. Brandt, *Zur historiographischen konzeption des Isaurers Candidus*, [in:] *Griechische Profanhistoriker des fünften nachchristlichen Jahrhunderts*, ed. T. Stickler, B. Bleckmann, Stuttgart 2014, p. 162–167; M. Meier, *Candidus: um die Geschichte der Isauriers*, [in:] *Griechische Profanhistoriker des fünften nachchristlichen Jahrhunderts*, ed. T. Stickler, B. Bleckmann, Stuttgart 2014, p. 171–193; R.C. Blockley, *The development...*, p. 312–314.

<sup>42</sup> R.C. Blockley, *Fragmentary...*, p. 71–74; H.U. Wiemer, *Malchos von Philadelphia. Die Vandalen und das Ende des Kaisertums im Westen*, [in:] *Griechische Profanhistoriker...*, p. 121–126.

primary ones are the work of Spanish bishop, Hydatius<sup>43</sup>, and a secretary of the Pope, Prosper of Aquitaine<sup>44</sup>. Those accounts are supplemented by panegyrics of the poet Sidonius<sup>45</sup>, especially important is the one on emperor Anthemius, who was, before his accession in Rome, an Eastern Roman general.

Around the same time in Dalmatia Marcellinus Comes wrote his Chronicle<sup>46</sup>. It is another important account, especially since it reports many unique details of the history of the author's home region, and he used otherwise unknown Byzantine chronicles that did not survive to our times.

Another important group of sources are the various Christian texts, Church histories and hagiographies, focusing mostly on the religious developments, however, on the background of socio-political history. Thus they still provide valuable information regarding the military elite, not only in areas regarding the generals' relationships with the Church and religious convictions. For example, the primary source for Theodosius' first war against Persia is the *Church History* of Socrates Scholasticus<sup>47</sup>. His narrative ends however in 439. Contemporary to Socrates' work was *Church History* of Sozomen<sup>48</sup>, which reaches until about 425. Another, much later *Church History* that bears mentioning was written by Evagrius Scholasticus, whose work comprised of six books, covering

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<sup>43</sup> On Hydatius and his work, cf. C. Cardelle de Hartman, *Philologische Studien zur Chronik des Hydatius von Chaves*, Stuttgart 1994; R.W. Burgess, *The Chronicle of Hydatius and Consularia Constantinopolitana*, Oxford 1993, p. 3–68; H. Börm, *Hydatius von Aquae Flaviae und die Einheit des Römischen Reiches im 5. Jahrhundert*, [in:] *Griechische Profanhistoriker des fünften nachchristlichen Jahrhunderts*, ed. T. Stickler, B. Bleckmann, Stuttgart 2014, p. 195–214; G. Zecchini, *Latin Historiography: Jerome, Orosius and the Western Chroniclers*, [in:] *Greek and Roman Historiography in Late Antiquity. Fourth to Sixth Century A.D.*, ed. G. Marasco, Boston 2003, p. 342–344; A. Gillett, *Envoys and Political Communication in Late Antique West 411–533*, Cambridge 2003, p. 36–83.

<sup>44</sup> J.M. Kotter, M. Becker, *Einleitung*, [in:] Prosper Tiro, *Chronik. Laterculus Regum Vandalorum et Alanorum*, ed. J.M. Kotter, M. Becker, Paderborn 2016, p. 3–60; *PLRE*, vol. II, p. 926–927, (s.v. *Prosper Tiro*); G. Zecchini, *Latin...*, p. 338–340.

<sup>45</sup> J. Harries, *Sidonius Apollinaris and the Fall of Rome AD 407–485*, Oxford 1994; D. Alvarez Jimenez, *Sidonius Apollinaris and the Fourth Punic War*, [in:] *New Perspectives on Late Antiquity*, ed. D.H. de la Fuente, Cambridge 2011, p. 158–172; J. Styka, *Sidoniusz Apollinaris i kultura literacka w Galii V wieku*, Kraków 2008; A. Horvath, *The Education of Sidonius Apollinaris in the Light of his Citations*, *ACUSD* 36, 2000, p. 151–162; D. Alvarez Jimenez, *Sidonius Apollinaris and the Fourth Punic War*, [in:] *New Perspectives on Late Antiquity*, ed. D.H. de la Fuente, Cambridge 2011, s. 158–172.

<sup>46</sup> B. Croke, *Count Marcellinus and his Chronicle*, New York 2001.

<sup>47</sup> Th. Urbainczyk, *Socrates of Constantinople. Historian of Church and State*, Ann Arbor 1997; G. Chesnut, *The First Christian Histories. Eusebius, Socrates, Sozomen, Theodoret and Evagrius*, Paris 1986, p. 167–189.

<sup>48</sup> G. Chesnut, *The First...*, p. 192–200.

the period from 431 to 593<sup>49</sup>. What makes his work the more valuable is the fact that he is also one of the authors dependent on Priscus.

In addition to those works, one needs to mention a very important and informative hagiographical text, the *Life of St. Daniel the Stylite*<sup>50</sup>. Even though it is an overtly religious source, due to the involvement of the saint in political matters as an advisor of the emperor Leo, and the interests of the author, it records many political events, especially those in relation to the conflict between Leo and Aspar and rise of Zeno.

This list does not exhaust all the sources that have been used in this work. Some singular remarks regarding issues of interest to this work can also be found in *Chronicon Paschale*, *Church Histories* of Philostorgius and Theodoret, works of John Zonaras, *De Magistratibus* of John the Lydian, *History* of Zosimus, Armenian histories of Yeghishe, Moses of Khoren and Ghazar of Parp'i. The letters of Theodoret of Cyrrhus, primarily those addressed to the generals, are also helpful in painting the full picture.

The above overview serves not only to present the corpus of the sources that was used as a basis of this dissertation, but also illustrates a major problem facing the research of its topic. There is not one source that would provide a comprehensive basis for the narrative, and instead, there is a variety of texts, often surviving only in fragments, written from different perspectives, focusing on different things and created in different time periods and places. While seemingly it would appear that it could allow for extensive cross-referencing and view from different angles, unfortunately, that is rarely the case. Many events are only reported in single sources and the narratives tend to overlap only when mentioning the most famous events. Considering the focus of this work is a very specific aspect of the Late Antique history, there is rarely a satisfactory amount of information at our disposal.

In addition, it has to be realised that none of the sources specialise in the topic of the military of the fifth century<sup>51</sup>. The only author that was a member of the military (and even him in

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<sup>49</sup> P. Allen, *Evagrius Scholasticus the Church Historian*, Leuven 1981, p. 1–20; M. Whitby, *Introduction*, [in:] *The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius Scholasticus*, ed. M. Whitby, Liverpool 2000, p. XIII–XLIII; O. Jurewicz, *Historia literatury bizantyńskiej*, Wrocław 1984, p. 46.

<sup>50</sup> R. Kosiński, *Holiness and Power. Constantinopolitan Holy Men and Authority in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century*, Berlin 2016, p. 119–129

<sup>51</sup> There is one source in that period that vaguely fits that description, a dissertation on military matters written by Vegetius. It is a very important source on the Late Roman army, armaments, training regime, etc. however, the author was not a military professional, so his analysis is not without fault. Unfortunately, for this dissertation it is of very limited use, due to being created in the West, being filled with anachronisms and taking little interest in the topic of the chain of command. For more information on Vegetius and his work, cf. N.P. Milner, *Introduction*, [in:] *Vegetius*:

the loose sense) was Procopius, who writes from the perspective of almost a century after the events he is describing. Priscus, due to his involvement in the state structures and diplomatic experience probably had a good idea of the chain of command, but the military is not the focus of his work. Other authors are only further detached from military knowledge and usually also more distant chronologically.

This causes numerous problems when trying to establish the information base for the topic. For example, most of the sources do not use technical terms. The most common term used to denote a military commander is ‘*strategos*’<sup>52</sup>. Many modern scholars seem to assume that whenever it is used, it signifies specifically the *magister militum*, however, it is most likely a misinterpretation. To give an analogy, when a modern news outlet, or even a scholar, uses the word ‘general’, unless it is of utmost importance to their narrative, they would not specify whether they mean ‘brigadier general’, ‘lieutenant general’, ‘general major’, ‘general’, or the ‘general of the army’<sup>53</sup>. Thus, unless the source in question is very specific, which would be a rare occurrence, or a legal text with clear technical term used, the general assumption should be that the sources are vague when referring to military ranks.

This is one of the primary reasons why this dissertation does not aim to create a prosopography of *magistri militum*, but instead focuses on presenting the military elites and their influence, as well as their impact on the politics of the time, on the background of political events of the fifth century, during the reigns of Theodosius II, Marcian, and Leo.

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*Epitome of Military Science*, ed. N.P. Milner, Liverpool 1996, p. XIII–XLIII; F.L. Müller, *Einleitung*, [in:] *Publii Flavii Vegetii Renati, Epitoma rei militaris*, ed. F.L. Müller, Stuttgart 1997, p. 11–26.

<sup>52</sup> Which simply means ‘commander’.

<sup>53</sup> As per US army officer ranks.

## Chapter I - The Military Elites during the Reign of Theodosius II

The Eastern Roman Empire entered the 5<sup>th</sup> century facing a major political crisis involving the military. The person at the centre of those events was a military commander of Gothic origins, Gainas. It started with the revolt of the Goths in 399 in Phrygia, which grew serious due to incompetent handling of the rebels by the general Leo, who was sent to suppress it. This fact was used as a pretext by Gainas, who was the other commander sent to quell it, to dispose of eunuch Eutropius, who was a grey eminence at the court since 395. Eutropius had enemies at the court, thus his fall came about with little issues, however, it turned out, that the person who assumed power in Constantinople was certain Aurelian, nominated *praefectus praetorio*, who happened to be a staunch opponent of Gainas, and arguably, Goths in service of the Empire in general<sup>54</sup>. Gainas reacted to that by joining forces with the rebelling Goths, and marched with them at Constantinople. He managed to secure power for about 6 months, after which a popular revolt in the city led to the massacre of the Goths. Gainas escaped, but when he tried to retreat with some of his forces to Asia Minor, he was intercepted by a fleet commanded by Fravitta, who defeated the rebels. Fravitta was then appointed a *magister militum* in Gainas' stead<sup>55</sup>.

The revolt of Gainas had far reaching consequences for the policy of the Eastern Roman Empire. From 401 to the end of Arcadius' reign no law was issued in the name of any *magister militum*<sup>56</sup>. Fravitta, seemingly for no reason, was accused of treason and executed – most likely falling victim to political paranoia, as it appears there was a fear of any military commander gaining influence, no matter how loyal. Furthermore, as Evgeniy Glushanin points out, when Yezdegerd announced himself as the protector of Theodosius II's rights to the throne, the shah named only the Senate as a potential threat to young emperor's rule, and, as the historian accurately points out, omits any military figures which suggests that no member of the military elite wielded enough political power to be of note<sup>57</sup>. This was the background for Theodosius II' accession on the Eastern Roman throne.

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<sup>54</sup> A.H.M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire 284–602. A Social, Economic and Administrative Survey*, vol. I–II, Oxford 1964, p. 202–203.

<sup>55</sup> For an in-depth reconstruction and analysis of those events, cf. G. Albert, *Goten in Konstantinopel*, Wien 1984; J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, *Barbarians and Bishops. Army, Church, and State in the Age of Arcadius and Chrysostom*, Oxford 1991; A. Cameron, J. Long, *Barbarians and Politics at the Court of Arcadius*, Berkeley 1993.

<sup>56</sup> Глушанин Е.П., *Военная знать ранней Византии*, Барнаул 1991, p. 98.

<sup>57</sup> Е.П. Глушанин, *Военная...*, p. 98.

## The Regime of Anthemius

Theodosius was only seven years old when he became the sole *Augustus* of the Eastern Roman Empire<sup>58</sup>. Due to the emperor's infancy the actual power was held however in other people's hand – at first the most important person in the government was certainly the *praefectus praetorio* Anthemius. He originated from an Egyptian family that reached the highest positions in the Empire only two generations ago, as Anthemius' great-grandfather was just a simple sausage-seller. His son, Anthemius' grandfather, Philippus made a great and quick career advancing in imperial offices to the post of *praefectus praetorio* of the East<sup>59</sup>. Anthemius himself also showed a great administrative talent which was reflected in his rapidly progressing career. Probably in 383 he took part in an embassy to Persia, in 400 he is known to have been the *comes sacrarum largitionum*<sup>60</sup>. In 404 he was already the *magister officiorum*, and from the July of 405 the praetorian praefect of the East<sup>61</sup>. He held that office for ten years, being the *de facto* ruler of the Eastern Roman Empire.

He was certainly a very talented administrator. Firstly, what probably should speak the most to our imagination, he was unequivocally praised for his rule<sup>62</sup>, which stands in stark contrast to the previous regime, as well as being a very rare case for a politician in general, since politics tends to be a rather contentious matter regardless of times. He seemed to bring peace among warring political factions. As Kenneth Holm remarks there is no evidence of Anthemius' religious beliefs, however, it is most likely that he was a Christian, yet not a religious fanatic, and open to those who professed the old Hellenic faith<sup>63</sup>. The popularity of his moderate rule was also helped by the tax remissions<sup>64</sup>.

The policies of Anthemius regarding the security of the Empire warrant a more in-depth look. Certainly, this was a major issue. Just after the accession of Theodosius II, the Eastern Roman Empire was in peril from two sides. Firstly, general Stilicho, a protector of the will of emperor Theodosius the Great, wanted to set off to the East to re-establish himself as the guardian of the unified Empire. Luckily for Anthemius' regime, Stilicho did not follow through with his plans because he was informed of dissent among the troops in Ticinum. The reason for that were the

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<sup>58</sup> He held that title since 402 alongside his father Arcadius, cf. R.C. Blockley, *The Dynasty of Theodosius*, [in:] *CAH*, vol. 13, p. 128.

<sup>59</sup> A.H.M. Jones, *The Career of Flavius Philippus*, *Hi* 4, 1955, p. 229-233.

<sup>60</sup> A high ranking official, responsible for financial matters. Cf. *ODB*, p. 486, (s.v. *Comes sacrarum largitionum*)

<sup>61</sup> *PLRE*, vol. II, p. 94 (s.v. Anthemius 1).

<sup>62</sup> K.G. Holm, *Theodosian Empresses: Women and Imperial Dominion in Late Antiquity*, Maryland 1981, p. 87-88.

<sup>63</sup> K.G. Holm, *Theodosian...*, p. 86-87.

<sup>64</sup> *CTh*, XI, 28, 9.

false allegations spread by Olympius that the real motivations behind Stilicho's expedition were to make the general's son, Euphemius, the emperor in Constantinople. The situation deteriorated quickly, developing shortly into a mutiny aimed against Stilicho's supporters who were slaughtered in the process. Despite the pressure from his soldiers, the general did not allow them to act in revenge and attack the mutineers. When he joined the emperor at Ravenna, he learned that Honorius ordered his capture. Having found refuge in a church, he came out as soon as he was given a sworn promise that he would not be harmed. Honorius however broke his oath and ordered his immediate execution. Stilicho accepted the unjust judgement, not allowing his soldiers to resist.

The death of Stilicho had many far-reaching repercussions in the West, yet in the East the news of it must have been met with relief. After a period of tense relations, or even outright hostility, between both parts of the Empire, the situation finally calmed down.

This did not however mean the end of problems. In the same year a Hunnic leader Uldin crossed the Danube and invaded the Balkans. The barbarians seized the opportunity, since most of the Eastern Roman troops were moved to the eastern frontier as the danger of Stilicho's invasion had passed. It seems that the government was aware of the danger, as an order to strengthen the fortifications in Illyricum was issued<sup>65</sup>. It seems that the Romans wanted to rely on the walls of the fortified cities in the region, which were often enough to stop barbarians unskilled in the art of siege warfare. Unfortunately, Uldin managed to capture by treachery at least one fortified settlement, *Castra Martis* in *Dacia ripensis*. We do not know if other fortifications had also fallen, but it is likely that this forced local commanders to hastily gather troops against the Hun menace, since a passage in the contemporary *Commentary on Isaiah* by Jerome suggests that there was a battle which resulted in a defeat of the Roman Army<sup>66</sup>. Regardless of whether the battle took place, the Roman forces were not able to deal with the invasion, and there were attempts to solve the crisis diplomatically. Trying to reach any kind of agreement with Uldin himself, however, failed, and if we are to believe Sozomen, when the boastful barbarian met with the envoys, he pointed at the sun, and claimed he could conquer all the lands under it<sup>67</sup>. Luckily for the Romans, there was some kind of dissent among Uldin's warriors and numerous tribes defected to the emperor's side, forcing Uldin to retreat with his remaining loyal followers.

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<sup>65</sup> *CTb*, XI, 17, 4. The date of the edict has been disputed in the literature; however, I follow the interpretation of Otto Maenchen-Helfen. On that debate, cf. O. Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of Huns. Studies in Their History and Culture*, London 1973, p. 64, n. 243.

<sup>66</sup> O. Maenchen-Helfen, *The World...*, p. 64.

<sup>67</sup> Sozomen, XI, 5.

Undoubtedly in both aforementioned situations the goddess Fortuna kept a vigil over Anthemius' regime, although one cannot exclude the possibility that the dissent in Uldin's camp was inspired from the outside. It would neither be the first, nor the last, operation by the agents of Roman intelligence aimed against powerful barbarian leaders<sup>68</sup>. Unfortunately, due to the nature of those covert actions it is impossible to tell without a doubt whether Anthemius had a hand in successful dealing with Uldin. However, the solution of the third crisis that came up as a result of the death of Arcadius was definitely orchestrated by Anthemius and bears all semblance of his political excellence. As it was mentioned before, the transfer of troops to the east after the danger of the western invasion passed was dictated by the fear of tensions along the Persian border. It was of utmost importance that the Persian Shahenshah Yezdigird accept the rule of Theodosius II. The customary embassy announcing the accession of the new emperor was sent to Persia. Yezdigird was however very receptive to Roman claims, and even announced that he would act as an executor of Arcadius' will, guaranteeing Theodosius' rights to the throne and threatening war against anyone who challenges young emperor's claims<sup>69</sup>. Certainly, the Persian ruler did not want a friendly Theodosian dynasty replaced. Furthermore, the Romans reached out to Yezdigird for his assistance in settling the quarrels between Christians who lived in Persia. It seems that the expectations were even surpassed, as they were not only allowed to hold a synod in 410, which resulted in the Persian Church regulating itself by establishing its dogma as well as confirmation of Isaac as the bishop of Ctesiphon.

All what that meant for Anthemius' regime was ensuring a long-lasting peace with its most powerful neighbour and security on the eastern border. What is more, the praefect took a lesson from the now passed danger of an invasion from the north and took several precautions. In the following years the crowning achievement of his reign was finished, a marvel of late antique architecture – a ring of fortifications around the city<sup>70</sup>. One cannot understate the importance of this project, especially if we consider that the so-called Theodosian Walls rendered Constantinople virtually unconquerable for the next eight hundred years. Furthermore, Anthemius ordered

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<sup>68</sup> Cf. p. 64 and 122 of this work. On the Roman intelligence gathering efforts in general, cf. M. Humphries, *International Relations*, [in:] *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Warfare*, vol. II, ed. P. Sabin, H. van Wees, M. Whitby, Cambridge 2008, p. 250–253; A.D. Lee, *Information and Frontiers: Roman Foreign Relations in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge 1997, p. 175; A. Pikulska-Robaszkiewicz, *Funkcjonariusze służb specjalnych w późnym Cesarstwie – „agentes in rebus”*, PK 37, 1994, p. 151.

<sup>69</sup> Procopius, *History of the Wars*, I, 2, 1-10; Theophanes, AM 5900; K.G. Holm, *Theodosian...*, p. 83.

<sup>70</sup> *CTh*, XV, 1, 51; K.G. Holm, *Theodosian...*, p. 89.

repairing of walls of towns in Thrace, and called for a strengthening and renovation of patrol craft force on the Danube river in 412<sup>71</sup>.

Undoubtedly all those efforts were meant to prevent any further danger of invasion from the north. However, Kenneth G. Holum remarks that another possible consideration was to protect the government in Constantinople from political ambitions by military commanders and their using the field army as a leverage<sup>72</sup>. This had already happened once during the revolt of Gainas and just several years ago in 400, so the memory was still fresh among the ruling civilian elite of the city. The researcher then goes on to point out that Anthemius' 'wall defended a new system of government, in which politicians could control a weak emperor in full security'<sup>73</sup>. Therefore, according to the historian, Anthemius sought to continue the policies of the previous regime in regard to dealing with the military elites, and even expanded on them.

On the other hand, Evgeniy Glushanin argues that Anthemius' policy was that of reconciliation. Contrary to Eutropius, he did not try to concentrate central military offices in his own hands. Thanks to Marcellinus Comes we know of two *magistri militum praesentales* in the year 409, Varanes and Arsacius, both of eastern, Persian or Armenian, origin<sup>74</sup>. Anthemius also seems to have expanded the authority of regional masters of arms. As a matter of fact, the praefect created a new office of *magister militum per Thracias*, who was tasked with the aforementioned strengthening of the northern border. This seems to have been a contentious decision, opposed by *duces* of Moesia and Scythia. Evgeniy Glushanin points out that the recent incursions by the Huns and the problems of the central government in Constantinople allowed them to enjoy a high degree of independence. The law on the reinforcement of the Danube mentions a threat to fine these officials if they disrupt the tasks of the *magister militum*, and another one from 413 equates subordinates of regional masters of soldiers and the *duces*.

Despite undeniable evidence of strengthening the authority of regional *magistri militum* and the defensive system of the Empire, Holum's remarks should not be completely discounted. Certain actions and political motivations of the praefect are up to discussion. It is possible that he decided to deal with external problems by employing diplomacy, and if that failed, subterfuge,

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<sup>71</sup> *CTh*, VII, 17, 1. While the law itself bears only the names of the Emperor and the *magister militum* Constans, it is unlikely that eleven-year-old Theodosius would make the decision by himself. Therefore, it is reasonable to attribute it to Anthemius. cf. R.C. Blockley, *The Dynasty of Theodosius*, [in:] *CAH*, vol. 13, p.129; W. Treadgold, *A History of Byzantine State and Society*, Stanford 1997, p. 89.

<sup>72</sup> K.G. Holum, *Theodosian...*, p. 89.

<sup>73</sup> K.G. Holum, *Theodosian...*, p. 89.

<sup>74</sup> Marcellinus Comes, a. 409; *PLRE*, vol. II, p. 152, (s.v. Arsacius 3); *PLRE*, vol. II, p. 1149-1150, (s.v. Varanes 1); A. Demandt, *Magister militum*, [in:] *RE*, t. 12 suppl., 1970, p. 745.

simply due to the weakness of the military at the time. However, the fact that Anthemius decided on such course of action, was possibly caused by him being hesitant to resort to the use of military force. It is likely that his political programme was affected by the looming shadow of Gainas' revolt and he preferred to deal with external problems by civil means.

Furthermore, relying on regional masters of arms and diminishing the independence of duces, Anthemius kept closer watch on the Empire's frontier, effectively retaining more control over the military in his hands. During that time no powerful military figures can be attested by the sources, and only 2 *magistri militum in praesentis* are known. They were both outsiders, not connected to any established political parties. Therefore, there is no reason to think that Anthemius supported, or even allowed for military elite to exert any influence on the court.

He did, however, see the errors of the previous regime and the dangers that course of action caused and understood that the Empire needs strong military force led by competent commanders in the coming turbulent times. It does not seem as if he enjoyed that prospect; more likely he considered it a necessary evil. The most important fact was therefore that the civil service (and of course by extension, Anthemius himself) possessed far more power and influence than any military figure could gather. Ultimately, it was about control over the government and Anthemius' priorities were not to allow any external or internal force to threaten the system.

### **The Fall of Anthemius and the New Regime of Pulcheria**

Anthemius is last attested in his office in April of 414<sup>75</sup>. It might have happened due to his death shortly afterwards; however well within the realm of possibilities is also his downfall due to the opposition in the court. The family of Anthemius gathered quite a lot of power, since his son Isidorus became the praefect of Constantinople in 410. Kenneth Holum claims even that Anthemius marrying his daughter to general Procopius<sup>76</sup>, who apparently claimed his lineage from Constantine himself<sup>77</sup>, revealed an ambition of reaching for the throne<sup>78</sup>. Whether that was true is difficult to say, however, it is very likely that this was how the aristocratic elite of the city perceived the actions of the praefect. The turning point, however, was the conflict that emerged between him and the fourteen-year-old sister of Theodosius, Pulcheria<sup>79</sup>. As the young woman was entering the age fit of marriage, finding a suitable husband was of utmost importance. Anthemius most likely

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<sup>75</sup> *CTh*, IX, 40, 22.

<sup>76</sup> Sidonius, *Carmina*, II, 94.

<sup>77</sup> Sidonius, *Carmina*, II, 68-69.

<sup>78</sup> K. Holum, *Theodosian...*, p. 95.

<sup>79</sup> The description of the events follows the interpretation of Kenneth Holum.

had his own candidate in mind, his grandson Theophilus. This project was probably supported by the *cubicullarius* Antiochus<sup>80</sup>.

Pulcheria however would not agree to any of this. On the one hand she certainly enjoyed her independence and did not want her future to be dictated to her, and on the other hand, she probably saw the danger that further expansion of Anthemius' influence posed to her brother. Before her fifteenth birthday she proclaimed that she was devoting her virginity to God. Undoubtedly it was a political move, the only one that could counter the plans of the all-powerful praefect. Sozomen clearly states that her decision was to prevent other men from entering the palace and engaging in intrigues<sup>81</sup>. That move obviously forced Anthemius and Antiochus to abandon all plans to have Pulcheria married. Furthermore, Antiochus was soon replaced and Isidorus lost his praefecture of the city. Those events were not coincidental, and clearly show how the power of Anthemius and his supporters slowly slipped from their hands.

Pulcheria might have been helped in her endeavours by some faction opposing the praefect, however, the ambition and capabilities of the young woman should not be underestimated. She took control of the government under the guise of her brother's will<sup>82</sup>. In place of Anthemius she designated an elderly associate of her mother, Aurelian<sup>83</sup>. On 4 July 414 Pulcheria was proclaimed *Augusta*, officially establishing her political authority<sup>84</sup>. She also had immense influence over her brother, which was not limited to educating him in religious matters and courtly behaviour.

Kenneth Holum mentions that Pulcheria's regime seems to have brought a change in the policy of military nominations, returning to the practices of her grandfather - Theodosius I – who employed barbarian commanders and allowed them to gain significant political influence.

Undoubtedly, there is a noticeable increase in the appearances of military commanders in the sources, which may be an indirect proof of their growing influence. Additionally, there is a direct quotation from a source, as Sozomen mentions that general Plintha possessed great influence at the court<sup>85</sup>. The historian reports that in relation to the commander's involvement in religious

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<sup>80</sup> *PLRE*, vol. II, p. 101-102 (s.v. Antiochus 5).

<sup>81</sup> Sozomen, IX, 1, 3-4.

<sup>82</sup> The sources clearly mention her personal involvement, cf. Sozomen, IX, 1, 5-7; Philostorgius, XII, 7. Furthermore, all evidence points to her being very able despite her young age, cf. A. Cameron, J. Long, *Barbarians...*, p. 399-402.

<sup>83</sup> Once, in May of 414, another praefect is attested – a certain Monaxius - however his stay in office was ephemeral. Perhaps he did not agree with Pulcheria, so she replaced him in favour of a more amenable candidate. Cf. A. Cameron, J. Long, *Barbarians...*, p. 400-402.

<sup>84</sup> *Chronicon paschale*, a. 414; Marcellinus Comes, a. 414.

<sup>85</sup> Sozomen VII, 17, 14.

matters, as he apparently was the one responsible for ending a 35-year-long schism among the Arians. It is certainly a proof of his significance, at least among his fellow believers.

Furthermore, as Doug Lee points out, the generals were actively using their influence to help the careers of their family members<sup>86</sup>. Plintha was able to secure a commanding position for his son Armatius; similarly, it was the case for Ardaburius and his son Aspar. This phenomenon, however, was not limited to barbarian families, as general Procopius likely managed to do the same thing for his son Anthemius.

A look at the legal sources offers a different perspective. The law of 415<sup>87</sup> addressed to master of soldiers Florentius deals with the problem of issuing commissions to officials in command of the frontier forces<sup>88</sup>. This was traditionally in the area of the competences of *magister officiorum*, and the law stated that forty of these offices shall be reassigned back to the master of offices. According to Evgeniy Glushanin, it was part of a concerted effort to reassert government control over commissions of middle command staff, and, in turn, it reduced the practical influence of the military elite<sup>89</sup>. However, according to Doug Lee, the aforementioned law should be seen in a different light. As he points out, it did not reverse the situation but rather introduced a compromise, reassigning only a portion of the commissions<sup>90</sup>. According to him, this is a proof of the generals' influence, since they were able to encroach on areas of competence traditionally held by other officials and, possibly, gain all the benefits, funds and political patronage that went with those. However, unless it can be pin pointed when did this begin to happen, it is unwarranted to make such claims regarding the political influence of the military elite in the early reign of Theodosius II. If anything, the source material proves that the political capital of the generals was weak enough for the civil service to regain its long-lost authority.

This is further proved by another set of laws from the year 424 that followed through with the previous constitution completely, assigning all the posts to master of offices' area of competence<sup>91</sup>. It is therefore certain that the civil service of the Empire attempted to reduce generals' influence over administrative matters.

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<sup>86</sup> A.D. Lee, *Theodosius and his Generals*, [in:] *Theodosius II. Rethinking the Roman Empire in Late Antiquity*, ed. Ch. Kelly, Cambridge 2013, p. 101.

<sup>87</sup> *CTh*, I, 8, 1.

<sup>88</sup> The *laterculus minus* (lesser register), which included tribunes, praefects and other minor military officers.

<sup>89</sup> Е.П. Глушанин, *Военная...*, p. 101.

<sup>90</sup> A.D. Lee, *Theodosius...*, p. 94-95.

<sup>91</sup> *CTh*, I, 8, 2-3. Interestingly, Doug Lee mentions that law, but does not comment on it, cf. A.D. Lee, *Theodosius...*, p. 95. n. 25.

There are several other arguments for the political weakness of the military elite in the early reign of Theodosius. As Glushanin notes, it seems that the *magistri militum* were consistently kept in office for up to five years and rotated out as their term was over<sup>92</sup>. Maintaining the temporary nature of the office prevented therefore the commanders from building political capital

The sudden emergence of a new military elite seems to coincide with new conflicts that followed relatively peaceful times and it certainly helped the careers of many military commanders. Plintha, in the rank of *comes*, was responsible for suppressing the rebellion in Palestine in 418. For the successful resolution of the conflict he was awarded a consulate a year later, along with the title of *magister militum praesentalis*. Evgeniy Glushanin states outright that the political significance of the military elite was directly correlated with the situation on the international scene, namely whether the Empire needed to project its force, and in turn, needed military commanders to lead its armies, and the military performance of the generals<sup>93</sup>.

### **The War with Persia**

The most important event was however the war with Persia that broke out in 421. The relations between both countries had been deteriorating for several years, mainly because of religious unrest in Persia and conflicts between Christians and Zoroastrians, as well as the hard-line policy against heretics and heathens (which included fire-worshippers) that was started in the Roman Empire with the advent of Pulcheria's regime. For as long as the ruler of Persia was moderate Yezdigird I, the tensions never escalated to the point of war; however he died in 420, possibly in an assassination ordered by conspiring Persian nobles, with one of the reasons being Yezdigird's failure to address the religious unrest and growing opposition among the worshippers of Zoroastrianism. His successor, Bahram V, began to openly persecute Christians who in turn started fleeing and seeking asylum in the Roman Empire. Since the Romans allowed them to seek refuge inside their borders and refused to comply with Persian demands for their return, Bahram responded by mistreating of Roman hired workers and allowing the plunder Roman merchants<sup>94</sup>.

The Roman response to that was war. Their forces seem to have been well prepared for conflict and at the beginning they achieved numerous successes. The war was obviously a chance for military figures to rise to prominence, so a more in-depth look is warranted.

The command structure of the Roman forces is however somewhat unclear. There were several commanders who were involved in the fighting: Alan Ardaburius; the previously

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<sup>92</sup> Е.П. Глушанин, *Военная...*, p. 102.

<sup>93</sup> Е.П. Глушанин, *Военная...*, p. 105-106

<sup>94</sup> R.C. Blockley, *East Roman Foreign Policy. Formation and Conduct from Diocletian to Anastasius*, Cairns 1992., p. 56.

mentioned Procopius, a Roman of aristocratic lineage; possibly Anatolius; certain Vitianus, otherwise unknown; and Goth Areobindus. Out of those only Areobindus is known without a doubt what rank did he hold during the war, and that was *comes foederatorum*.

Firstly, many complications arise since in 420 the commander of the eastern forces, Maximinus, was killed by his soldiers in a mutiny<sup>95</sup>. Unfortunately, we do not know what exactly the practice in such cases was, especially since the tensions on the eastern frontier were already rising and the war was already on the horizon.

Therefore, it is unclear who held the eastern *magisterium*. As far as sources go, John Malalas claims that Procopius, who had already held the title of *patricius*, was appointed commander of the East and sent with expeditionary forces against the Persians<sup>96</sup>. He does not mention however the successful campaign by Ardaburius at all and mentions only Areobindus out of the commanders involved in the conflict. Those claims stand in contrast with another source, the panegyric on the emperor Anthemius by Sidonius Apollinaris, in which he claims that Procopius, the emperor's father, was rewarded with the office for his achievements in the war, along with the title of patrician. Even though it is a western source, Sidonius is notoriously well informed, and, considering the official status of his work (panegyrics were recited in front of the emperor and the court, so any glaring mistakes would have been easily spotted), this information should not be disregarded. Alexander Demandt assumes a rather straightforward explanation of the discrepancy in the sources and claims that Procopius was appointed a *magister militum per Orientem* before the war and rewarded with patriciate afterwards<sup>97</sup>. According to John Martindale, Procopius was still either a *comes* or *dux* during the war, however, his achievements awarded him both *magisterium* and the title of *patricius*<sup>98</sup>, and the historian claims that the commander of the East over the course of the war was Ardaburius<sup>99</sup>. Evgeniy Glushanin generally agrees with Demandt's claims; however, he disagrees on who was the commander-in-chief of the Roman forces involved in the fighting<sup>100</sup>. He assumes it was Procopius, while according to Demandt this Roman general was either commanding only part of the forces alongside Ardaburius, or even was his subordinate, as the German scholar

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<sup>95</sup> Marcellinus Comes, a. 420. It cannot be stated without any doubt that Maximinus held eastern *magisterium* (cf. A. Demandt, *Magister...*, p. 740), however, if we made such an assumption, his being murdered explains the irregularity in the five-year tenures.

<sup>96</sup> Malalas, XIV, 23: βασιλεὺς Ῥωμαίων ἐποίησεν στρατηλάτην ἀνατολῆς τὸν πατρίκιον Προκόπιον καὶ ἐπεμψεν αὐτὸν μετὰ ἐξπeditου πολεμῆσαι.

<sup>97</sup> A. Demandt, *Magister...*, p. 741.

<sup>98</sup> *PLRE*, vol. II, p. 920 (s.v. Procopius 2)

<sup>99</sup> *PLRE*, vol. II, p. 137 (s.v. Ardabur 3)

<sup>100</sup> Е.П. Глушанин, *Военная...*, p. 104.

claims that the Alan commander occupied the post of *magister militum praesentalis*. According to Glushanin, however, Ardaburius was likely still a *comes rei militaris* during the war.

Another contentious matter is the case of Anatolius. It is even debatable whether he took part in the war at all. Kenneth Holum has arrived at the conclusion that it was Anatolius who held the eastern command and there are certain researchers, such as Brian Croke or Roger Blockley, who follow his interpretation<sup>101</sup>. The primary source for that is the passage on the war with Bahram in the *History of the Wars* by Procopius<sup>102</sup>. The historian specifically mentions his rank. Furthermore, there are other sources that seem to confirm the general's involvement in the war<sup>103</sup>. Holum takes also into consideration the possibility that the Anatolius involved in this war was an otherwise unknown relative (likely the father) of the *magister militum per Orientem* who was appointed to the office in 433<sup>104</sup>. Glushanin and Demandt do not mention Anatolius in the context of the war of 421-422, and the latter attributes the passage in Procopius to a later conflict in the forties<sup>105</sup>.

Fortunately, the case of Vitianus is much more simple, as it is very unlikely that he could have held any *magisterium*; instead, he might have been either a *dux* or *comes rei militaris*. John Martindale remarks that the nature of his independent military actions seems to point to the latter<sup>106</sup>.

A look at the course of the war may however clarify certain unknowns. The most comprehensive account was relayed by Socrates Scholasticus, according to whom the forces of Ardaburius were the first to be involved in the fighting. The general marched through Armenia and invaded the province Arzanene in which he encountered a Persian army commanded by Narses. In the following battle Persians were soundly defeated, which allowed the Romans to press on into Mesopotamia, towards the fortress of Nisibis. Upon learning of the failures of his armies, king Bahram decided to call upon his Arabic allies. According to Socrates, a great army was assembled; however, thanks to Divine Providence, the Arabs were overcome with fear and a great number of them drowned in the Euphrates. What exactly happened is unknown, however, the drowning of a hundred thousand Arab auxiliaries is rather unlikely to say the least, especially

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<sup>101</sup> K.G. Holum, *Pulcheria's Crusade A.D. 421-22 and the Ideology of Imperial Victory*, GRBS 18, 1977, p. 156; 167-169; B. Croke, *Dating Theodoret's Church History and Commentary on the Psalms*, B 54, 1989, p. 70, n. 45; R.C. Blockley, *East Roman...*, p. 200, n. 31.

<sup>102</sup> Procopius, *History of the Wars*, I, 2

<sup>103</sup> Theophanes, AM 5921; Cyril of Skythopolis, *Life of Euthymius*, 10.

<sup>104</sup> K.G. Holum, *Theodosian...*, p. 101, n. 102.

<sup>105</sup> A. Demandt, *Magister...*, p. 742.

<sup>106</sup> PLRE, vol. II, p. 1178 (s.v. Vitianus); Alexander Demandt (*Magister...*, p. 753) claims he might have been *magister militum vacans*.

because news of reinforcements was enough to force the Romans to abandon the siege of Nisibis and withdraw. The following Persian counterattack however failed, since the Persians were not able to conquer the fortress of Theodosiopolis-Resaina<sup>107</sup>. Afterwards, both sides seem to have been looking for a resolution of the conflict. For that reason, Helion himself was sent by the emperor to make a peace treaty. The peace talks were conducted by Helion's intermediary, an assessor of Ardaburios, Maximinus. King Bahram, convinced by some of his commanders, decided to look for one last opportunity. He held Maximinus captive and launched a surprise attack upon the Roman forces, splitting his own army and attempting to encircle them. Luckily, the arrival of Procopius' detachment resulted in the flanking Persian unit being spotted and attacked from the rear, which resulted in a defeat for king Bahram.

One of the most vivid elements of this campaign is how well prepared and quick to act the Romans were in the beginning of the war. Thus, whatever the rank of Ardaburios may have been, he was present in the East and in command of a ready fighting force on the eve of the war. The claims that he had been *magister militum praesentalis* in command of the forces which were sent from the capital for the war are very unlikely, considering how quickly he was able to seize the initiative. The march of the praesental army across whole Anatolia would undoubtedly cost precious time that would make the rapid advance into the Persian territory improbable<sup>108</sup>. Such forces eventually did arrive and there are several accounts that point to at least one praesental army being involved in the fighting – John Malalas mentions expeditionary forces, Theophanes tells a story from the early life of the future emperor Marcian, about how he marched to war with Persia through Anatolia, and also the successful Hun invasion of Thrace in 422 was very likely enabled by the Romans pulling out too many forces from the Danube frontier for the war with Persia. Those forces therefore arrived at a later date; possibly even as a response to Bahram's gathering enormous army and marching against Roman lands. Therefore, considering the urgency of the situation in 420-421, it is very likely that the command of the Roman armies of the East was decided *ad hoc*, and as a temporary measure, Ardaburios was appointed *magister militum*. It is possible that he received the eastern office, but it is equally, if not more likely, that he was granted the title of *magister militum vacans*. Such course of action would allow the Roman government to avoid making hasty

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<sup>107</sup> Theodoret, *HE*, V, 37

<sup>108</sup> A victory over the Persians was announced in Constantinople on 6 September 421 (cf. *Chronicon Paschale*, a. 421), which most likely refers to Ardaburios' success in Arzanene against Narses. Cf. K.G. Holm, *Pulcheria's...*, p. 168. It means that it took between the beginning of the war and the 6 September for the forces of Ardaburios to set out and march through Armenia, plunder Arzanene and destroy the Persian army. and the information to travel back and reach Constantinople.

decisions on military nominations, while not compromising the war effort at the same time. It is most probable that Ardaburius was chosen for the task, because he was present at the site, perhaps in the rank of *comes rei militaris*, and as ex-subordinate of murdered Maximinus. He was probably tasked with reorganization of the army of the East, and after the war broke out, served effectively as the commander-in-chief of the Roman forces, and almost certainly stayed at the front till the very end of the war, considering that his own subordinate was conducting the peace negotiations<sup>109</sup>.

Procopius was likely not involved in fighting from the very beginning, even though the account of John Malalas clearly mentions Procopius at the head of expeditionary forces<sup>110</sup>. He must have therefore arrived later at the head of the praesental army. His exact rank therefore is unclear. Seemingly, it would have made the most sense that he was *magister militum praesentalis*, however it seems unlikely. It is known for a fact that Procopius held the rank of *magister militum per Orientem* after the war, so it would be extremely unlikely for him to become essentially demoted despite his commendable conduct during the war. It is also quite unlikely for him to have been just a *comes* and to have led the whole praesental army, so it leaves two possibilities. Since Procopius was sent in the later phases of the war, most likely when the news of Bahram V gathering his large army and the Romans abandoning the siege of Nisibis arrived in Constantinople, it is possible that the decision to appoint Procopius as the commander of the East had already been made. While it was uncommon for a *magister militum per Orientem* to lead a praesental army, an exception could have been made since the forces of the east were already engaged in combat against the Persians. The other equally likely possibility is that Procopius was also sent as *magister militum vacans*. This interpretation seems to accommodate different sources best, since it would mean that he could have both held a high rank during the war and been awarded *magisterium* of the East alongside the title of *patricius* – exactly as Sidonius reports.

It should be recognized that Anatolius also was present during the war with Persia. His efforts to fortify the Karin-Theodosiopolis<sup>111</sup> and diplomatic activity are proven by numerous sources<sup>112</sup>. It is also possible that he was present during the negotiations with Bahram V that eventually settled the peace, as Procopius claims, albeit it is very unlikely that his role was so

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<sup>109</sup> Socrates, VII, 20; *PLRE*, vol. II, p. 741 (s.v. Maximinus 3)

<sup>110</sup> Malalas, XIV, 23

<sup>111</sup> Moses of Khoren, III, 59

<sup>112</sup> Procopius, *History of the Wars*, I, 2; Theophanes, AM 5921; Moses of Khoren, III, 57; Cyril of Skythopolis, *Life of Euthymius*, 10.

pronounced and heroic<sup>113</sup>. There is however no need to assume that Anatolius held a rank of *magister militum*. Firstly, it would be very unlikely for a commander to receive an appointment to territorial command for a duration of one year, and then being replaced by another person. While Anatolius' achievements during the war probably fade in comparison with the exploits of Ardaburius or Procopius, we know nothing of any signs of incompetence, insubordination, or anything that would justify him being demoted. Neither is it the case of him abandoning the military service, since Anatolius' career would flourish later<sup>114</sup>. Thus, Anatolius being *magister militum per Orientem* during the war is highly unlikely. It is more probable that he also received command free of territorial boundaries as *magister militum vacans*, but, it would also mean that he held highest military offices for more than thirty years, which was not unheard of, but highly unusual nonetheless. It should be therefore taken into consideration that Anatolius simply held a lower rank at the time of the war, possibly that of *comes rei militaris*. Nothing is known of his military exploits; it appears that his activity was primarily diplomatic in nature. That seems to further prove the claim that he was a subordinate commander, serving as an envoy, likely being placed in such capacity in the East since before the war<sup>115</sup>.

On the brink of the war the situation of the Roman forces in the East was quite complicated. We do not know the exact course of events, but a mutiny of soldiers and the resulting murder of the eastern commander must have been considered a major danger to the security of the eastern border, when the war with Persia seemed inevitable. It seems very likely that the Roman government was forced to improvise the military nominations for the war, resorting to appointing commanders Ardaburius and Procopius as *magistri militum vacantes* for the duration of the campaign, to avoid making a long-lasting decision in a hurry.

The numerous successes and victories in the field of both masters of arms probably even surpassed the expectations of the government and propelled their and other distinguished commanders' careers. Ardaburius became *magister militum praesentalis*, Procopius became *magister militum per Orientem* and received a title of *patricius*, Areobindus was rewarded with the consulate.

Thus, the war with Persia laid the groundwork for a certain measure of continuity. In the preceding period, masters of arms seemed to serve their term and then to be rotated out of their

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<sup>113</sup> It is very likely that Procopius merged the events of 422 (the name of the Persian shah - Bahram V - who was involved and the clauses of the treaty) and 441 (the fact that Anatolius led the negotiations, first making truce with Persians and then signing a binding treaty).

<sup>114</sup> Unless the commander Anatolius known from 30's and 40's and the one taking part in the Persian war of 421 are different people, which Kenneth Holum took as a possibility.

<sup>115</sup> He negotiated a treaty with a certain Aspebetus, an Arab chieftain who fled the persecutions of Yazdigird. Cf. Cyril of Skythopolis, *Life of Euthymius*, 10.

offices, and there is no evidence of them returning to their posts or receiving promotions to different command posts. From now on, the same names would continue to appear over the course of the following decades.

### **The Campaign Against the Usurper John**

Shortly after the war with Persia was concluded, the Empire faced another crisis. In the West, after death of Honorius, certain John<sup>116</sup> proclaimed himself an emperor. Theodosius did not accept that, likely because he considered members of the Theodosian dynasty to be the only rightful heirs to the Roman throne<sup>117</sup>.

He dispatched an army to take down the usurper led by Ardaburios, freshly appointed as *magister militum praesentalis*. Accompanying him were the general's son, Aspar, and Flavius Candidianus. It is possible that they both had the rank of *magister militum vacans*<sup>118</sup>, but it is also possible that Aspar, who must have been quite young at that point, was a junior officer<sup>119</sup>. According to the sources, he was leading cavalry. The expedition reached the city of Salona in Dalmatia where the forces were split into two detachments. Ardaburios embarked with some of his troops to cross the Adriatic, while Candidianus and Aspar proceeded on land through Dalmatia. Unfortunately, the expedition was put in jeopardy due to a sudden storm which caught the forces of Ardaburios, swept his ships ashore which resulted in the capture of the general himself. The usurper treated the general well and did not keep him in confinement, as he wished to sue for peace. This however proved to be a mistake, since Ardaburios made use of his freedom to plot against the usurper and swayed some of his officers to his side. In the meantime, the remaining forces of the expedition under Candidianus and Aspar pushed into the Italian peninsula, capturing the important fortress of Aquileia on their way. Their exploits seem to have helped Ardaburios' efforts, since soon after usurper John was betrayed and murdered in Ravenna, which allowed the eastern Roman forces to enter the city. Afterwards, Helion was dispatched to Rome to oversee the enthronement of Valentinian. Even though the campaign seemed to have been concluded successfully, just before his downfall, John sent out a supporter of his, a young general Aetius, to

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<sup>116</sup> Cf. *PLRE*, vol. II, p. 594–595, (s.v. *Ioannes 6*). For more information on John and the subsequent power struggle between generals: Flavius Felix, Bonifatius and Aetius, leading to the latter establishing his dominant position, cf. M. Pawlak, *Walka o władzę w Rzymie w latach 425–435*, Toruń 2004.

<sup>117</sup> M. Pawlak, *Walka...*, p. 82–83.

<sup>118</sup> Е.П. Гушанин, *Военная...*, p. 105.

<sup>119</sup> Possibly a *vicarius magistri militum*, cf. A. Demandt, *Magister...*, p. 748.

gather an army from friendly Hun tribes<sup>120</sup>. He arrived in Italy too late to affect the course of the war, but, soon enough to create a problem for the newly established government. What followed is disputable. According to Philostorgius, the Hun army led by Aetius was met on the field of battle by Aspar and his forces. In the encounter that ensued neither side was able to get upper hand, and both suffered great casualties. For Aetius it was however pointless to pursue a further conflict, and thus he made a deal with Placidia to secure his standing after the change of regime. The Hun warriors were paid off to return back to their lands. Interestingly, Olympiodorus, the other source, informs of no such incidents.

It is not the only discrepancy between the two sources. Philostorgius mentions Aspar's efforts as fundamental to the success of the campaign, both in capturing Aquileia, reaching Ravenna, and facing Aetius, while the fragments of Olympiodorus claim it was Candidianus' capturing of cities that contributed to the outcome, while Aspar succumbed to despair after his father was captured<sup>121</sup>. There is a possible explanation to some of those differences. The fragments from Olympiodorus are less detailed than the account of Philostorgius, although such an important event as a battle between Aetius' Huns and the Eastern Roman expeditionary forces undoubtedly would not have been omitted. The editors of Philostorgius came up with a probable explanation in that the historian mixed up some accounts critical of Theodosius II's Hunnic policy and made up a probable course of events<sup>122</sup>. Thus, it is much more likely that there was no battle, but instead Aetius used the Hun mercenaries at his disposal as leverage in his deal with Placidia, and afterwards the Huns were paid off to return home. It is possible that such events were not considered relevant enough for Olympiodorus, or, more likely, the compiler of the fragments.

Even though the climactic showdown of two future *generalissimi* most likely did not occur, the campaign against the usurper John, despite all setbacks, was another success of the Eastern Roman military. When taking into account all of the sources, it seems that both Candidianus and Aspar distinguished themselves in the campaign. Ardaburius, despite the accident that could have led to the failure of the whole mission, was also reported to have accomplished much when plotting against the usurper while in captivity. Overall, all of the goals set out for the expedition were accomplished successfully.

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<sup>120</sup> Aetius in his youth was sent as a hostage to the Hunnic court. Cf. Gregory of Tours, II, 8; Merobaudes, *Carmina*, IV, 42-46; Merobaudes, *Panegyrici*, II, 1-4; 127-143; Zosimus, V, 36, 1. The army he gathered was reportedly 60,000 strong, cf. M. Meier, *Geschichte der Völkervwanderung. Europa, Asien und Afrika vom 3. bis zum 8. Jahrhundert n.Chr.*, München 2019, p. 397.

<sup>121</sup> Olympiodorus, fr. 43.

<sup>122</sup> Philostorgios, *Kirchengeschichte*, ed. B. Bleckmann, M. Stein, Bd. II, Paderborn 2015, p. 617.

It is not known whether Candidianus got rewarded for his service in Italy<sup>123</sup>, however, he remained an influential political figure which is exemplified by him being chosen to serve as emperor's representative at the council of Ephesus in 431<sup>124</sup>. Ardaburius, as he was leaving his post in 427, received a consulate, undoubtedly in recognition of his service. Aspar's exploits seem to have been noticed, considering how quickly his career developed over the following years.

After 427 there is no more mention of Ardaburius in the sources. Evgeniy Glushanin argues that this must mean that he somehow lost his influence<sup>125</sup>. There is however a more mundane explanation which also seems more likely, and this is that at some point soon after 427 Ardaburius died. Especially since the person that received the *magisterium* after him was his own son, Aspar.

### **The First Vandal Expedition**

In 428 yet another crisis arose in the West. A Germanic tribe of Asdingi Vandals, joined by the remnants of their Silingi brothers and allied Alan tribes, crossed the straits of Gibraltar from the Iberian Peninsula and proceeded towards the rich Roman province of Africa. The forces of the African *comes* Bonifatius were insufficient to deal with the threat. In 430 barbarians besieged Hippo Regius, the second most important city in Africa. In the battle that ensued outside the city walls the Roman forces were defeated. The city managed to hold for fourteen months and only after the inhabitants were allowed to leave did the Vandals capture it. Nevertheless, the situation in the province was critical.

The perspective of losing Africa would be of dire consequences to the Roman Empire, especially its western part. The province provided a steady supply of grain, much needed by Italian cities. Furthermore, it used to be relatively rich and comparatively easy to defend, contributing much to the budget, while not requiring a lot of expenses to secure the flow of revenue. With the coming of the Vandals, it would all change. It seems that Theodosius II was aware of the consequences. In his policies, he considered himself responsible for both parts of the Empire. Therefore, when the local forces proved insufficient, Theodosius decided to intervene. Organizing such an expedition was definitely a complicated and time-consuming process, not to mention the need to wait for good sailing conditions, so the help could not have been sent immediately.

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<sup>123</sup> Which lends more credibility to the reasoning that not only his, but also Aspar's, exploits contributed to the success of the campaign.

<sup>124</sup> A. D e m a n d t, *Magister...*, p. 748.

<sup>125</sup> Е.П. Г л у ш а н и н, *Военная...*, p. 106.

Next year, in 431, Aspar was dispatched with expeditionary forces to Carthage, to help in fighting off the Vandal menace. This time however the general met a worthy opponent in the person of the Vandal king Geiseric. Combined remnants of the provincial forces of Africa commanded by Bonifatius and Eastern Roman expeditionary forces met the Vandals on the field of battle; however, they were bested. Many Roman soldiers were captured, among them Marcian, Aspar's *domesticus* and future emperor of the East. Despite the Vandal victory, the situation in Africa remained a stalemate. After two major defeats, the Romans were in no position to contest the Vandals on the field of battle and attempt to force them out or otherwise to subjugate them. The Vandals however, due to their lack of competence in siege warfare<sup>126</sup>, could not assault Carthage, the capital of the province, held by Aspar and the remainder of his troops.

After two years of *impasse* it seems that both sides tried to reach some kind of agreement. It is likely that Aspar negotiated a temporary settlement, regarding return of the captives and possibly laying groundwork for future peace talks. A treaty was concluded in 435 by envoy Trygetius that allowed the Vandals to settle around Hippo Regius in exchange for a tribute, which most likely meant that the Romans wanted to secure the *annona* tax from the province.

Aspar's return to Constantinople was certainly not as glorious as after his previous campaign. He got rewarded with consulate, but, the nomination came from the Western court. Evgeniy Glushanin claims that Aspar returned in disgrace<sup>127</sup>, but that seems like an overstatement. While tactically and militarily the campaign in Africa was not successful, in the end its outcome probably seemed good enough. It should be recognized that at this point in time nobody had the power of hindsight to know that the peace of Trygetius would be broken by 439. Furthermore, some kind of settlement with the Vandal side was probably an outcome of the conflict that the Romans aimed for; however, they likely hoped for a more beneficial one. The concept of total war was foreign to the ancients<sup>128</sup>, and the complete extermination or expulsion of the tribe undoubtedly was not taken into consideration, especially since at that point the Vandals had not yet become such a thorn in the Romans' side. Regardless, the consular nomination of Aspar in 434 proves that at least in the West his efforts were considered sufficient.

Following his interpretation, Glushanin also claims that Aspar lost his command over the army, which was given to Areobindus<sup>129</sup>. Alexander Demandt argues that Areobindus was appointed as *magister militum praesentalis* in 433/4 as well, which coincided with his consular

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<sup>126</sup> H. Castritius, *Die Vandalen. Etappen einer Spurensuche*, Berlin 2006, p. 97.

<sup>127</sup> Е.П. Глушанин, *Военная...*, p. 107.

<sup>128</sup> Y. Modéran, *Les Vandales et l'Empire Romain*, Arles 2014, p. 196–197.

<sup>129</sup> Е.П. Глушанин, *Военная...*, p. 107.

nomination alongside Aspar. He, however, claims that Areobindus was appointed together with Aspar and Plintha, therefore as a third general of the same rank.

It should be noted however that this whole discussion was based on incorrect dating of a law in Codex Justinianus and a following erroneous placement of Apollonius on the post of *magister militum praesentalis* as the successor of Plintha. Alexander Demandt places the aforementioned law between 435 and 440<sup>130</sup>, however, it is much more likely that it was issued in 443.

This means that there is a much simpler explanation. Aspar was not superseded by Areobindus but rather by Flavius Dionysius, who had just finished his five-year service as master of the East. This is proven by a passage in Priscus who mentions both generals as being interested in diplomatic mission to the Huns and strongly implies the parity in their political standing<sup>131</sup>. Furthermore, Flavius Dionysius is independently mentioned by the acts of the ecumenical council alongside another general that was the master of the East. John Martindale assumes Dionysius must have been therefore a *magister militum vacans*<sup>132</sup>, but there is no reason why he could not have been a *magister militum praesentalis* instead.

When Plintha's tenure had ended in 435, it was his office to which Areobindus received his appointment. The fact that Areobindus received consulship does not necessarily mean he had held the rank of *magister militum* at that point. It should be noted that it is not exactly known what he did receive this honour for, however, the earlier example of Plintha shows that it was entirely possible for a *comes* to become a consul before receiving an appointment for the office of *magister militum*<sup>133</sup>.

### **The Huns in the Twenties and Thirties and Plintha**

As it was already discussed earlier in the chapter, the security of the Empire's northern border was challenged by the tribe of the Huns.

The danger from Uldin was contained by skilful employment of diplomacy and possibly involvement of the Roman secret service, but it does not mean that the danger from the Huns has passed. In 422, when the Roman forces had been moved from the Balkans to support the war

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<sup>130</sup> A. Demandt, *Magister...*, p. 746

<sup>131</sup> The historian mentions that both were proconsuls and generals, but he does not specify which office either of them held, but we know for certain that Plintha was a *magister militum praesentalis* so it makes the most sense that Dionysius held an equivalent post, cf. Priscus, fr. 2.

<sup>132</sup> PLRE, vol. II, p. 366 (s.v. Dionysius 13)

<sup>133</sup> A similar case is the consulship of Aspar's son, Ardaburius, who certainly did not serve as *magister militum* when receiving the nomination and did not receive such office for several years more. It is possible he was being prepared for that, however, the perceived failure of his father in the war caused the government to stop backing the Ardaburi and to look for other candidates for military offices.

effort against Persia, the Huns led by king Rua invaded Thrace. A detailed analysis of all the sources regarding the invasion of 422 was made by Brian Croke who proposed the following course of events: in 421, when troops from the European provinces were relocated to the East, Theodosius pre-emptively settled the tribe of Goths in Thrace to bolster the security of the borders against a potential Hun invasion. In spite of those efforts, the Huns circumvented the Roman defences and attacked Thrace. To deal with the threat Theodosius decided to pay off the Huns, agreeing to an annual tribute of 350 pounds of gold<sup>134</sup>.

It has to be said that the interpretation of Croke is very well put together. He offers a comprehensive analysis of multiple sources in support of his claims. There are however some aspects of his reasoning that can be disputed.

Firstly, he assumes that the Goths were resettled to Thracian provinces as a precaution. This implies a great deal of political forethought on the part of the government in Constantinople. We do not know how much time resettling a whole tribe took, but certainly it was not something that could have happened overnight. If we accepted Croke's dating, it would mean that the decision to settle Goths in the Thracian provinces must have been made very early, probably even before the war with Persia. That is not impossible, however, the course of the war with Persia suggests that the Romans did not expect their enemies to gather such numerous armies, nor that they would need all possible reinforcements to stop Bahram's counterattack.

Secondly, according to Croke, the tribute of 350 pounds of gold was paid to the Huns in exchange for their retreat from Thrace. The tribute to king Rua is supported by a very reliable account of Priscus<sup>135</sup>, however, many scholars differ on when he received it. There are three major dates taken into consideration: 422, 424, and 431<sup>136</sup>. The arguments of Croke for the year 422 amount to the fact that he deems it unlikely for the Romans to give tribute to the Huns in any other instance than following an invasion. This assumption is however untrue. It was a relatively common practice of the period to accompany diplomatic agreements with barbarians by annual payments<sup>137</sup>. Such tribes were then bound as *foederati* and in exchange for gold (or very often the

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<sup>134</sup> B. C r o k e, *Evidence for the Hun invasion of Thrace in 422*, GRBS 18, 1977, p. 347–367.

<sup>135</sup> P r i s c u s, fr. 2.

<sup>136</sup> Some agree on the year 422, cf. M. R o u c h e, *Attila. La violence nomade*, Paris 2009, p. 120; A.H.M. J o n e s, *The Later...*, p. 193. John B. B u r y (*History of the Later Roman Empire*, London 1923, p. 271) claims that Rua received the tribute from 424. Edward A. T h o m p s o n (*The Foreign Policies of Theodosius II and Marcian*, Her 76, 1950, p. 62) claims that the ruler of the Huns was granted the tribute as a result of an embassy in 431, when he threatened war if his demands were not met.

<sup>137</sup> Е.П. Г л у ш а н и н, *Военная ...*, p. 108–109; E. L u t t w a k, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire*, Cambridge 2009, p. 55.

equivalent in other goods) they served the Roman emperors. The extortion conducted by the Huns in the 430s and 440s that Croke uses as an example was actually anomalous and related to the aggressive policy of Attila. Furthermore, the sums agreed upon with Rua were actually not 'so large' - 300 pounds of gold was the usual sum that accompanied *foedus*. It should be noted that despite all those arguments it is not entirely improbable that the Huns received the tribute as early as 422. It would however mean that for twelve years till 434 the diplomatic relations between the Romans and the Huns remained unchanged, and that the involvement of Rua's Huns in Italy during the war with the usurper John in 424, the expulsion of the Huns from Pannonia in 427 and the Eastern Roman support in the war against the Vandals in the 430s did not affect them at all. In 424 the fact that the Huns were paid off to leave Italy is confirmed by the sources, and even though it involved the western part of the Empire, Eastern Roman officials were present there and involved in those matters.

In addition to the previously dates another one could be proposed. In 427 the Huns were expelled from Pannonia and the tribute (probably accompanying a *foedus*) might have been a mean to stabilize the diplomatic relations. Therefore, each of the proposed dates has some merit and it is not possible to state without any doubt when and under what circumstances the payments began. As such, information regarding the tribute should not serve as a basis for an interpretation.

Thirdly, both Brian Croke and Kenneth Holum (who came up first with that idea) seem to overestimate the importance of the law from March 422 which forced the civilians who occupied the towers within the walls of Constantinople to provide for the quartering of the soldiers<sup>138</sup>. According to those historians, it proves that Theodosius started to pull soldiers back from the war with Persia to deal with the Hun menace. Croke even claims that the capital itself was in danger<sup>139</sup>. On the other hand, the meaning of the law may be much more mundane. Due to the escalation in the East, the constant need for reinforcements and troops being transferred from European to Asiatic provinces meant they needed lodging in the capital. The fact that the inhabitants of the city wall assumed immunity from the usual practice of *hospitas* certainly caused some problems. The law might have therefore been an attempt to clear up the situation, but it does not imply that soldiers were stationed in Constantinople to protect it from an impending Hun attack.

It is important to set up the background for the invasion of 422, since it too seems to have been an important factor in the emergence of the military elite in the 420s alongside of the Persian war. Even though there is no direct information stating that, all the evidence points to Plintha being closely involved in the resolution of the conflict against Rua. We do not know who the commander

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<sup>138</sup> *CTh*, VII, 8, 13.

<sup>139</sup> He references Theodore (HE, V, 37).

of the Thracian forces was at that point<sup>140</sup>; however, Plintha, being the *magister militum praesentalis* not involved in the war with Persia in case of Hun invasion, would have been the leader of the Roman armies sent to deal with the threat. That being said, most of the forces were involved in the East. In that case the decision to employ the tribe of the Goths, bound by *foedus* to serve the Roman Emperor seemed very reasonable. The Goths who were resettled by Thodosius were undoubtedly the same group who appear later in the sources as the followers of Theodoric Strabo. It is very likely that Plintha had some kind of influence over them and possibly was an intermediary in resettling them to Thrace as a countermeasure against the Huns. If this plan actually proved successful and the Hun raiders were driven out of Thrace by the Goths, then the influential position of Plintha at the Constantinopolitan court which Socrates informs of and his prolonged double tenure as *magister militum praesentalis* is much easier to understand. Glushanin on the other hand explains Plintha's extraordinary position simply by the fact that the forces under his command were tasked with the defence of the capital, and twice, when his tenure was about to end, the other army was either away on a campaign (in 424/425 in Italy) or preparing to set out on one (in 429/430 in Africa against the Vandals)<sup>141</sup>. His arguments however do not seem convincing. Nothing stopped the emperor from appointing another officer to serve as the leader of the army that was stationed near the capital. Glushanin's arguments could have some merit if the capital were under immediate danger in both of those instances, as changes in leadership could potentially influence army's effectiveness, however, that was not the case. Therefore, there must be another explanation to Plintha's case, and military achievements accompanied by the support of an important group of *foederati* that bolstered the defences of the Empire seem like a sufficient reason for the Emperor to keep Plintha on his post.

In 427 there was another conflict with the Huns; unfortunately, the sources are even more scarce than before. There are just two short passages, one by Marcellinus who mentions that the Romans drove the Huns away from Pannonia after 50 years<sup>142</sup>, and a similar one by Jordanes, who adds only one detail, that the Romans were helped by the Goths<sup>143</sup>. Due to the scarcity of information there is a multitude of interpretations of the events of 427. A comprehensive overview

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<sup>140</sup> There is however solid evidence for that to have been a certain Macedonius, otherwise unknown. He is named as a *magister militum* in 423, and since we know the occupants of the other posts, by the process of elimination he must have been *magister militum per Thracias*, possibly still in service in 425. Cf. *CJ*, III, 21.2; *PLRE*, vol. II, p. 694 (s.v. Macedonius 5).

<sup>141</sup> Е.П. Глушанин, *Военная...*, p. 105-106.

<sup>142</sup> Marcellinus Comes, a. 427.

<sup>143</sup> Jordanes, *Getica*, 166.

of the scholarship on this matter was presented by Hrvoje Gračanin<sup>144</sup>. Firstly, it is unclear who the 'Romans' mentioned by the sources were, since even though Marcellinus claimed he wrote a history of the Eastern part<sup>145</sup>, as Otto Maenchen-Helfen rightfully points out, he described the events pertaining solely to the West several times before<sup>146</sup>. It is then debatable what group of the Huns the sources are talking about. Many scholars assume it was the so-called tribe of the Great Huns from beyond the Danube, however, as Laszlo Varady rightfully pointed out, they disregard the information that these Huns held Pannonia for 50 years and in that case the tribe in question must have been the Hunnic *foederati* settled there earlier in the fourth century<sup>147</sup>.

All things considered; it is more likely that the events of the 427 involved a military action by the Eastern Roman forces. The West had barely any reason to get involved in Pannonia, and considering limited resources at the disposal of its government, it would have been foolish for them to do so. The Eastern Roman Empire might have however acted on the basis of a preliminary agreement from 424 that involved the cession of Western Illyricum by the West<sup>148</sup>. The Huns that were expelled were the western *foederati*, with whom the East had no binding agreements. It is however not entirely unlikely that the Huns of Rua were involved in some way. It is possible that the vicinity of such a powerful enemy might have influenced the Romans to employ major forces, including the allied Gothic tribes, very likely the same ones that fought against the Huns five years earlier. Additionally, since Plintha was still a *magister militum praesentalis* in 427, he probably was the Roman commander-in-chief for the Pannonian campaign, which is even more likely considering that the Goths were involved<sup>149</sup>.

Unfortunately, we know nothing beyond these two laconic remarks, and any details regarding the military operations, battles, and the extent of the Romans' success are shrouded in mystery. That being said, regardless of the scope of the campaign, it was nonetheless successful, and if the assumption that Plintha was commanding in it is correct, it explains why his tenure would be extended for yet another term.

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<sup>144</sup> H. Gračanin, *The Huns and the South Pannonia*, Bsl 64, 2006, p. 47–49.

<sup>145</sup> Marcellinus Comes, praefatio

<sup>146</sup> O. Maenchen-Helfen, *The World...*, p. 78.

<sup>147</sup> L. Varady, *Das Letzte Jahrhundert Pannoniens (376-476)*, Amsterdam 1969, p. 281.

<sup>148</sup> B. Croke, *Evidence...*, p. 361, n. 25.

<sup>149</sup> Vladislav Popović (*Die süddanubische Provinzen in der Spätantike vom Ende des 4. Bis zur Mitte des 5. Jahrhunderts*, [in:] *Die Völker Südosteuropas im 6. bis 8. Jahrhundert*, hrsg. B Hänsel, Berlin 1987, p. 102) claims it was Aspar who commanded these forces, however, provides no sources for that.

In 430s the tensions between the Eastern Roman Empire and the Huns rose again. Several tribes belonging to the Hun confederacy sought cooperation with the Romans<sup>150</sup>. Rua decided to make war on the dissidents and also sent his envoy to Constantinople, demanding that every refugee be sent back. Interestingly, when the Romans were deciding on the embassy to Rua, Priscus mentions that both Plintha and Dionysius, who were both *magistri militum praesentales* and ex-consuls at that time wished to go. Apparently Plintha was so determined that he resorted to concocting a plot to secure his membership in the embassy. He sent his retainer, Sengilach, to accompany the Hunnic envoy with orders to convince the king that he speaks only with Plintha. What exactly motivated the general is unknown. Otto Maenchen-Helfen assumes Plintha must have used the Huns as leverage in court politics, similarly to what Aetius did in the West<sup>151</sup>. Evgeniy Glushanin claims that in such a way Plintha attempted to secure command for himself for another term, as diplomatic functions were usually bestowed upon those who held high, military and civilian offices<sup>152</sup>. There may be another explanation for this altogether; regardless, it is unknown if anything came out of it, since Rua died and was succeeded by the brothers - Attila and Bleda. When an embassy to them was being assembled in Constantinople, the Senate recommended Plintha; however, it is unknown whether this choice was affected by his previous intrigue. The general was accepted for an envoy by the emperor, he chose certain Epigenes to accompany him, and set out to meet the kings of the Huns near the city of Margus. There a treaty was agreed upon which doubled the tribute the Huns had been receiving from the Romans<sup>153</sup>, prohibited the Romans from allying themselves with tribes hostile to the Huns, as well as forcing them to relinquish all the fugitives. The Roman prisoners of war were to be ransomed for eight *solidi* each. Additionally, markets with equal rights for the Huns and the Romans were to be established on the frontier.

### **The Second Vandal Expedition (441)**

In 439 Geiseric, the king of Vandals, broke the treaty and in a sudden attack managed to capture Carthage. This event caused great distress in both parts of the Empire. The fall of the

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<sup>150</sup> Priscus (fr. 2) mentions several tribes: Amilzuri, Itinmari, Tounsures and Boisci. He seems to indicate that whole tribes were fleeing to join the Romans, cf. O. Maenchen-Helfen, *The World...*, p. 90. However, Roger Blockley (*Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire*, t. I, Liverpool 1981, p. 379-380, n. 3) rightfully points out that it is more likely it was large groups of individuals who fled into Roman territory rather than whole tribes.

<sup>151</sup> O. Maenchen-Helfen, *The World...*, p. 91.

<sup>152</sup> Е.П. Глушанин, *Военная...*, p. 107.

<sup>153</sup> This clause may have been caused simply by the fact that agreements were negotiated between the rulers, and since now there were two of them, both needed to receive payments. Cf. R.C. Blockley, *East Roman...*, p. 203, n. 8.

capital of the province of Africa sealed the fate of the whole region which was instrumental in sustaining the struggling economy of the Western Roman Empire. Economic factors aside, it also meant that any attempt at retaking Africa in future campaigns would be much more difficult, as the Romans lost their primary foothold in the province. Furthermore, Geiseric gained access to the multitude of vessels docked in Carthaginian ports, which significantly bolstered the strength of the Vandal naval forces<sup>154</sup>.

This event made the Romans realize that the Vandal threat was much more serious than they had originally thought. Soon after, they took hasty precautions to defend themselves from a Vandal attack that seemed imminent. In the West, commander Sigisvult created a system of early warning to inform of the approaching Vandal fleet, and the right to bear arms was restored<sup>155</sup>. Additionally, in the East the sea-side walls of Constantinople were renewed<sup>156</sup>.

The fears were not unsubstantiated, as just the next year the Vandal forces appeared on the coast of Sicily. The whole countryside was ravaged, Lilybaeum fell and Panormos endured a lengthy siege. Whether it held or fell in the end is not certain, however Hydatius mentions some persecutions of Catholics instigated by local Arian leaders that followed<sup>157</sup>. Despite some limited successes fighting off the barbarians by the local forces, the situation on the island was dire.

Valentinian's pleas for help must have been heard by Theodosius, as the Western emperor reassures in his *Novellae* that the forces from the East are coming soon<sup>158</sup>. Indeed, Theodosius decided to act against the Vandals, however, this expedition proved to be an endeavour costly in both resources, and time it took to prepare. The official responsible for the logistics of the operation, Pentadius, was rewarded by the emperor for his efforts<sup>159</sup>, yet it still took up until the next year for the expedition to set out. The strength of the involved forces was reported by Theophanes to be 1,100 ships, which is probably an overstatement, however, likely to a lesser extent than it is usually assumed. This would translate into about 30,000 soldiers and 70,000 sailors, which would have made this force on par with the later famous expedition of Basiliscus in 468. What supports these high numbers of the Roman soldiers is the number of commanders involved<sup>160</sup>. The commander-in-chief was Areobindus, at that point in the rank of *magister militum praesentalis*. Another commander mentioned by three independent sources is Germanus, who was

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<sup>154</sup> R. Miles, A. Merrills, *The Vandals*, Oxford 2010, p. 111.

<sup>155</sup> *Novellae Valentiniani*, IX.

<sup>156</sup> *Chronicon Paschale*, a. 439.

<sup>157</sup> Hydatius, 112.

<sup>158</sup> *Novellae Valentiniani*, IX.

<sup>159</sup> *PLRE*, vol. II, p. 858 (s.v. Pentadius 2).

<sup>160</sup> Cf. M. Wilczyński, *Gejzeryk i „czwarta wojna punicka”*, Oświęcim 2016, p. 121.

*magister militum vacans*. Both Prosper and Theophanes mention Ansila, who is however otherwise unknown. Only the latter account informs of two more, namely Innobindos (unknown) and Arintheus, who was probably synonymous with Agintheos, a commander in Illyria mentioned by Priscus in 449<sup>161</sup>. Both Demandt and Glushanin assume that all four commanders, besides Areobindus, held the titles of *magistri militum vacantes*<sup>162</sup>, yet there is evidence for that only in case of Germanus, so it is certainly a possibility that the others were lower ranking officers<sup>163</sup>.

That being said, in that year a new legislation was accepted in Constantinople which established a flexible system of offices with a clear hierarchy<sup>164</sup>. The law was linked with the expedition of 441 and mentioned Pentadius and Germanus; undoubtedly it was created to give the government the ability to quickly appoint officials for temporary functions as the need arose<sup>165</sup>. The establishment of the legislation might have meant that the government was going to make full use of it and appoint multiple *magistri militum vacantes* for this one expedition.

It is also likely that the unusual number of commanders involved in one combat theatre directly contributed to the failure of the expedition. The Eastern Roman forces arrived on Sicily when the warriors of Geiseric had already retreated. Prosper claims that it was caused by the arrival in Africa of a certain Sebastianus<sup>166</sup>, who was a Western Roman commander, a rival of Aetius and later a councillor of Geiseric<sup>167</sup>. It is difficult to guess what Prosper might have had exactly in mind, or whether his account is accurate in this regard; however it is much more likely that the actual, direct reason for Vandal withdrawal was the news of the Eastern Roman reinforcements approaching Sicily. The Vandals rarely sought field battles in their raids and Geiseric must have not liked the odds of fighting the whole armada.

If the goal of the expedition was to force the Vandals to retreat, Areobindus accomplished it before even reaching the coast. There are however several possible interpretations to what followed. According to Prosper, the Eastern Roman forces stayed on the island for a prolonged duration, to a distress of the already struggling local population who had to procure supplies for

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<sup>161</sup> Priscus, fr. 11.

<sup>162</sup> Е.П. Глушанин, *Военная...*, p. 108; A. Demandt, *Magister...*, p. 790. Demandt does however recognize the fact that there is hard evidence only for Germanus' case. Cf. A. Demandt, *Magister...*, p. 753.

<sup>163</sup> Cf. M. Wilczyński, *Gejzerzyk...*, p. 121.

<sup>164</sup> *CJ*, XII, 8, 2.

<sup>165</sup> Е.П. Глушанин, *Военная...*, p. 107.

<sup>166</sup> Prosper, 1342. On Sebastianus, cf. PLRE, vol. II, p. 983-984 (s.v. Sebastianus 3); Ł. Pigoński, *Wpływ czynników religijnych na relacje rzymsko-wandalskie w latach 429–474*, *ChrA* 8, 2016, p. 106-107.

<sup>167</sup> Victor of Vita, I, 19.

the allied forces<sup>168</sup>. Theophanes, on the other hand, mentions that the forces waited for an embassy from Geiseric suing for peace<sup>169</sup>. Furthermore, around the time of the expedition against the Vandals, the Eastern Roman Empire became engaged in conflict with Persia, and had to defend against the raids of Isaurian and Tzani tribes in Anatolia, as well as to deal with major Hun invasion in Thrace<sup>170</sup>. The fact that the Roman homeland was in danger was certainly a contributing factor to the eventual retreat of the expedition and is often brought up by scholars as the explanation for the failure of the campaign<sup>171</sup>.

This fact, however, does not explain the prolonged stay on the island brought up by Prosper<sup>172</sup>. If in fact Theodosius had been content with forcing the Vandals to retreat, then keeping the forces on the island and overseeing the peace negotiations would have made sense. Considering the cost and effort required to send the expedition, it seems unlikely that it could have had such limited goals. Sicily, due to logistical reasons and the technique of sailing at the time had to be a stop *en route* to Africa; thus, it is not outside the realm of possibility that Areobindus was tasked with striking at the heart of Geiseric's kingdom. Certainly, those were the expectations of the inhabitants of Sicily. One likely reason for the Roman army to linger on the island for an extended period was the problem of divided command. As has already been related, there were as many as five commanders present at the site, and it is in fact possible that most of them held the rank of *magister militum*. Certainly, this allowed for all kinds of disputes over competence, especially if some controversial matter arose (for example making a decision whether to gather troops and sail to Africa or consider Geiseric's peace proposals). In fact, Geiseric used such a strategy several times, sending out his envoys with agreeable peace proposals to delay his opponents and buy time. In this instance he did not seem to have any specific plan, but instead was simply lucky. The tarrying forces on Sicily learned of the problems in homeland, especially the dangerous invasions of the Huns. The Eastern Roman forces were needed in the Balkans, so they hastily accepted the treaties offered by Geiseric and returned home.

The expedition of 441 was in the end a complete failure. This time a treaty signed between the Romans and the Vandals gave away most of the rich and fertile parts of the province to the barbarians; as Roger Blockley accurately states, 'Geiseric remained secure in his possession of

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<sup>168</sup> Prosper, 1344.

<sup>169</sup> Theophanes, AM 5942

<sup>170</sup> Marcellinus Comes, a. 441

<sup>171</sup> E. Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire*, Paris 1959, p. 291; E.A. Thompson, *The Foreign...*, p. 62; R.C. Blockley, *East Roman...*, p. 62.

<sup>172</sup> It should be noted that Prosper was likely well informed of the events on Sicily, since he was a member of papal offices, and it is known that the pope corresponded with the members of the Sicilian Church.

Carthage and a powerful fleet<sup>173</sup>, and even though for several years onwards the tensions died down, the Vandal power was there to stay and would be a thorn in the Romans' side.

### **The Developments in the East**

In 428 the last king of Armenia from the Arsacid dynasty, Ardashir, was deposed by Bahram at the request from the local aristocracy. The Persian king appointed a *marzaban* to govern the province, effectively incorporating it into his Empire. At the same time the *catholicos* of Armenia, the previously mentioned Sahak, was removed from his office<sup>174</sup>. Little is known of the Roman response to that. Apparently, the *magister militum* of the East, Flavius Dionysius, who succeeded Procopius in 428, was sent on an embassy to Persia which was probably related to those events, however there are no details regarding its goals or outcome<sup>175</sup>.

In 433 Anatolius received a nomination for the position of *magister militum per Orientem*, succeeding Flavius Dionysius. The choice was likely not coincidental, as Anatolius seems to have been relatively well versed in Armenian matters. The case of Sahak was still open, as the Armenian nobles petitioned to Bahram to restore the bishop to his function. The king refused, to which Anatolius responded by requesting that Sahak be transferred to the Roman-controlled part of Armenia, yet he met with the king's refusal too. Apparently, the Romans must have wanted to keep a peaceful relationship with Persia, as no further action on their part followed<sup>176</sup>.

In 438 Bahram V died. His successor, Yezdigird II, was occupied by a rebellion against his rule in the first years of his reign and a war with the Kidarite Huns that followed. However, around 441 he turned his attention to the West, invading Roman Mesopotamia. The reason for that incursion seems to have been the fact that the Romans had stopped making payments on account of maintaining the defences of Caspian Gates.

The war was very brief and not much is known about any details regarding the battles, if any took place. It is very likely the only goal of the shah was the projection of power, and it seems he succeeded, as the Romans were in a reasonably conciliatory mood at that time. It was mostly due to the fact that Theodosius II was preparing the expedition against Vandals since 439. Secondly, the Isaurian and Tzani tribes raided Anatolia, which also required the intervention of the

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<sup>173</sup> R.C. Blockley, *East Roman...*, p. 62.

<sup>174</sup> Roger Blockley (*East Roman...*, p. 61) argues the latter was potentially more impactful.

<sup>175</sup> *PLRE*, vol. II, p. 366 (Fl. Dionysius 13).

<sup>176</sup> R.C. Blockley, *East Roman...*, p. 61.

Roman Army. Thus, Anatolius was dispatched as an envoy who first negotiated a year-long truce and later signed a peace treaty that most likely upheld most of the clauses from 422<sup>177</sup>.

### **The War against the Huns of 441-442**

In 441, when the Roman forces were already occupied in the East against Persia and in the West against the Vandals, up north on the Danubian frontier the Huns provoked an incident, attacking the Romans during time of the market. In the course of the following negotiations the Huns claimed that it was a retaliatory strike for the transgressions of the bishop of Margus, who, according to them, robbed some royal tombs of theirs. Regardless of how much credibility there is to those claims of a supposed grave-robbing bishop, whether there was another reason for the aggression, or if the Huns just used the opportunity of the fact that Roman forces were occupied everywhere else and of their overall defencelessness, they demanded that the bishop be turned in to them, as well as any fugitives to whom the Romans were prohibited from giving refuge under the previous treaty<sup>178</sup>. Since mediation had failed, the Huns invaded the Roman territory. Viminacium, Margus<sup>179</sup>, Singidunum<sup>180</sup>, and Sirmium fell to the barbarians<sup>181</sup>, who in the end advanced as far as Naissus, which was also conquered after a siege described in detail by Priscus<sup>182</sup>. To face the Huns, the emperor dispatched *magister militum praesentalis* Aspar. It is unknown what forces he had at his disposal, however, considering on how many fronts the Roman soldiers were occupied in 441, they were likely not substantial<sup>183</sup>. Most likely he did not even attempt to engage the enemy, and instead secured a year-long truce, which gave time for the forces from Sicily to return home<sup>184</sup>.

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<sup>177</sup> Marcellinus Comes, a. 441; Procopius, *History of the Wars*, I, 2.

<sup>178</sup> And even Priscus admits that the Romans broke that clause, as there were many fugitives who were accepted into the Roman territory. Cf. Priscus, fr. 6.

<sup>179</sup> Margus was eventually betrayed by the bishop, who allowed the invaders inside, in exchange for his own safety, cf. Priscus, fr. 2.

<sup>180</sup> Marcellinus Comes, a. 441.

<sup>181</sup> O. Maenchen-Helfen, *The World...*, p. 116; M. Meier, *Geschichte...*, p. 412.

<sup>182</sup> Priscus, fr. 6.

<sup>183</sup> R.C. Blockley, *East Roman...*, p. 62

<sup>184</sup> B. Croke, *Anatolius and Nomus: Envoys to Attila*, Bsl 42, 1981, p. 164-165; B. Croke, *The Context and Date of Priscus Fragment 6*, CP 78, 1983, p. 308.

In 442 the hostilities were resumed with another Hun invasion. This time the barbarians advanced into Thrace<sup>185</sup>. Otto Maenchen-Helfen wonders why the Huns were stopped and assumes it might have been due to a plague or a tribe of Sorosgi raiding their territories<sup>186</sup>, however, there is a much simpler explanation, which is that the forces of Areobindus had finally returned from Sicily and could contain the Hun menace. At this point Attila and Bleda agreed to a peace, which was preliminarily negotiated with the general and then ratified by the *magister officiorum* Nomus<sup>187</sup>.

Interestingly, there is another event related to the Eastern Roman generals in 441. According to both Marcellinus Comes and the *Chronicon Paschale*, Arnegisclus murdered John the Vandal<sup>188</sup>, who was at that point likely the *magister militum per Thracias*<sup>189</sup>. The motive is unknown; the assumption of some scholars that it was a political assassination due to John's ethnicity and the imminent conflict with the Vandals seems rather improbable; however, the fact that Arnegisclus received the office after his victim proves that it was approved by the establishment<sup>190</sup>. There is however another account, written by Theophanes, who confused the general John with the usurper in Rome, thus its credibility is dubious, yet he links *spatharius* Chrysaphius with the murder<sup>191</sup>. It was during that time when Chrysaphius-Ztoummas, which was his original, Armenian, name, became a close advisor of Theodosius and an influential person at the Constantinopolitan court<sup>192</sup>.

The year 441 was, as we have discussed, in more than one aspect a turning point of Theodosius' reign. Primarily however, it signified a major failure of his foreign policy, and at least partially the emperor was to be blamed for that. The fact that he engaged in a campaign that was costly in time and resources, while there were several potential flashpoints at the Empire's borders only resulted in his forces being stretched so thin that led to harsh concessions in all theatres of war. The unfavourable peace with Persia and the *de facto* acceptance of Vandal dominion over Africa were at this point a done deal. The settlement with the Huns, however, was the outcome of that ill-fated year which Theodosius could have turned around. It is clear that the emperor did not fully recognize the danger of the invaders from beyond the Danube up to this point, but this was about

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<sup>185</sup> Marcellinus Comes, a. 442; *Chronicon Paschale*, a. 442.

<sup>186</sup> O. Maenchen-Helfen, *The World...*, p. 116.

<sup>187</sup> B. Croke, *Anatolius...*, p. 167-170.

<sup>188</sup> Marcellinus Comes, a. 441; *Chronicon Paschale*, a. 441.

<sup>189</sup> A. Demandt, *Magister...*, p. 744-745.

<sup>190</sup> *PLRE*, vol. II, p. 597 (s.v. Ioannes the Vandal 13).

<sup>191</sup> Theophanes, AM 5943.

<sup>192</sup> He was also a *cubicullarius*, tender of the Imperial bedrooms. While on the surface this office appears unimportant, in reality it gave immense power due to unrestricted access to the emperor. F. Millar, *A Greek Roman Empire. Power and Belief under Theodosius II 408–450*, Berkeley 2007, p. 226.

to change. In 443 he ordered to reinforce the *limitanei* troops and restore them to original numbers, rebuild the river flotilla on the Danube, threatened to punish all instances of corruption that would embezzle the funds meant for strengthening the military system of the Empire and announced a system of oversight and annual checks to make sure the reform gets implemented correctly<sup>193</sup>.

### **The Road to the Next War**

Possibly the next year, in 444, no more payments of the tribute were sent by the emperor to the Huns. The barbarians were at this point involved first in the West, in a limited conflict that was concluded by a peace negotiated by Aetius<sup>194</sup>, and soon after, in 445, Attila murdered his brother and co-ruler Bleda<sup>195</sup>. This move had made Attila the sole leader of the Huns, but obviously he needed to pacify dissidents and former followers of Bleda. Then, he was also involved in a war with another Hun tribe called Akatziri. Naturally, due to all of those struggles he was unable to challenge the Roman Empire on the account of the fact that they had ceased to pay him off.

For the next three years it seemed like Theodosius' policy was a success. After the payments stopped, Attila seems to have threatened the emperor with war<sup>196</sup>; however, considering the bolstered defences on the Danube, it would have been rather unlikely for Huns to be able to face the concentrated might of Roman armies in the Balkans.

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<sup>193</sup> *Novellae Theodosianae*, XXIV; O. Maenchen-Helfen, *The World...*, p. 117; P. Heather, *Upadek Cesarstwa Rzymskiego*, tłum. J. Szczepański, Poznań 2006, p. 359.

<sup>194</sup> I follow the interpretation of Otto Maenchen-Helfen (*The World...*, p. 95–107) who provides a detailed analysis proving a rise in tensions between the Huns and the Western Roman Empire that were pacified by Aetius. For additional commentary cf. T. Stickle, *Aetius. Gestaltungsspielräume eines Heermeisters im ausgehenden Westromischen Reich*, München 2002, p. 116–122.

<sup>195</sup> Marcellinus Comes, a 445; I. Bóna, *Das Hunnenreich*, Stuttgart 1991, p. 62; O. Maenchen-Helfen, *The World...*, p. 104–105.

<sup>196</sup> Priscus, fr. 9. Attila sent Theodosius a message saying that without the gold he would not be able to hold back his warriors from invading. Otto Maenchen-Helfen (*The World...*, p. 118) interprets this information as proof that within the Hunnic confederation there were some restless, warlike groups who decided to raid the frontier on their own, before the war started. Gerhard Wirth (*Attila. Das Hunnenreich und Europa*, Stuttgart 1999, p. 69–70) claims that Attila truthfully informed the emperor that he urgently needed gold to keep his warriors in check, as the stability of his realm was in jeopardy after the murder of Bleda. Those interpretations are well reasoned and certainly interesting; it is not to be argued that Attila was facing some dissent, possibly from hawkish parties among his followers, and needed gold from tribute as a tool in governing his realm; however, there might be another, simpler possibility that this passage simply relays Attila's threats, disguising in diplomatic words a message with the actual meaning that attacks will happen if gold is not sent.

Unfortunately, it seems that this time the goddess Fortuna favoured the barbarians. In 446/447 the province of Thrace was struck by an earthquake, which was followed by a plague and famine<sup>197</sup>. Considering the sorry state that the struggling Balkan provinces of the Empire were in at that point, it was a perfect time for the Huns to strike. Undoubtedly the Roman attention was focused on dealing with the calamities, and the ability of local forces to withstand the invasion, despite Theodosius' previous efforts to bolster it, was at its lowest. To make matters worse, the earthquake severely damaged the walls of Constantinople which rendered the capital, usually impervious to any barbarian horde, extremely vulnerable<sup>198</sup>. It must have caused a great distress on the imperial court, as the news of Attila's attack reached the capital.

### **The War of 447. A Conflict Shrouded in Mystery**

The war of 447 could be considered one of the most important conflicts in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, and it is especially meaningful for the topic explored in this work. Unfortunately, the information at our disposal is extremely scarce and spread across multiple sources.

Marcellinus Comes claims the war was even greater than the previous one, informing that Attila reached Thermopolis<sup>199</sup>, and mentions one major battle that took place at the Utus river, where *magister militum* Arnegisclus fought bravely against the forces of Attila, however was struck down just when the battle was turning in the Romans' favour<sup>200</sup>. This battle was related by two other sources, Jordanes in his *Romana* elaborates how the general was killed due to his horse collapsing under him and getting outmanoeuvred, and in addition to those minor details, he informs us that Arnegisclus set out to meet the enemy from Marcianopolis<sup>201</sup>. The death of Arnegisclus in the field is also recorded by the *Paschal Chronicle*, which also mentions that Marcianopolis fell to the invaders in the aftermath of the battle<sup>202</sup>.

Another account of the war can be found in Theophanes' Chronicle, however his work is very confused chronologically. The historian seems to have combined the war of 447 with the previous conflicts, and as such, it is unclear which information pertains to which year. He mentions Arnegisclus by name, as well as Aspar and Areobindus, and laconically reports that the generals

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<sup>197</sup> Marcellinus Comes, a. 447.

<sup>198</sup> Apparently fifty-seven towers collapsed alongside the sections of the wall, cf. Marcellinus Comes, a. 447. According to *Chronicon Paschale* (a. 447) the results of the earthquake were much less lethal since people had managed to escape the towers before they crumbled.

<sup>199</sup> *Attila usque ad Thermopolim infestus advenit* – Marcellinus Comes, a. 447

<sup>200</sup> Marcellinus Comes, a. 447.

<sup>201</sup> Jordanes, *Romana*, 331.

<sup>202</sup> *Chronicon Paschale*, a. 447.

suffered defeats in the battles that occurred. Then he mentions several cities that fell to the Huns, and Attila reaching the fort Athyras, before describing the conditions of the peace<sup>203</sup>.

The most important source on those events, the *History* of Priscus, is unfortunately severely lacking, as the fragments regarding the conflict itself are missing<sup>204</sup>. Some details he mentions in passing, indicate that the Huns first invaded Ratiaria and he names a certain battle at Chersonesus, however, the fragment did not specify its outcome. The historian also brings up Flavius Zeno's role in the war, the destruction caused by the Huns, as well as praises the resolve of the defenders of fortress Asemus, who apparently managed not only to successfully fend off the Huns, but also sallied forth, engaging some raiding parties in the field and dealing them serious losses. An interesting passage exists in the Gallic Chronicle of 452, where the author mentions the cities destroyed in the war and blames the Western government for not intervening to help their brethren<sup>205</sup>.

As such, much of the war of 447 is shrouded in mystery and the interpretations of the scholars vary widely. Adding to the overall confusion, some parts of the conflict have previously been erroneously dated to the year 443<sup>206</sup>, which does not necessarily make the observations of otherwise renowned historians who made that mistake useless, however, the confused chronology certainly detracts from their interpretation. As far as the evaluation of the conflict goes, there is a certain division on how successful were the Huns when facing the Roman army<sup>207</sup>. Many claim that it was an utter disaster in military terms and the warriors of Attila crushed the forces sent against

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<sup>203</sup> Theophanes, AM5942; Since it is known from other sources that Aspar and Areobindus were involved in the war of 441-442, it is impossible to tell whether Theophanes means this conflict or actually reports on their taking part in the war of 447. Ronald A. Bleeker (*Aspar and Attila: The Role of Flavius Ardaburius Aspar in the Hun Wars of the 440s*, AWO 3, 1980, p. 25) assumes Theophanes follows a chronological continuity and since the information on the war comes after the mentioning of the murder of Bleda, he claims that all the information pertains to the war of 447. However, the information on Bleda's murder is a digression, since Theophanes follows it up with the information on an earlier treaty with Geiseric, after which Areobindus returned to the Balkans and fought the Huns saying that all this took place in 442.

<sup>204</sup> This is likely due to the character of the fragments, which were excerpts from the embassies. In the original work Priscus undoubtedly specified the outcomes of the battles and elaborated on them, however, the copyists of the *excerpta de legationibus* were interested specifically in fragments directly detailing diplomatic negotiations and embassies, omitting the war itself.

<sup>205</sup> *Chronica Gallica a. 452*, 132.

<sup>206</sup> J.B. Bury, *History...*, p. 275; A.H.M. Jones, *The Later...*, p. 193; E.A. Thompson, *A History of Attila and the Huns*, Oxford 1948, p. 85.

<sup>207</sup> Interestingly, no source, barring Theophanes, explicitly states that Romans suffered defeats in the field.

them, allowing the Hun king to dictate his terms to Romans<sup>208</sup>. Others point out the existence of many coinciding factors that allowed the Huns to achieve the favourable result, however it was at a cost<sup>209</sup>. Interestingly, there are even singular voices claiming the campaign of 447 was a defeat for Attila<sup>210</sup>.

When it comes to the course of the campaign, the outcome of the battles, and the leadership, the historiography generally refrains from delving into much detail. When we consider the limited information provided by the sources, it is understandable. The Battle of Utus, being the most widely reported event has however found some interpretations. Scholars such as Evgeniy Glushanin and Karl Feld claim, supposedly following Theophanes, that all the Roman forces in the Balkans joined together to face the Huns<sup>211</sup>. The battle of Chersonesus is rarely discussed at all, and generally it is assumed it was another defeat for the Roman army<sup>212</sup>. There is also a common mistake that repeatedly appears in the literature - the misinterpretation of Marcellinus' Thermopolis as a famous Thermopylae passage<sup>213</sup>.

### **The Course of the War**

The above overview undoubtedly proves how complicated the conflict of 447 is. The safe approach is therefore to avoid interpretations based on anecdotal evidence and resort only to information that is confirmed by the sources. This could have been a right solution in a general overview of the era, however, considering the importance of those event to the development of the issues it is simply insufficient for the purpose of this work to accept the uncertainty of the information at our disposal. Thus, an attempt at puzzling out the course of events is essential, however, it needs to be stressed that the interpretation below, despite the author's best efforts to take into account and properly analyse all the information at our disposal, no matter how disjointed and fragmentary, is prone to mistakes and largely subjective in its nature.

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<sup>208</sup> J.B. Bury, *History...*, p. 275; A.H.M. Jones, *The Later...*, p. 193; A. Demandt, *Geschichte...*, p. 140; H.J. Kim, *The Huns, Romans and the Birth of Europe*, Cambridge 2013, p. 71.

<sup>209</sup> E.A. Thompson, *A History...*, p. 92.

<sup>210</sup> G. Wirth, *Attila...*, p. 94.

<sup>211</sup> E.П. Глущанин, *Военная ...*, p. 109; K. Feld, *Barbarische Bürger: Die Isaurier und das Römische Reich*, Berlin 2005, p. 214.

<sup>212</sup> E.A. Thompson, *The Isaurians under Theodosius II*, *Her* 68, 1946, p. 20; M. Meier, *Geschichte...*, p. 419.

<sup>213</sup> Concerning this misconception see J. Karayannopoulos, *Byzantinische Miszellen*, [in:] *Studia in honorem Veselini Beševliev*, ed. V. Georgiev, Sofia 1978, p. 490; J. Prostko-Prostyński, *Attila and Novae*, [in:] *Novae. Legionary Fortress and Late Antique Town*, vol. I, *A Companion to the Study of Novae*, ed. T. Derda, P. Dyczek, J. Kolendo, Warsaw 2008, p. 137, an. 24.

Firstly, it is important to consider the strategic situation of the Romans at the brink of the war. The Huns thus far decided to make war against the Eastern Roman Empire only when their forces were occupied elsewhere and the defences of the northern border were not at full strength. The earthquake and other calamities that the Empire suffered from before the war certainly diminished its ability to defend itself to such a point that Attila must have felt ready to attack. This means the recently reorganized forces of *limitanei* that Theodosius based his policy on, just a couple years later in 447 were no longer able to hold the king of the Huns for any substantial amount of time. Additionally, the usually impervious to attacks city of Constantinople had its walls seriously damaged and the Huns who usually had problems dealing with sieges would have been able to enter and plunder the city.

If we take the above factors into consideration there could have been only one primary goal for the Roman army in 447, and that was to stop, or at least delay, the Huns to prevent them from reaching the capital before its defences were rebuilt. If the intentions of the Romans are easy to guess, how they went about stopping the Hun menace is unfortunately unknown. We can however theorize on what might have been considered the best course of action at the panicked court of Theodosius.

We know for a fact that stationing the whole army near Constantinople was out of the question. The sources clearly state how the capital was saved by the forces coming from the East, thus, the majority of the forces in Thrace must have been sent to meet the Huns in the field. A likely reason for such a course of action was possibly the fear of defeat by the walls of Constantinople which could not have been rebuilt in time if the Huns were allowed to invade the Empire unimpeded. The outcome of the field battle was always uncertain. If it were to take place further up north there would always be a chance to slow down the approaching enemy, even if fortune would not be on the Romans' side.

It can be therefore safely assumed that the majority of the Roman forces in Thrace, either both of the praesental armies, or one reinforced with additional units from the other, were dispatched against the invading Huns. The fastest route connecting the capital and the endangered frontier was *Via Militaris*. Attila had already chosen that approach to invade Thrace earlier and most likely that is where the Roman soldiers were sent to intercept the invading Huns. It is up to speculation who commanded these forces. One of the commanders of the forces was likely Aspar, which is evidenced not by the faulty passage in Theophanes' chronicle, but rather by the coinciding fact that Aspar's son, Ardaburius, was granted consulship in 447. Evgeniy Glushanin rightfully notes that it was likely a 'gift' to the clan of Ardaburi to secure their loyalty, since likely Aspar was considered an important asset in the new policy of the emperor against the Huns. Thus, he must

have been in position of command around that time, likely replacing Areobindus in 445 (incidentally exactly around that time the relations with the Huns turned sour). Maybe Aspar's good use of the limited resources he had at his disposal in the wars of 441-442 was the reason why it was decided he was to be the commander in the next war. The other commander was possibly Apollonius, but the evidence in support of that is even more scarce. All that we know is he was certified in command in 443, and did take part in an embassy in 452, which would be unlikely if he held no office at the time. That would amount exactly to two terms in service<sup>214</sup>. Furthermore, simply by elimination there is no other name unaccounted for that would be referenced around that time, save for Areobindus; however, there is nothing that would indicate he held the office during the conflict, since the account of Theophanes cannot be taken as a proof of that. He might have taken part in the war as a *magister militum vacans*. There is also no way to account for the sudden nominations and dismissals.

Whoever was in charge of the Roman field armies had the difficult task of intercepting the Hun forces in the Balkans. This time however, Attila, after the capture of Ratiaria, which most likely held much shorter than the Romans had hoped for and needed it to, turned eastwards in parallel to the Danube river. The army of the *magister militum per Thracias* Arnegisclus marched from the opposite direction. It is very likely that the general did not plan to fight the invaders, and instead intended to join forces with the army dispatched from Constantinople. Whether or not he was reinforced is difficult to say and there is no evidence in the sources that would indicate one way or the other. However, for that to have been the case his forces would have to have been strengthened by some detachments from the field armies either prior to the Hun invasion, or the praesental forces (or their elements) would have had to cross the Hemos mountains to join Arnegisclus. Furthermore, of all the sources relating the course of the battle, none mentions any commanders beyond Arnegisclus, and only Theophanes (whose credibility in this case is, as it was pointed out, highly questionable) names Arnegisclus alongside Aspar and Areobindus, but does not mention the battle of Utus itself.

In the following meeting engagement Arnegisclus valiantly opposed the Hun forces, but ultimately was defeated. The sources at our disposal seem to indicate that the battle was going favourably for the Roman side, and only the death of the commander, who bravely led his troops from the front turned the tide. It might have been so, but it is equally probable that the battle of Utus was later considered by the Romans a necessary sacrifice of the numerically inferior army of Thrace to slow down the Hunnic hordes. It was certainly the most famous event of the whole war,

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<sup>214</sup> The fact that Apollonius managed to build close relationship with Flavius Zeno after the war, likely based on similar views on the Hun policy, might also indicate they were both commanders in the war of 447.

which is indicated by three surviving accounts. Its actual tactical and strategic aftermath is, however, difficult to evaluate.

It is not known what happened with the other Roman armies in the Balkans. The historiography simply assumes that they were destroyed, but as it was established previously, it is not even likely for them to have taken part in the battle of Utus. However, the Huns pressed on into the Roman territory, eventually capturing Marcianopolis. The destruction of the Roman armies would be a reasonable explanation for the quick Hun successes. That being said, if by turning east the barbarians evaded the main force that was sent to meet them, the following news of the catastrophe at Utus and Arnegisclus' demise could have been a major blow to the Roman morale, even to the point that the armies were rendered effectively useless for military purposes<sup>215</sup>. Furthermore, those soldiers were now in a very difficult situation. We obviously do not know at what points they learned of the fall of Ratiaria, the route taken by the Huns, and eventually the fate of Arnegisclus and the army of Thrace, but undoubtedly, they were always a couple of steps behind. As the Huns pressed on, it likely became clear that they were neither able to chase them, nor cut them off due to the Hemos mountains standing in the way.

The only sensible course of action must have been to retreat back to Constantinople, as quickly as possible, since even if the walls were to be rebuilt in time, there were not enough defenders in the capital to man them. Still, it was likely that it might have been too late for that anyway.

Similar fears must have been going through the minds of the Emperor and his court. The Romans did not have many options to choose from when deciding on how to deal with the threat. Unfortunately, this is also the part of the war that is the most mysterious due to the lack of sources, which also contributes to the scholarship's general avoidance of making any claims regarding those events.

The only clue at our disposal are the fragments of Priscus, especially the second passage from the excerpts from the Roman embassies<sup>216</sup>. The short, laconic note mentions the embassy of Flavius Senator to Attila and an army commander Theodulus who was stationed in Odessos. The first information should not be a surprise. The use of diplomacy to either stop, or at least gain time when facing a serious threat was a common practice. In this case however, as Priscus bluntly states, Senator achieved absolutely nothing. What is more interesting is the information how he decided to reach the Huns. As the historian remarks, Senator was unsure if he could travel by land, therefore

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<sup>215</sup> It has to be noted that the events preceding the war of 447 could also have had a detrimental effect on the morale, considering they could have been interpreted as bad omens or a sign of divine wrath.

<sup>216</sup> *Priscus*, fr. 9.

he decided to sail to Odessos. This must mean that at this point the Hun vanguard must have already been moving south, parallel to the coastline of the Black Sea, towards Constantinople, and thus the envoy did not want to risk capture.

The fact that Priscus mentions Theodulus at this point is very interesting. He specifically mentions that the general was sent to Odessos. It is therefore clear that as soon as the news of the tragic fate of Arnegisclus and the army of Thrace reached Constantinople, the emperor immediately dispatched Theodulus to reorganize the fragmented units in the north. The commander did not manage to prevent the fall of Marcianopolis, nor could he oppose the Huns in the field. He most likely gathered the remnants from the Arnegisclus' army and the survivors from the siege of Marcianople and prepared to hold Odessos – successfully – as we know the town did not fall during the war.

When Senator's embassy failed, the emperor was truly helpless. Luckily, the walls of the city were indeed rebuilt incredibly quickly in just three months' time due to extraordinary efforts of the urban praefect Constantine, who, thanks to his cunning, employed the circus factions and ensured their engagement by making the opposing factions compete against each other<sup>217</sup>. All of this would have been for naught if not for the eventual arrival of Flavius Zeno with his Isaurian troops. It is uncertain whether his appearance actually saved the capital. The Huns most likely managed to reach the fortress of Athyras<sup>218</sup> located just on the outskirts of Constantinople. Having no chance to conquer the rebuilt walls defended by the Isaurians, it seems that the Huns either tried to plunder the lands to the west of the capital or attempted to cross the Dardanelles, since the next major event that we know of was the battle at Chersonesus.

Known only in passing from a reference in the history of Priscus, its details, significance, and even the outcome are all a matter of speculation. The location of the battle might signify that the Huns faced, among others, the reinforcements from the East led by Anatolius. It is further supported by the fact that this general was later responsible for peace negotiations, which was often the prerogative of the military commander who was the closest to the theatre of operations<sup>219</sup>. It is also likely that the forces of Flavius Zeno took part in the battle, considering how close they were to the location of the battlefield. Whether the praesental armies of the Empire took part in it is uncertain, however, it cannot be ruled out. Nevertheless, it was likely that at the Chersonesus the Huns met the concentrated Roman force.

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<sup>217</sup> Marcellinus Comes, a. 447. Cf. *PLRE*, vol. II, p. 317 (s.v. Fl. Constantinus 22).

<sup>218</sup> Theophanes, AM5942.

<sup>219</sup> Priscus, fr. 9.

The outcome of the battle is another mystery. As it has already been pointed out, the scholarship generally assumes it was another defeat for the Roman side, however, there are several counterarguments to that.

Firstly, the fact that the Huns retreated from Thrace and did not even attempt to lay siege to Constantinople indicates that the Roman army was not destroyed in the field. Some scholars assumed that their retreat could have been due to plague breaking out in their ranks. Those conclusions are drawn from analogous events from the later invasion of Italy in 452, yet there is no evidence for such problems in the Hunnic forces in 447 in any of the sources, besides the coincidental fact that pestilence struck the Roman lands before the invasion.

Secondly, several Roman commanders, with the saviour of Constantinople, Flavius Zeno, at the forefront wanted to continue the war at all cost. The reasons behind their agenda will be explained in detail in following chapters; however, they had to gauge their chances highly against the Huns of Attila if they were willing to openly push for a military resolution of the conflict. It would be unlikely for that to have been the case if the Roman forces had been completely obliterated in the battles with the barbarians.

Thus, it is most likely that the battle of Chersonesus was a stalemate. Neither did the Huns manage to break the Roman forces, nor did the Imperial army defeat the invaders. In such a situation Theodosius was left with a decision whether to pursue further conflict.

While the outcome of the war hung in a balance, at the northern border the fortified town Asemus witnessed, like many other Roman cities, raiding and pillaging of nearby lands by the Huns. The Asemuntians, however, stood out among the rest due to their courage and martial prowess, as they not only held the walls, but also managed to set out to the field and defeat some of the raiding parties. Doing that they freed many prisoners and captured Hun baggage trains with spoils. There is no doubt that the episode of Asemus serves a specific purpose in the story of the war in Priscus' work, and it may be slightly exaggerated. It is however also an example that the Huns suffered setbacks in the campaign of 447 and the war itself was not one-sided.

### **The Peace of 447**

The clash on the Chersonesus was the last engagement in the war. As Priscus reports, the peace negotiations followed, even before Attila retreated from the Roman territory, and the envoys who were chosen to negotiate were Anatolius and Theodulus, commanders who operated in the area<sup>220</sup>. This led to a conclusion that the subject of the talks was an armistice rather than a lasting

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<sup>220</sup> Priscus, fr. 9.

peace. It appears that the emperor considered an imminent cessation of hostilities a priority in this situation.

The price that the Romans had to pay for that, however, was steep. An annual tribute of 2,100 pounds of gold was agreed upon. In addition, the Romans had to pay the arrears of 6,000 pounds of gold, and release all of the refugees and prisoners, however, the Roman prisoners of war were subject to ransom of 12 solidi per capita. To add salt to injury, Theodosius also had to pay for those prisoners that the Huns claimed to have captured, but who escaped on their own.

Priscus also mentioned that Attila demanded a strip of land stretching from Pannonia to Novae, five days' travel deep. It was commonly accepted that Anatolius indeed ceded some territory to the Huns to create a demilitarized buffer zone<sup>221</sup>. This would have been a temporary measure, as just two years later another embassy would have negotiated a return of those lands under full Roman control. It has to be understood that considering the difficult situation the Empire was in, such decision would not have been entirely unreasonable, especially since the Romans, as Priscus states explicitly, were desperate to make peace at all cost. However, other scholars interpret the information in the source differently, claiming Attila's demands were not grounded in any previous agreement and just constituted his usual extortion and threats, which is probably more likely to have been the case<sup>222</sup>.

The consequences of the war of 447 and the ensuing peace are hard to gauge and have been subject to much discussion. Priscus paints an apocalyptic overview of the Roman populace becoming subject to exorbitant taxes, which ruined their livelihoods, leading some to starvation or even suicide from desperation. Some from the formerly wealthy senatorial class were forced to sell their belongings, even furniture or their wives' jewellery. Furthermore, some of the refugees who were to be handed over refused to comply and were thus killed by Roman hands. The historian certainly attempts to present this peace as a political catastrophe, a disgrace to the Roman state, and a huge strain on the budget. The latter part is, however, disputable. Some scholars noted that the sums that were demanded by Attila were relatively insignificant considering the economic capacity of the Roman Empire<sup>223</sup>. They tend to point out Priscus' bias and his allegiance to the senatorial class as the reasoning behind his criticism, and propose an interpretation to the contrary – the additional taxes imposed on the higher classes could not harm their well-being, considering

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<sup>221</sup> A.H.M. Jones, *The Later...*, p. 194; O. Maenchen-Helfen, *The World...*, 124; R. Hohlfelder, *Marician's Gamble. A Reassessment of Eastern Imperial Policy toward Attila AD 450–453*, *AJAH* 9, 1984, p. 55; T. Stickle, *Aetius...*, p. 123.

<sup>222</sup> B. Croke, *Anatolius...*, p. 169; J. Prostko-Prostyński, *Attila...*, p. 139.

<sup>223</sup> A.H.M. Jones, *The Later...*, p. 206–207; E.A. Thompson, *The Foreign...*, p. 73.

their enormous wealth, and were actually a sound decision to avoid burdening the general population with additional taxes. However, what these overviews fail to take into account is that the taxes were collected from the people who were previously exempted from them. A usual practice was to grant exemptions to people affected by natural disasters or enemy raids. It has to be recognized, that the additional taxes had to cover the expenses of the state that was first hit by natural disasters, had to wage a war, and then pay tribute – if we take all of that into account, suddenly the sums that were the subject of the treaty become more significant<sup>224</sup>. Furthermore, Priscus does not state that it was only the senators who had to pay additional taxes and his allusions to them leading to starvation and suicides among some seem to indicate that the common man was not spared by the tax collectors either.

Therefore, it seems that the agreement to the terms of the peace of 447 was considered a controversial issue to say the least, not only among the wealthy senatorial class, but among other groups as well. One of the groups that seems to have been particularly dissatisfied with the outcome was the military elite.

### **The Straw that Broke the Camel's Back. The Conflict over the Hun Question.**

There is some evidence that some members of the Eastern Roman military command were not happy with how the Hun problem was being dealt with. Naturally, we do not have their own statements criticizing the policies of the Emperor, however, it can be proved by the analysis of their activities just after the war. Luckily, the aftermath of the war of 447 and the diplomatic talks with Attila are among the most detailed and credible descriptions of the historical events of the 5<sup>th</sup> century that can be found in the whole corpus of the sources.

The most vocal opponent of the imperial policy regarding the Huns was doubtlessly the hero of the war, Flavius Zeno, the Isaurian. His willingness to continue the war was apparent, considering the political scandal he was willing to create only to make a point<sup>225</sup>.

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<sup>224</sup> Cf. H.J. Kim, *The Huns...*, p. 71-73. Furthermore, Doug Lee (*The eastern empire: Theodosius to Anastasius*, [in:] *CAH*, vol. XIV, ed. A. Cameron, B. Ward-Perkins, M. Whitby, Cambridge 2008, p. 45, n. 77) brings up an interesting argument that the quick collection of vast financial reserves by the successor of Theodosius, Marcian, could be attributed to his different policies regarding tribute and could indicate how much of a strain on the Empire's resources the appeasement of Attila was. For other scholars who accept the severity of the taxes, cf. C.D. Gordon, *The Age of Attila. Fifth-Century Byzantium and the Barbarians*, Michigan 1961, p. 66–67; O. Maenchen-Helfen, *The World...*, p. 114; N. Lensky, *Captivity among the Barbarians and Its Impact on the Fate of the Roman Empire*, [in:] *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Attila*, ed. M. Maas, Cambridge 2015, p. 235–238.

<sup>225</sup> Priscus, frag. 14; K. Feld, *Barbarische...*, p. 218–219; R. Kosiński, *The Emperor Zeno. Religion and Politics*, trans. M. Fijałk, Cracow 2010, p. 61; M. Meier, *Geschichte...*, p. 421.

As it has already been stated, Theodosius was desperate to conclude peace with Attila. When the Hun embassy, at some point after the armistice of 447, reached Constantinople, one of its members, a Western Roman named Constantius, who was the king's secretary, offered the emperor to ensure that a long-lasting peace would be made on the condition that he received a wealthy, noble-born bride for his efforts. Theodosius happily agreed to that request, offering a daughter of a wealthy senator Saturninus. She was under emperor's care ever since her father had been killed by the order of the empress Eudocia<sup>226</sup>. It is not stated in the sources how Constantius planned to make a lasting peace, whether he had Attila's ear or had some other way in mind. The specific problems that created the tensions between the Romans and the Huns at the time were primarily the usual sly and disobedient attitude of the Romans when having to hand over the fugitives and prisoners, and the consequent Attila's refusal to relinquish the territories he occupied by the Danube. However, knowing how usually any issues were resolved in Roman-Hunnic relations, the answer was probably money. As Priscus reports, Constantius agreed to split the dowry he were to receive with the king. It is possible that this was a way to appease Attila with yet more gold, and an alternative to straining the imperial treasury even further which was already in dire straits<sup>227</sup>.

Nevertheless, unfortunately for Theodosius, this is where Zeno decided to step in and take matters in his own hands. He kidnapped Saturninus' daughter, hid her away, and ordered her to marry one of his subordinates, a certain Rufus. Whatever arrangements the emperor had with Constantius, they were no longer binding. The Roman protested his case to Attila, and the king took personal interest in the matter<sup>228</sup>. As a result, just after the costly treaty of 447 had been settled, the diplomatic relations turned for the worse yet again, and over an issue that was not at all something the emperor was willing to fight for.

### **The Curious Case of Berichus**

Even though it appears that there is little evidence indicating the political alignment and goals of military commanders beyond what has already been stated, there is an important clue hidden in the narrative of Priscus that could lead to new interpretations. The story in question is part of Priscus' report from his diplomatic mission to the Huns and concerns an argument with a certain Berichus – a Hun nobleman that was sent with the returning Roman envoys to conduct negotiations on behalf of Attila. As they were travelling together, Berichus suddenly appeared

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<sup>226</sup> R.C. Blockley, *The Fragmentary...*, vol. II, p. 388, n. 86.

<sup>227</sup> R.C. Blockley, *East Roman...*, p. 66.

<sup>228</sup> The issue was brought up during the meeting of Maximinus and his embassy with Attila, cf. Priscus, frag. 14.

resentful for no apparent reason – he refused to communicate or even ride along with the Romans. When finally asked about what had caused his behaviour, he accused Maximinus, the head of the embassy, of claiming in front of Attila that Aspar and Areobindus were unreliable barbarians and had no say at the emperor's court. Unfortunately, Priscus is not clear why this infuriated the Hun so much, and it is just as likely that the diplomat himself did not understand what caused the barbarian's ire. There are many possible explanations, and some (which the author considers to be the most probable) may be relevant to the questions at hand<sup>229</sup>.

There are two main issues with the Berichus case: why did Maximinus make such statements about Aspar and Areobindus, and why did that fact anger the Hun so much. There are two likely explanations for Maximinus' words; the envoy made the observation that Aspar and Areobindus hold no power, because after the war with the Huns they were no longer holding the offices of *magistri militum*. This would mean that the tenure of Aspar was cut short, which, from what we know, was not a common occurrence, even if the commander in question could be accused of failures in his service. Of course, it is possible that the war of 447 was a special case, but it is impossible to say whether Aspar could have been guilty of any misconduct, cowardice, or incompetence. However, considering the humiliation that was the peace of 447, it is not unlikely that the commanders leading the army that failed to deliver a victory over the Huns could have made a convenient scapegoat.

The other possibility is that Maximinus wanted Attila to name specific persons as future envoys. The king of the Huns was very selective and sometimes refused to speak with the Romans when he considered them not illustrious enough. In this instance it appears he named people he had already trusted and conducted talks with – Anatolius, Nomus, Senator, Aspar, and Areobindus<sup>230</sup>. Out of those five, Maximinus clearly tried to convince Attila to not call for Aspar nor Areobindus; for some reason both of those commanders were somehow inconvenient to the Roman envoy or the people he represented. This could have been simply due to them holding no office any longer at that time, which would have made them ineligible for such an important diplomatic task. There is however another possibility to consider, namely why did Berichus get so offended after learning of the actions of Maximinus?

If we accepted the seemingly straightforward interpretation that the envoy informed Attila of Aspar and Areobindus being unable to represent the emperor, the only explanation for Berichus' outburst is some misunderstanding, since he presented the words of Maximinus as quite blunt and

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<sup>229</sup> Cf. Ł. Pięgoński, *Berichus and the Evidence for Aspar's Political Power and Aims in the Last Years of Theodosius II's Reign*, SCer 8, p. 247-251.

<sup>230</sup> B. Croke, *Anatolius...*, p. 166.

negative towards the commanders. It is possible, however, that the envoy did indeed use such uncompromising language, and did so for a reason. There could have been a reasonable fear in 448, when the embassy took place, that the military could interfere in the diplomatic process. In fact, that had already happened when Zeno orchestrated the scandal concerning the daughter of Saturninus. A more direct intrusion was also possible, and it would not have been unprecedented if we remind ourselves of the example of Plintha. Thus, Maximinus could have reasonably suspected it to happen and employed countermeasures, by convincing Attila of the value of conducting negotiations only with selected people. For that interpretation to make sense there is however yet another assumption that has to be made – Aspar and Areobindus were considered the opponents of the governmental policy regarding the Huns. This is quite likely, especially in the case of the former who later on was essential in the accession of Marcian, the emperor who initiated a change in the course of the Hun policy. Being directly on the front and experiencing first-hand the consequences of the inconsistent foreign policy of Theodosius, they had every reason to disagree with it. The wars of Theodosius were justified in the strategic sense and from the perspective of the well-being of the whole Roman Empire. However, it is unlikely that the Eastern Roman generals of barbarian origin cared much for the other half of the Empire; nonetheless, they probably did for their own country. Thus, when its security was being put in jeopardy to save the West from the Vandals, it is unlikely they were in support of such course of action. If, additionally, their status and influence had also suffered, it should be no wonder why they were strongly dissatisfied with Theodosius' and Chrysaphius' policies.

### **The Developments of 448-450**

Soon after Maximinus' embassy, Attila uncovered a plot aimed against him<sup>231</sup>. Since he learned that Chrysaphius was responsible for it, he demanded that Theodosius hand over the eunuch. It seems that the emperor's line of defence was to deny accountability, since he had no hand in Zeno's and Chrysaphius' intrigues (very unlikely in the case of the latter), however, Attila would not be fooled. The barbarian replied to Theodosius' excuses quite wittily as he offered to send a military intervention if the emperor was unable control his subordinates. Diplomatic jargon aside, it essentially meant that another war, just after the destructive conflict of 447 had ended, was a likely possibility.

Theodosius was clearly not in control of the situation. Furthermore, Priscus informs us that Zeno too was seeking Chrysaphius. It is unfortunately difficult to say what exactly the historian did

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<sup>231</sup> Priscus, frag. 11; R.C. Blockley, *East Roman...*, p. 66.

mean by that. Zeno, as a *magister militum* had no right or means to capture Chrysaphius or seek retribution. Then, Priscus follows with an ambiguous statement that the eunuch had an almost unanimous support, and thus an embassy by Anatolius and Nomus in 449 was dispatched to appease Attila and solve the problems. This comment was often considered sarcastic, knowing Priscus' disdain towards Chrysaphius, but Blockley accurately remarks that it is possible that even his usual political opponents (save for Zeno) decided that it was preferable to defend the minister this time instead of handing over a high imperial official to a hostile barbarian ruler<sup>232</sup>. To make amends for the assassination plot, Theodosius agreed to send even more money, and to keep the promise given to Constantius, another suitable bride was found, a widow of the late son of Plintha.

Interestingly, as Holum observes, it is likely that this woman was under Aspar's care, due to his familial relations with the Gothic general<sup>233</sup>. It must have meant that Aspar was willing to offer his support to avoid the crisis. Holum claims that it was a part of a wider political change on the court: Pulcheria's gaining influence and Chrysaphius' falling out of favour<sup>234</sup>. However, there is only one source that supports such a case; the chronicle of Theophanes which is at odds with other evidence. Thus it is quite unlikely that such a dramatic political change occurred, especially since an alternative explanation to the chronicler's claims could be argued for<sup>235</sup>.

Ultimately, Chrysaphius stayed in power and Zeno was forced into hiding due to his schemes. The sources state that the emperor feared his open rebellion and an expedition was ordered by to bring the insubordinate commander to justice<sup>236</sup>. The superior of Priscus, Maximinus, even though known mostly for his diplomatic service, was chosen as the commander and ordered to capture Isauropolis, where Zeno was expected to seek support<sup>237</sup>. It is interesting that no other known military officer was selected for the task. While it might have been due to them being needed on their stations, there is a possibility that the reason for it was that the other commanders either tacitly supported the Isaurian or were considered not loyal enough to lead such a mission. This can be another evidence for a general widespread opposition to the eunuch in the military.

In general, as it has been previously stated, there is little direct information on the political conflict at the end of Theodosius II's reign. Each of the pieces of evidence that has been brought

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<sup>232</sup> R.C. Blockley, *The Fragmentary...*, vol. II, p. 389, n. 96.

<sup>233</sup> K.G. Holum, *Theodosian...*, p. 207, n. 157.

<sup>234</sup> K.G. Holum, *Theodosian...*, p. 207. Chrysaphius was involved in some high level corruption, which could in theory bring his downfall, however, his accomplice was Nomus who remained influential even after the regime change, cf. F. Millar, *A Greek...*, p. 192-196.

<sup>235</sup> Cf. p. 67 of this work.

<sup>236</sup> Priscus, frag. 15-16; Е.П. Глушанин, *Военная...*, p. 110.

<sup>237</sup> Priscus, frag. 16; K. Feld, *Barbarische...*, p. 219.

up may be on its own not convincing enough to challenge the established narrative that can be found in the literature. However, all of them combined can create a basis for a compelling argument that there was indeed a major dissent in the military elite. The main reason for that seems to have been the failure of the foreign policy of Theodosius.

### **Conclusion**

Theodosius acceded to the throne shortly after the Eastern Roman Empire had to face a major political crisis involving the military elite, the Gainas' revolt. It is difficult to say if the memory of it affected the young emperor, but it is a fact that Theodosius in many ways tried to keep the members of the high command in check, reshuffling the appointments to high ranks regularly. However, his reign was marked by many wars, which led to the emergence of powerful individuals among the successful commanders. Theodosius' attempts at limiting their growing influence were futile and seem to have led to an opposite outcome, the consolidation of the new military elite. This, and the emperor's failed foreign policy<sup>238</sup>, as well as other contributing factors, inflated taxation for instance, contributed to the rising dissent among the commanders. It culminated after the war of 447, when disagreements over the resolution of the conflict with the Huns pushed the country to the brink of a civil war. In the end, Theodosius died in a horse riding accident before that could happen. However, due to shared gripes, at the end of Theodosius' reign, the military elite, despite having little in common otherwise, united under one banner against the emperor's minister, Chrysaphius. This meant that when Theodosius passed away, they were in a position to bring forward their own candidate, one that would align closer with their convictions – the choice fell on an otherwise little known military tribune, Marcian.

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<sup>238</sup> That being said, in the he managed to maintain the integrity of the borders, cf. F. Millar, *A Greek...*, p. 82-83.

## **Chapter II - The Military Elites during the Reign of Marcian**

The reign of Marcian in the Eastern Roman Empire is one of the most curious periods in the fifth century. It is difficult to properly evaluate it, as the sources that chronicle his rule are scarce and fragmentary. Coincidentally, the attention of the historians often drifted towards the West, where the dramatic events of the fifties sowed the seeds of the eventual fall of the Empire. For this work, however, the reign of Marcian is of the utmost importance, considering his connections to the military elite.

### **The Perception of Marcian by his Contemporaries and in the Scholarship**

In the eyes of his contemporaries Marcian was almost universally regarded as a good emperor. It seems that in the seven years of his reign he managed to rebuild the treasury after the disaster that were the last years of 'Theodosius' rule, and left enough in the reserves to fuel the adventurous policies of his successor, Leo. Robert Hohlfelder also accurately points out that Marcian was considered an emperor who exhibited traditional Roman martial virtues<sup>239</sup> – he took part in military campaigns and ceased to send the humiliating tribute to the Huns. Thus, his foreign policy was much more to the liking of the general populace and the educated elite. Secondly, he lowered the taxes and it should not be surprising how it contributed to his fame. Thirdly, he ordered the Council of Chalcedon in 451, which resolved some of the ongoing religious conflicts and brought him support of the orthodox populace. The last matter is however the contentious one, as those of opposing religious views would consequently hold a different opinion on that point.

In the modern historiography there seems to be more disagreements on Marcian. The general works and textbooks that overview the history of the period tend to not focus on the emperor, probably due to the previously mentioned scarcity of the sources and focusing on the events happening in the West, which often seem to be of more consequence to the history of Late Antiquity. Thus, they often follow the judgement of the ancients, without any in-depth commentary.

There is also an opposing view on the emperor. It seems to have originated from the works of a prominent American scholar, Edward Thompson, and is being upheld by his students. Thompson criticized Marcian's foreign policy as unnecessarily risky. According to him, the

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<sup>239</sup> R. Hohlfelder, *Marcian's Gamble, A Reassessment of Eastern Imperial Policy toward Attila AD 450-453*, AJAH 9, 1984, p. 63.

emperor was simply lucky that his decisions did not backfire and the Empire did not end up in a destructive war with the Huns<sup>240</sup>. Thompson also discounted many successes of Marcian in the internal policy, as it benefitted the elite and the rich, and since they were the ones who wrote history, Marcian is being praised not for any objective reasons, but rather because he supported interests of a specific group<sup>241</sup>. Due to Thompson's prominence in the Western scholarship, many works were at least partially influenced by this outlook<sup>242</sup>.

Interestingly, as far as research into the military elite goes, the reign of Marcian is not generally recognized as all that notable, which is showed by its inclusion with Leo's into a single chapter, with the latter getting more attention<sup>243</sup>. It is probably due to the general lack of prosopographic data on the generals of Marcian, and an overall scarcity of the sources; however, analysis of secondary events can fill in the blanks and paint a clearer picture of the uniqueness of the emperor's relationship with the military. Thus, the goal of this chapter is to argue that Marcian's reign was instrumental to the position of the military elites in the fifth century and significantly different from that of his successor.

### **Accession to the Throne...**

Marcian acceded to the throne of the Eastern Roman Empire on 25 August 450, a month after Theodosius' death. Before that point, however, Marcian was far from the fame he achieved after his reign. His career up to this point was not anything special. Marcian came from a family with military traditions, and joined the army as well, early in his life<sup>244</sup>. In 421 he took part in the Persian campaign commanding a troop<sup>245</sup>, likely in the rank of *tribunus*<sup>246</sup>. Perhaps it was at this point, or soon after, that he became a *domesticus* of general Ardabur; however, no details of his service in this capacity are known. Later on, possibly when Ardabur, for one reason or another, disappeared from the records, Marcian exercised the same function under the general's son, Aspar.

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<sup>240</sup> E.A. Thompson, *A History of Attila and the Huns*, Oxford 1948, p. 135; E.A. Thompson, *The Foreign Policy of Theodosius II and Marcian*, Her 76, 1950, p. 69.

<sup>241</sup> E.A. Thompson, *A History...*, p. 191.

<sup>242</sup> Primarily A.H.M. Jones' (*The Later Roman Empire 284–602. A Social, Economic and Administrative Survey*, vol. I–II, Oxford 1964, p. 318–319) whose monumental work disseminated Thompson's ideas even further.

<sup>243</sup> Е.П. Глушанин, *Военная знать ранней Византии*, Барнаул 1991, p. 113–136; A. Demandt, *Magister militum*, [in:] *RE*, t. 12 suppl., 1970, p. 763–781.

<sup>244</sup> Priscus, fr. 18.

<sup>245</sup> Theophanes AM5943.

<sup>246</sup> Malalas, XIV, 27; Theodor Lector, *Epitoma*, 354.

Under his command he took part in the African expedition, where he was taken captive following the lost battle with Geiseric<sup>247</sup>.

Up until the year 457, every single piece of evidence points to the fact that Marcian was just a regular middle-rank officer. However, if we are to believe John Malalas, he was specifically chosen by Theodosius II on his deathbed to be his successor<sup>248</sup>. Other accounts, of Evagrius, Hydatius, and Theophanes, present a different story, namely that Marcian was chosen for his virtue by Pulcheria, the emperor's sister, and presented to the Senate which accepted his candidacy on her advice<sup>249</sup>. While Hydatius' remark is rather laconic, both Evagrius and Theophanes add that Pulcheria had one condition - Marcian had to respect her vows of virginity, which he agreed to do. Following these events thus far there seems to have been no reason why Marcian specifically was chosen for the role. Nothing is known of his involvement at the court or any connections to either member of the imperial family. Furthermore, it would have been rather unlikely for an army officer to be randomly chosen to ascend to the throne, no matter how virtuous of a man he was. There was no natural successor to the throne in the East, but undoubtedly there were many who were more influential, powerful, and connected to the court.

### ... and Its Presentation

A person acquainted with the previously mentioned sources could have noticed our purposeful omission of much additional information regarding Marcian's past. The reason for that was to paint a true picture of the emperor's early career and explain how unlikely his accession to the throne was, if we fully accept the course of events presented by the sources. It would have been just as suspect for the ancients themselves, were it not for the fantastical elements that explained how Marcian was destined to rule<sup>250</sup>.

According to Evagrius, when Marcian enlisted in the military, he found a dead body *en route* to the camp and wished to do the honourable thing and bury it. While doing so he was spotted and wrongfully accused of murder. However, thanks to divine intervention, the murderer was identified and the future emperor was saved. This event indicated that Marcian was always favoured by divine providence and protected from the consequences of bad fortune. In the unit he enlisted in, he was enrolled in a commanding rank due to a vacancy in the register because the previous holder of the

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<sup>247</sup> Evagrius, II, 1; Procopius, *History of the Wars*, III, 4, 2-10.

<sup>248</sup> Malalas, XIV, 26-27. The same story is repeated by *Chronicon Paschale* (a. 450).

<sup>249</sup> Evagrius, II, 1; Theophanes AM5943; Hydatius 139.

<sup>250</sup> Most likely they originated from imperial propaganda, cf. R.W. Burgess, *The Accession of Marcian in the Light of Chalcedonian Apologetic and Monophysite Polemic*, BZ 86/87, 1994, p. 59

office was recently deceased. As Evagrius notes, it just so happened that the name of the soldier was Augustus, hence Marcian was registered as ‘Marcian who is also Augustus’, foreshadowing his imperial future, since *Augustus* was an imperial title<sup>251</sup>.

Evagrius follows that with a story from Marcian’s captivity among the Vandals, which is also recorded in Procopius’ *History of the Wars*. The prisoners were gathered in an open field where they were being guarded. Marcian wished to rest, however, when he lied down in the scorching sun of the desert, an eagle flew over him, covering him with its shadow while he slept. Geiseric, the king of the Vandals, noticed this occurrence and considered it prophetic, meaning that Marcian was destined to become an emperor, and thus he decided to let him go<sup>252</sup>. Another version of this story is recorded in ‘Theophanes’ chronicle, in which it is said that this event happened in Lycia when Marcian had fallen ill on the way to war with Persia. The eagle’s shadow shielding his body from the sun was noticed by two brothers who were taking care of him, and they interpreted this event in the same way as the king of the Vandals did. Convinced that Marcian was destined to rule the Empire, they convinced him to go back to Constantinople, gave him some money, and asked him to promise that he would reward them after the prophecy came true. Naturally, when it did, Marcian did not forget and kept his word<sup>253</sup>.

It is not uncommon for historical sources of the time to include such prophetic events. However, the sheer number of them in relation to Marcian is out of the ordinary. In fact, it can be argued that this is the best preserved aspect of Marcian’s reign. There is only one reasonable explanation to this phenomenon. Marcian’s claims to the throne were weak. Weak enough in fact, that they needed broad justification. It is unknown to what extent the above mentioned stories were devised by the historians and chroniclers, but it is not outside of the realm of possibility that they were encouraged or even actively proclaimed by the state. The story of Theodosius choosing Marcian as his successor with his dying breath, Pulcheria picking him on account of his virtue, and the unanimous support of the Senate for such a decision all likely have more to do with how the ascension of Marcian was presented officially, than what was really going on behind the scenes<sup>254</sup>.

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<sup>251</sup> Evagrius, II, 1. Even though Evagrius used Priscus as his source, those prophetic events regarding Marcian likely originated elsewhere, cf. D. Brodka, *Priskos von Panion und Kaiser Marcian. Eine Quellenuntersuchung zu Procop. 3,4,1–11, Evagr. HE 2,1, Theoph. AM 5943 und Nic. Kall. HE 15,1*, Ml 9, 2012, p. 159.

<sup>252</sup> Evagrius, II, 1; Procopius, *History of the Wars*, III, 4, 2-10. Evagrius managed to make this event even more miraculous, implying that the unrelenting heat of the sun was extraordinary for the season (Procopius claimed it was summer).

<sup>253</sup> Theophanes, AM5943

<sup>254</sup> Cf. R.W. Burgess, *The Accession...*, p. 59. There is another side to this overview, provided by the Monophysite tradition, which also claims that Marcian was chosen by Pulcheria, not on account of his virtue, but rather her

It is possible that the story of Theodosius seeing through Chrysaphius' 'villainy' and the banishing of the eunuch towards the end of his reign, described by Theophanes, was also a part of imperial propaganda<sup>255</sup>. After all, the marriage with Pulcheria linked the new emperor with the Theodosian line, yet the political alignment of the imperial couple was starkly opposed to the eunuch. All of the calamities and misfortunes that plagued the previous government were to be presented as Chrysaphius' responsibility, and it certainly was beneficial for Pulcheria, and by extension, Marcian, to absolve her late brother of them. To justify the execution of the eunuch, a new narrative was presented – in the last years of his reign, Theodosius managed to get away from under Chrysaphius' treacherous influence and wanted to punish the eunuch, yet he did not manage to deliver justice due to his untimely death. By executing Theodosius' minister the imperial couple fulfilled the late emperor's will, or so they claimed.

### **The Month of Power Struggle**

Theodosius II died in a riding accident on 28 of July 450. If we are to believe John Malalas, he did not die on the spot, but survived long enough to be transported back to Constantinople and pick Marcian as his successor on his deathbed. However, it took almost a whole month between the death of Theodosius and the accession of Marcian. If, as many sources want us to believe, the line of succession was clear and widely accepted, whether due to the emperor's decision or his sister's, then leaving the Empire for a whole month without a head of state seems to be counterintuitive. Normally it was paramount to have the throne occupied at all times and to maintain an unbroken line of succession. Theodosius himself was crowned *Caesar* in his father's lifetime, just as his father, Arcadius, became *Caesar* when his father, Theodosius the Great, was still alive. Thus, such a system could help to discourage potential usurpers, avoid any disputes due to power vacuum, and allow for the transfer of power to be fast and clear. Yet it did not happen in Marcian's case. Certainly not for the lack of the need to secure the indisputable right to rule<sup>256</sup>.

Lawfully, if such a term can even be used in regards to the Roman succession system, there was a male member of the Theodosian dynasty who could claim the throne in Constantinople.

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uncontrollable lust. The source of those slanderous accusations is obvious, and it is Marcian's religious policy. Contrary to most secular or orthodox sources, Marcian is presented as a wicked tyrant. What is important here is, however, that they ultimately accept a similar course of events, only with a much differing interpretation of their nature and the motivations of people involved. For the detailed synopsis of Monophysite authors' view of Marcian, cf. R.W. Burgess, *The Accession...*, p. 50-54.

<sup>255</sup> Theophanes, AM5942.

<sup>256</sup> R.W. Burgess, *The Accession...*, p. 59.

Valentinian III, when the emperor Theodosius had died, technically should have become the *Augustus* of the whole empire. While it was unlikely he would have been able to rule directly over both parts, he could have expected to have a say in choosing a successor of his late elder cousin<sup>257</sup>. We ought to remember that when an analogous situation had happened after the death of Honorius, Theodosius did not hold back and sought a military resolution to secure the succession within his dynasty and support Valentinian's rights. There is also some evidence confirming Valentinian's displeasure with the situation, as the Eastern consuls of 451 and 452 were not recognized in the West, thus indicating that the emperor did not consider Marcian's regime a legitimate one<sup>258</sup>.

Thus, if we take into account the situation Marcian was in, it would have been extremely unlikely for him to voluntarily delay his accession to the throne<sup>259</sup>. There had to have been another reason for it to happen. The most likely explanation is that it took time to establish Marcian's candidacy. After all, Chrysaphius was still powerful and likely had some support, so the establishing of the new regime could not have been accomplished in an instant.

Unfortunately, any details of the process are lost and all we can do is speculate. The most likely course of action was the consolidation of an alliance with influential members of the military and others who were dissatisfied with Chrysaphius' regime, and Pulcheria. The emperor's sister certainly was not influential enough at that point to pick her own candidate, and if she were, there would have been no reason for him to be specifically Marcian. However, she still was a capable politician and her approval was needed. Even though the Empire had no formal laws of succession through inheritance, after 72 years of Theodosian dynasty's rule in the East there was a certain loyalty towards it and Pulcheria had the ability of giving a new emperor the much needed legitimacy<sup>260</sup>.

### **Aspar's Right Hand Man**

Considering all of the above there is an important question to be answered: how does a modest officer of the imperial army suddenly become an emperor? Marcian had no status, influence, or political connections excluding one thing – his service as a *domesticus* of Aspar. Even though such a title could designate a wide range of officials, both civil and military, and it evolved

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<sup>257</sup> J.B. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire*, London 1923, p. 235; E. Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire*, Paris 1959, p. 311; R.W. Burgess, *The Accession...*, p. 49; 63.

<sup>258</sup> *CLRE*, p. 436-439

<sup>259</sup> R.W. Burgess, *The Accession...*, p. 59.

<sup>260</sup> R.W. Burgess, *The Accession...*, p. 64.

through history<sup>261</sup>, thanks to Procopius there is no doubt on Marcian's function; as the historian explains, he served as an advisor, an *aide-de-camp* of Aspar<sup>262</sup>. Certainly he was both loyal and very close to the commander. And likely those qualities were what decided that it was Marcian who was chosen. In fact, it is the choice of Marcian that indicates Aspar's influence in picking the successor. That phenomenon is easily explained, even though the faction opposing the regime was much more numerous. Aspar was likely the most powerful opponent of Chrysaphius that was present in the city of Constantinople, when the news of the emperor's accident arrived. Furthermore, there is some fragmentary evidence implicating Aspar, such as Malalas pointing him out specifically as one present at Theodosius' deathbed when the emperor supposedly chose Marcian as his successor<sup>263</sup>, which is repeated by the *Chronicon Paschale* as well<sup>264</sup>, and finally Procopius implying that Marcian was destined to the throne not only due to the prophetic signs, but also his connection to Aspar and the latter's political influence in Constantinople<sup>265</sup>.

Flavius Zeno, who was the most vocal opponent of Chrysaphius, was hiding in Isauria from an expedition led by Maximinus that was sent against him. The whereabouts of Apollonius and Anatolius are unknown; however as masters of arms they could have been in the field; and regardless, Apollonius probably lacked the political network of Aspar, and Anatolius did not seem to have such strong political convictions as to actively interfere with the succession. The fact that both of those commanders stayed influential figures after Marcian's accession may also indicate that they were not opposed to his candidacy.

This leaves only the late emperor's sister Pulcheria. Even though she is named as the person responsible for choosing Marcian, all the evidence points to that not being the case. Pulcheria, despite her talents, likely lacked the actual backing to choose her own candidate. Nevertheless, it seems that Marcian was acceptable to her due to his apparent piety thus it is likely that she supported Aspar's pick.

As for Chrysaphius, there is no evidence of him being able to mount any serious opposition, gather his supporters, or present a counter candidate<sup>266</sup>. The animosity towards the eunuch was

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<sup>261</sup> ODB, vol. I, p. 646, (s.v. Domestikos).

<sup>262</sup> Procopius, *History of the Wars*, III, 4, 7.

<sup>263</sup> Malalas, XIV, 26-27.

<sup>264</sup> *Chronicon Paschale*, a. 450.

<sup>265</sup> Procopius, *History of the Wars*, III, 4, 8.

<sup>266</sup> Some people who were likely Chrysaphius' supporters still remained somewhat influential even after his downfall (eg. Nomus, Maximinus). It can mean that they did not support Chrysaphius in the critical month of the power struggle, so no retribution was needed. There is however one official, who disappears from the sources after Marcian's accession – *praefectus praetorio* Hormisdas, who is not even present in the lists of dignitaries at the Council of Chalcedon. Cf. PLRE,

what truly unified the fledgling political alliance and it can be assumed that his capture was of a highest priority, probably preceding even the political arrangements between Pulcheria and the generals. Chrysaphius' fate was recorded in several sources, however, the accounts differ slightly. Most claim Pulcheria had him murdered<sup>267</sup>, John Malalas, on the other hand, claims that Chrysaphius faced accusations under Marcian and was executed<sup>268</sup>. However, the most detailed account of those events is that of Theophanes, who mentions that Pulcheria allowed Jordanes, the son of John the Vandal, to execute Chrysaphius<sup>269</sup>. It bears reminding that the eunuch was most likely responsible for the murder of John, thus, Jordanes was granted by the empress the right to take vengeance. Interestingly, this is yet another piece of evidence, even if minor, that links Pulcheria to the military circles.

Thus, it seems that Marcian was Aspar's personal candidate, one who was in the end chosen due to the general's combined influence and being in a fortunate position at an opportune time. It is likely that Pulcheria and Zeno eventually supported this choice<sup>270</sup>, possibly with the approval of wider circles in the military. As such, on 25 August 450 a new reign began. Marcian became the emperor in Constantinople; however, his elevation to the throne was accomplished by several

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vol. II, p. 571 (s.v. Hormisdas). His falling out of favour is however one of many explanations, maybe he died or was not allowed on the council for other reasons (could have been a monophysite, considering his name suggest eastern origins).

<sup>267</sup> Marcellinus Comes, a. 450; Theodor Lector, *Epitoma*, 353; Priscus, fr. 3. *Chronicon Paschale* (a. 450) only informs that Chrysaphius was killed, while Prosper (1361) informs of his death without mentioning the cause.

<sup>268</sup> Malalas, XIV, 32

<sup>269</sup> Theophanes, AM5942.

<sup>270</sup> The idea that Aspar, Pulcheria, and Zeno created an *ad hoc* political alliance against Chrysaphius to put their own candidate on the throne was proposed by some scholars. Cf. C. Zuckermann, *L'Empire d'Orient et les Huns. Notes sur Priscus*, TM 12, 1994, p. 176; *The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius Scholasticus*, ed. et. trans. M. Whitby, Liverpool 2000, p. 60, an. 12; A.D. Lee, *Theodosius and His Generals*, [in:] *Theodosius II. Rethinking the Roman Empire in Late Antiquity*, ed. C. Kelly, Cambridge 2013, p. 95–96. Others take only Aspar and Pulcheria into account, of whom some underscore the former's power and influence as *Kaisermacher* – G. Vernadsky, *Flavius Ardabur Aspar*, SF 6, 1941, p. 53; A.H.M. Jones, *The Later...*, p. 218; B. Bachrach, *A History of the Alans in the West. From Their First Appearance in the Sources of Classical Antiquity through the Early Middle Ages*, Minneapolis 1973, p. 44; A. Demant, *Geschichte der Spätantike*, München 2008, p. 152, while some put more emphasis on Pulcheria's role – J.B. Bury, *History...*, p. 235–236; E. Stein, *Histoire...*, p. 311. There has also been a trend to put Pulcheria in the absolute forefront, claiming the general lost much influence prior to the events of 450. Cf. R.A. Bleeker, *Aspar and Attila: The Role of Flavius Ardaburius Aspar in the Hun Wars of the 440s*, AWO 3, 1980, p. 23–29; K.G. Holm, *Theodosian Empresses. Women and Imperial Dominion in Late Antiquity*, Berkeley 1981, p. 206–209. Those views have been rightfully criticized by R.W. Burgess (*The Accession...*, p. 27–63), who however probably goes a little too far discounting Pulcheria's political talents and not recognizing the importance of Flavius Zeno.

influential people who made an alliance to gain some control over imperial policy. Those people most likely still stood behind the throne, seeing to it that their interests were fulfilled. The policies of Marcian were not made only by the emperor himself, on the contrary, but his immediate associates were crucial to understanding his reign.

### All Marcian's Men

When researching Marcian's personal policy there is one asset that is of immense help. The Council of Chalcedon lists dignitaries who took part in it and shines a little light on the internal workings of the state just after Marcian's accession. Even though it focuses mostly on civil servants, it mentions names, offices, and who was the representative of the Emperor and who represented the Senate<sup>271</sup>.

Interestingly, the first official, who was the representative of the emperor and present at the council was *magister militum* Anatolius. It indicates that despite the previous government's trust in him, the general did not support Chrysaphius, at least not to the point of refusing close cooperation with Marcian. Consequently, the emperor clearly considered him a trustworthy associate; if he decided to rely on him as his representative in religious matters that were of utmost importance. This relationship is further corroborated by Armenian sources that claim that Anatolius was still influential at the court and that the emperor often sought his guidance when deciding on the eastern policy<sup>272</sup>. In fact, both Yeghishe and Ghazar accuse the general that it was his advice which convinced the emperor to not help the cause of Vardan Mamikonean's rebellion against the Persians<sup>273</sup>.

Anatolius is the only high-ranking military official included in the list. Besides him there was a *comes domesticorum peditum* Sporacius. *Comites domestici* were captains of the imperial guard, thus he certainly was a military official; however, little is known of his career besides the fact that he was awarded consulship in 452, although the reasons for which he received such an honour are unknown<sup>274</sup>. According to John Martindale, another one of the *comites* was Flavius Aetius, not to be confused with the famous Western general. The acts of the council call him *magnificentissimus*

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<sup>271</sup> R. Delmaire, *Les Dignitaires Laïcs au Concile de Chalcedoine: Notes sur la Hierarchie et les Preseances au Milieu du V<sup>e</sup> siecle*, B 54, 1984, p. 141-175.

<sup>272</sup> Ł. J a r o s z, *Kariera Flawiusza Anatoliusza*, [in:] *Florilegium. Studia ofiarowane profesorowi Aleksandrowi Krawczukowi z okazji dziesięćdziesiątej piątej rocznicy urodzin*, red. E. Dąbrowa, T. Grabowski, M. Piegdoń, Kraków 2017, p. 441.

<sup>273</sup> G h a z a r P ' a r p e c ' i, 41; Y e g h i s h e, III. On the rebellion and the events surrounding it, cf. N. G a r s o i a n, *The Marzapanate (428-652)*, [in:] *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*, vol. I, ed. R.G. Hovannisian, New York 1997, p. 98-101.

<sup>274</sup> PLRE, vol. II, p. 1026-1027 (s.v. Fl. Sporacius 3).

*comes domesticorum et sacrarum stabulorum*, a title that does not exist in this form anywhere else. Therefore Martindale claims that Aetius must have either been a *comes domesticorum equitum*, and his title was just expanded in that instance, or that he combined the post of *comes domesticorum equitum* with that of *comes sacri stabuli*<sup>275</sup>. However, according to Roland Delmaire, Aetius' place on the list is not appropriate for the office he was supposed to hold. The historian argues it is much more likely that he wielded an honorary rank, that of *vacantes*, likely a *magister militum vacans*<sup>276</sup>. This seems to fit well with what is known about his later career.

Those three names exhaust the list of the officials that could be considered members of the military. However, among the names of the civil servants there is one that can lead to more conclusions about Marcian's relationship with the military – a certain Flavius Areobindus Martialis. The name suggests that he was related to the late general of the Theodosian era, possibly being his nephew<sup>277</sup>. He was the *magister officiorum* around the time of Priscus' embassy, as the historian informs that he was notified by Theodosius of the plot to take the life of Attila<sup>278</sup>. He, however, was no longer in office in 451. According to Gereon Siebigs this indicates Marcian was trying to reduce Martialis' influence and stripped him of his dignities<sup>279</sup>. However, the German scholar omits Placitius, also an attendee of the assembly, who served as *magister officiorum* after April of 449<sup>280</sup>; that is when Martialis is last recorded in office<sup>281</sup>. Thus, if Martialis faced some political backlash, it was by Theodosius II's hand<sup>282</sup>. The previous argument could have been extended to Martialis'

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<sup>275</sup> PLRE, vol. II, p. 29-30 (s.v. Fl. Aetius 8).

<sup>276</sup> R. Delmaire, *Les Dignitaires...*, p. 163-164.

<sup>277</sup> PLRE, vol. II, p. 729 (s.v. Fl. Areobindas Martialis).

<sup>278</sup> Priscus, frag. 11.

<sup>279</sup> G. Siebigs, *Kaiser Leo I. Das oströmische Reich in den ersten drei Jahren seiner Regierung (457–460 n. Chr.)*, Berlin 2010, p. 73.

<sup>280</sup> R. Delmaire, *Les Dignitaires...*, p. 163. The mistake probably originates from following M. Claus (Der *magister officiorum* in der Spätantike. *Das Amt und sein Einfluss auf die kaiserliche Politik*, München 1980, p. 184) who mistakenly assumed Placitius was in office before Martialis, however, the order of the dignitaries in the Chalcedon lists proves that to have been impossible.

<sup>281</sup> R. Delmaire, *Les Dignitaires...*, p. 162.

<sup>282</sup> There is an interesting notion in how Priscus (frag. 11.) describes the emperor relaying information to Martialis. The historian says that Theodosius confined in him by 'necessity'. This might simply mean that the emperor was doing his due diligence by informing a senior official of his plans, but it might also mean that Martialis was unlikely to support this plan, or maybe even the relationship between the emperor and his functionary was tense. We have to remember it was after 447, that Martialis' uncle, Areobindus, supposedly 'carried no weight with the emperor' and was 'an unreliable barbarian'. It is impossible to know what the convictions of Martialis were, but it is not unreasonable to assume that he was an opponent of Chrysaphius as well.

successor; that being said, Placitius is also listed as one of the representatives of the emperor, who certainly would not have entrusted someone he considered disloyal or whom he wanted to isolate politically with an important assignment<sup>283</sup>. The details of Placitius' deposition and the elevation of John Vincomalus, the *magister officiorum* as of the time of the assembly of the Council of Chalcedon, are unknown. Perhaps other factors were at play; since Vincomalus was very pious, maybe he was considered a better candidate for the office when the Chalcedon Council was being prepared, or, he might have been Pulcheria's choice<sup>284</sup>.

Regardless of the intricacies of court politics, unfortunately unknown to us, there is little evidence of Flavius Aerobindus Martialis to have been an opponent of the emperor or of his policy, in spite of his no longer serving as *magister officiorum*. All that being said, another assessment of Siebigs is certainly correct. Marcian, after his accession, reshuffled the cabinet<sup>285</sup>. The list of the representatives of the Senate includes mostly dignitaries who did not serve in an office anymore, and names like Nomus or Senator can be found among them. It is likely that at least some of those could have been the supporters of the previous regime who lost their influence after the accession of Marcian. Instead, the emperor seems to have brought new people in, the previously mentioned Vincomalus as *magister officiorum*, Palladius, who became the new *praefectus praetorio per Orientem*, and Tatianus, who became the praefect of the city of Constantinople<sup>286</sup>.

It bears explaining why certain people who were previously mentioned as firmly in support of Marcian do not appear on this list of dignitaries. An avid reader may claim such a fact to be evidence to the contrary of the line of argumentation presented so far. However, the absence of most military officials is easy to explain. Apollonius, who was likely the other serving *magister militum* alongside Anatolius, was needed in the field. While the council was being assembled, some fighting was being reported in Illyricum, and even Marcian excused himself for being late to the assembly due to the need to visit the troops at the front<sup>287</sup>. Even if he claimed that the situation was under control and that the religious matters were of primary importance to him, so that he was willing to

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<sup>283</sup> R. Delmaire, *Les Dignitaires...*, p. 143 ;163.

<sup>284</sup> He became a monk later in his life, however, would still visit the palace as a senator, but return humbly to all his menial tasks back at the monastery, cf. Theophanes, AM5957.

<sup>285</sup> G. Siebigs, *Kaiser Leo I...*, p. 73.

<sup>286</sup> Tatianus was one of the brothers from Theophanes' (AM 5943) story that foreshadowed Marcian's accession to the throne. In it, Marcian had promised to reward Tatianus and his brother if the prophecy came true, which, as is exemplified above, he did (Tatianus' brother, Julius, became the governor of Lycia, cf. *PLRE*, vol. II, p. 624 (s.v. Iulius 4)).

<sup>287</sup> *The Acts of Council of Chalcedon*, ed. R. Price, M. Gaddis, Liverpool 2005, p. 107.

postpone any further campaigning<sup>288</sup>, leaving a standing army to keep the situation in check would have certainly been a logical decision, and that is probably what happened. Regardless, Apollonius was a fresh convert in 448, previously a pagan – likely he neither had any interest in the *minutiae* of the Christian doctrine, nor was he qualified to dispute it. Consequently, the reason for Aspar's absence would have been very similar. As an Arian, a heretic, there was no place for him at the council which was to decide the orthodox doctrine. That cannot indicate any falling out with the emperor, or the diminishing of his influence. The case of Flavius Zeno is similar, as he was a pagan.

In fact, all the evidence points to Marcian's intending to keep the *status quo* in the military high command. All the generals were serving their terms and there was no reshuffling done. Anatolius, who was likely the least convinced of Marcian's policy towards the Huns, was kept in office and the emperor heeded his council in eastern matters as well as involving him in his religious policy. Apollonius seems to have served his full term up until 452 when he was rewarded with patriciate and sent to conduct diplomatic talks with the Huns. Flavius Zeno was also granted a title of *patricius*, however, he died at some point during Marcian's reign<sup>289</sup>. It is unknown whether Aspar served in any office, but, his son, Ardaburius, was chosen as a *magister militum per Orientem*, after Flavius Zeno, who had served in that office, had died<sup>290</sup>. Thus, the claims of Gereon Siebigs that Marcian tried to isolate Aspar are unsubstantiated.

Firstly, if there were any kind of conflict between the new emperor and his former superior, it is reasonable to assume that there would be some evidence for that in the sources, especially if it were to happen in the early stages of his reign, when Marcian's achievements did not yet contribute to his popularity and he was not recognized as the rightful ruler in the West. The conflict between Aspar and Marcian's successor, Leo, was a major point of discussion in most sources of the period. Although the fragmentary nature of the texts might have led to some information about such an event not surviving, if that were a pronounced aspect of Marcian's reign, it would at least be likely that some references should exist. Instead, there are none, however; there are such that indicate Aspar's family growing in power, especially Aspar's son.

Secondly, considering the indisputable fact that Aspar was involved in choosing Marcian as the emperor, and taking into account the relative weakness of Marcian's political position, being

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<sup>288</sup> *The Acts...*, p. 109-110.

<sup>289</sup> Jordanes, *Romana*, 333. Zeno is last attested as *patricius* late 451, cf. *The Acts...*, p. 174-175; *PLRE*, vol. II, p. 1199-1200 (s.v. Fl. Zenon 6). It is likely he died soon after.

<sup>290</sup> Priscus, fr. 19 = *Suda*, A 3803. No other *magister militum* of the East is attested during that time so a nomination just after Zeno's death is most likely. It is known that Ardaburius was already in the East before 453, so his nomination should be placed around 451 or 452.

dependent on the people he owed the throne to (not to mention his other political problems of being unrecognized by Valentinian III and having to deal with Chrysaphius), igniting a conflict with one of his benefactor would have been an incredibly foolish move. Even a Roman emperor could not rule alone, and Marcian needed the support of his associates to govern the country and realize his policy. This seems to have been the reason why he reshuffled most of the high civil offices, so that they were occupied by people who were loyal and reliable. However, as Siebigs himself observes, Marcian did not touch the military offices<sup>291</sup>. This might have been due to his not being able to do so due to the influence of those occupying them, or not wanting to, because they comprised his base of support. The second variant is much more likely, but even if the former were the case that would still mean that Marcian simply could not isolate a powerful general he owed his throne to.

### **The Wars of Marcian**

In the previous chapters on the predecessor of Marcian, I presented the idea that the failure of the foreign policy of Theodosius was a major factor contributing to the dissent of the military, especially towards the end of his reign. Thus, since Marcian seems to have been the ‘candidate of the military’ an overview of his policy should serve as a proof of that hypothesis. Unfortunately, as it is with many aspects of Marcian’s reign, source material is lacking.

The first move in the foreign policy of the newly proclaimed emperor was however quite clear. At some point in late 450 or early 451 the Huns sent an embassy to Marcian, likely to collect the tribute. The emperor must have felt ready for the confrontation, as the answer the envoys received certainly was not to their satisfaction. Marcian refused to pay, and instead changed the rhetoric – he demanded of Attila to stop all hostilities, and if he fulfilled that condition, he would consider paying the tribute as a token of peaceful relations. If, however, the ruler of the Huns would continue making demands, Marcian threatened war<sup>292</sup>. It is no wonder that when Attila learned of this he reacted with fury and supposedly considered changing his plans to invade the West in order to enact his wrath on Marcian. In the end he decided to follow through with his original plan. There are multiple reasons that are brought up – possibly he considered the West to be a more profitable target<sup>293</sup> and the fact that the preparations for the invasion were already underway, but it might just as well have been that he was unsure of a positive result in another campaign in the Balkans, when the bulk of the Roman forces was neither away nor disorganized

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<sup>291</sup> G. Siebigs, *Kaiser Leo I...*, p. 73.

<sup>292</sup> Priscus, fr. 20.

<sup>293</sup> G. Wirth, *Attila...*, p. 89.

due to calamities as they were in 447. Cracking a well-organized and intact Roman defence system would have been unprecedented for the Huns<sup>294</sup>, and Attila knew that. It can probably be assumed that Marcian did some preparations strengthening the border, as he had military experience himself and his advisors certainly were professional enough to suggest such a course of action. Thus, Edward Thompson's assumption that Marcian avoided a similar defeat to that of 447 only thanks to luck and the fact that Attila had to follow through with his plans is unfounded<sup>295</sup>.

This change in the policy was likely done in cooperation with major players who were instrumental in installing Marcian on the throne and likely interested in the course of foreign policy – namely Zeno and Aspar – which is suggested by how quickly it happened upon the emperor's accession to the throne. There is a distinct possibility that the person who was responsible for conducting the diplomatic negotiations was no other than Flavius Zeno himself. The evidence is thin; however, Flavius Zeno was granted the title of *patricius* during that time and such thing was often done to present a holder of the title as emperor's rightful representative in negotiations with foreign rulers<sup>296</sup>. The uncompromising tone of the Roman diplomats also seems to indicate that the diplomatic exchange was headed by a staunch opponent of the appeasement policy, and Zeno was indeed one.

Still, some fighting did occur in 451. No details are known, beyond what the letters of Marcian to the assembly of Chalcedon inform of. The emperor excused his absence on account of taking part in a military campaign and asked the bishops to pray for victory<sup>297</sup>. In another letter from 22 September he informed of his success and that he would soon arrive to take part in the council<sup>298</sup>. Otto Maenchen-Helfen points out that the bishops from the provinces of *Moesia prima* and *Dacia ripensis* were absent, which indicates that this was where the fighting occurred<sup>299</sup>.

According to Michel Rouche, Attila sent some of his forces to prevent Marcian from sending support to the West and thus to cover his flanks while he was invading Gaul<sup>300</sup>. It is

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<sup>294</sup> Contrary to the popular belief, the Huns were generally at a disadvantage when facing regular, well organized imperial troops and most of their successes took place in the absence of sufficient defences on the border, cf. E.A. Thompson, *A History...*, p. 92-93; G. Wirth, *Attila...*, p. 74; 89; R. Lindner, *Nomadism, Horses and Huns*, PP 92, 1981, p. 9.

<sup>295</sup> Cf. E.A. Thompson, *A History...*, p. 135; E.A. Thompson, *The Foreign...*, p. 69.

<sup>296</sup> K. Feld, *Barbarische...*, p. 221. On that practice, cf. R.W. Mathisen, *Patricians as Diplomats in Late Antiquity*, BZ 79, 1986, p. 35-49.

<sup>297</sup> *The Acts...*, p. 107-109.

<sup>298</sup> *The Acts...*, p. 109-110.

<sup>299</sup> O. Maenchen-Helfen, *The World...*, p. 131.

<sup>300</sup> M. Rouche, *Attila. La violence nomade*, Paris 2009, p. 190.

doubtful, as it seems that the king of the Huns needed to concentrate all of his forces in his campaign, and it was rather unlikely for Marcian to be even willing to help Valentinian, considering the issues of legitimacy and, consequently, tense relations. Furthermore, the evidence suggests the fighting to have occurred in the late summer of 451, thus, after the famous battle of the Catalaunian Plains. Thus, the above appears to suggest that the Huns invaded Illyricum when returning from Gaul. After all, Attila's army was not completely destroyed – the battle of the Catalaunian Plains was a strategic victory for the Romans, however, tactically it remained undecided<sup>301</sup>. Thus it would have been possible for Attila to attack the Eastern Roman Empire in the year of his Gallic expedition. That being said, such an unprepared move seems rather unlikely for such a capable leader as the king of the Huns. Furthermore, the invasion of Illyricum in 451 is barely recorded in the sources. The only historian who might have mentioned it is John Malalas – might have mentioned – since he reports some fighting at the Danube in 451 yet, links it with Aetius and his struggle against Attila<sup>302</sup>. It is, however, quite likely that the chronicler from the far-away Antioch had mistakenly conflated two distinct events. Considering all of the above, it seems more likely that the fighting in Illyricum in 451 was not a part of some major Hun invasion. During the diplomatic talk before the war of 447, Attila intimated that he might not be able to hold his warriors from doing independent raids if he did not get tribute in gold to appease them. Thus, when Marcian withheld the payments of tribute and the Hun warriors were not satisfied with the spoils from Gaul considering the failure of the campaign, it is likely that some disgruntled warlords tried their luck invading the East. The smaller scope of those raids explains also how those raids were not widely recorded by the sources due to their lesser relevance, why the Eastern forces managed to easily deal with the danger, and why Marcian considered his appearance on the council more important than continuing the military campaign.

The war of 451 leaves many questions unanswered. There is nothing known of the specifics of the military movements of either the Hun forces or the Romans. Not one battle is recorded. Who was leading the Roman forces is up to speculation, although with Anatolius present at the council in Chalcedon, it seems very likely that the commander-in-chief was Apollonius. Ardaburius, son of Aspar, took part in the fighting and distinguished himself, for which he was awarded the oriental mastery after the death of Zeno<sup>303</sup>. He was either a *comes rei militaris* or *magister*

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<sup>301</sup> On the battle, cf. J o r d a n e s, *Getica*, 190-217; M. R o u c h e, *Attila...*, p. 202-210; B. B a c h r a c h, *A History...*, p. 66.

<sup>302</sup> M a l a l a s, XIV, 10.

<sup>303</sup> P r i s c u s, fr. 19 = *Suda*, A 3803

*militum vacans* at that time<sup>304</sup>. It is possible that Aspar was also present, perhaps as a *magister militum vacans*, overseeing development of his son's military career. An important detail of this campaign is also that the emperor took part in it in person. It seems likely that he relied on his officers' counsel in regards to strategic and tactical decisions, as it is unknown and rather unlikely if he had any experience commanding large units of the Roman army. That being said, even his visiting troops is a notable fact, an unusual act in the age of the Late Roman Empire, when emperors mostly stayed in the confines of their palaces. We can imagine how much it must have boosted the morale of the troops and affected the general opinion. Marcian placed himself in stark contrast with his predecessor, as strong willed leader possessed of martial virtue, while Theodosius was cowardly and submissive. The campaign of 451, even if of little importance strategically, was a major contributing factor to Marcian's legacy.

### **The War of 452**

The most important achievement of Marcian's foreign policy was yet to come. A year later, in 452 Attila ventured west yet again. The Huns managed to enter the Italian peninsula, capturing the fortified city of Aquileia that stood in their way, and swarmed into the Po valley, ravaging Mediolanum and Ticinum<sup>305</sup>. According to the main sources for these events, *Getica* of Jordanes and the chronicle of Prosper, Attila was dissuaded from capturing Rome only by the intervention of Pope Leo<sup>306</sup>. The person who once saved the West from the Hun menace, Aetius, is either not mentioned at all by Jordanes, or completely criticized for the failure to stop the Huns by Prosper. The chronicler claims that Aetius was surprised by the Huns invading Italy and he failed to defend the mountain passes leading to the Italian Peninsula. It has, however, been observed there was very little he could have done<sup>307</sup>. Prosper, a layman in terms of military strategy, was unaware that blocking the mountain passes to Italy was not be feasible<sup>308</sup>. Especially since Aetius lacked troops to mount any serious resistance. His allies from the year prior were unavailable; first, the death of Theodoric I, the king of Visigoths, led to his descendants fighting each other for power, and then, a war between the Goths and the Alans erupted<sup>309</sup>. Even considering these unfortunate circumstances, the critique of Prosper would be somewhat justified if the general did nothing to

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<sup>304</sup> PLRE, vol. II, p. 135-137 (s.v. Ardabur iunior 1)

<sup>305</sup> Jordanes, *Getica*, 222

<sup>306</sup> Jordanes, *Getica*, 223; Prosper, 1367.

<sup>307</sup> Prosper, 1367.

<sup>308</sup> O. Maenchen-Helfen, *The World...*, p. 136.

<sup>309</sup> A. Bachrach, *A History...*, p. 68.

prevent the fall of Italy to the Huns. However, it does not fit with the character of that capable general, and luckily, there are some additional sources that seem to expand on the information which Prosper and Jordanes presented from a biased perspective.

Thanks to the Iberian chronicler, Hydatius, there is another version of events that appears to clarify the previously pointed out reservations. According to him, the Huns were forced to retreat from Italy because of two, possibly three, factors. Firstly, the marshes of the Po river valley caused a plague among the Hun hordes. Secondly, Marcian decided to help the Empire in the West by sending forces to invade the Hun territories and possibly sending auxiliaries to help Aetius<sup>310</sup>.

Generally there is an agreement that the plague was a major contributing factor in stopping Attila's advance. It was neither the first, nor the last time when the putrid bogs of the Po Valley caused death among masses of men invading the Italian peninsula. In the contemporary Roman history it happened to the Alaric and his hordes 50 years prior to these events<sup>311</sup>, as well as to the Franks, twice: in 540, when the plague killed a third of their forces<sup>312</sup>, and in 553, when they almost lost their whole army<sup>313</sup>. Pestilence spreading among the Hunnic troops was certainly enough of a reason for Attila to retreat with all the collected loot and not risk a lengthy siege of a fortified city like Rome. It is also far more convincing than the official version of Prosper, who claimed that Pope Leo, incidentally Prosper's superior, saved Rome from the bloodthirsty Huns like, as Otto Maenchen-Helfen wittily states, '*pontifex ex machina*'. It is likely that the embassy of Leo only sought to ransom Roman prisoners of war<sup>314</sup>.

The other information brought up by Hydatius is more contentious. Some scholars misread the source to claim that it only reports one force and that the Aetius in question is the eastern *comes*<sup>315</sup>, but Richard Burgess, the editor of the modern translation of the chronicle, points out that Hydatius distinguishes between the *auxillia* that were sent to help Aetius and *exercitum* that attacked the Huns in their own territory. The scholar, however, deems the whole passage untrustworthy. He compares it with a piece of information about later events, a defeat of the Vandals at Corsica

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<sup>310</sup> Hydatius, 146.

<sup>311</sup> Claudian, *De sextu consulate Honorii*, 300-304.

<sup>312</sup> Procopius, *History of the Wars*, VI, 25, 17-18.

<sup>313</sup> Agathias, II, 3.

<sup>314</sup> O. Maenchen-Helfen, *The World...*, p. 140-141.

<sup>315</sup> J.B. Bury, *History...*, p. 295-296; E. Stein, *Histoire...*, p. 336; E.A. Thompson, *A History...*, p. 147-148; J.M. O'Flynn, *Generalissimos of the Western Roman Empire*, Edmonton 1983, p. 98-100; *PLRE*, vol. II, p. 29 (s.v. Aetius 8).

in 456, which the eastern traders, who arrived in Hispalis, falsely attributed to Marcian's military action<sup>316</sup>.

There are two major counterarguments to his theory. Firstly, in the letters to the Council of Chalcedon, Marcian claims he is postponing his campaigns to take part in it. It means that continuing the war in the next campaigning season was already in his plans. Secondly, Aetius apparently forced the emperor Valentinian to accept Marcian as a legitimate ruler in March of 452 – it would be unreasonable to think there were no strings attached – likely he understood the sorry state of the Italian defences and wanted to convince Marcian to send help<sup>317</sup>. Thus, contrary to Burgess' claims, there is another source supporting Marcian's military involvement in 452 and there is a justification as to why the emperor would be willing to do it<sup>318</sup>.

In addition to that, Burgess makes a couple of mistakes in his argumentation. He claims that it would have been extremely unlikely for the Eastern Empire to send forces to help the West, since that supposedly did not happen after 425. However, that omits two major and costly operations against the Vandals in 430 and 441<sup>319</sup>. He also claims that the information about Marcian's military campaign in 452 is a claim 'even more fabulous' than that about Marcian's fleet destroying the Vandals. Considering the abundance of sources puzzled by Marcian's passive approach to the Vandal problem or trying to excuse his behaviour, compared to the fragmentary,

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<sup>316</sup> Hydatius, 177. Cf. R.W. Burgess, *A New Reading for Hydatius "Chronicle" 177 and the Defeat of the Huns in Italy*, *Phoenix*, 42, 1988, p. 363.

<sup>317</sup> *Continuatio Codicis Reichenaviensis*, 21. Cf. T. Stickler, *Aëtius. Gestaltungsspielräume eines Heermeisters im ausgehenden Weströmischen Reich*, München 2002, p. 75-76. Considering the chronology and the fact that there was no *détente* in the tense relationship between the East and the West up to this point, this fact must have been connected to the Hun invasion. Furthermore, it is evidenced by the words of Valentinian himself, who accused Aetius of forcing him to let go of his rights to the Eastern throne. Cf. Priscus, fr. 30.

<sup>318</sup> In addition, there is an interesting passage in the *Galic Chronicle of the year 452* (132), where the author criticizes the West for inaction in the face of the destruction that their Eastern brethren suffered from the Huns in 447. If, as Burgess claims, each part of the Empire had to look after itself and could not reasonably expect any aid, why would it cause such commentary on the anonymous chronicler's part? Considering his work was written around the time of Attila's invasion of Italy, perhaps his critique was informed by the knowledge that the East actually came to the Western Empire's aid in the time of need, contrary to the analogous situation when it was the East which was in grave danger.

<sup>319</sup> It is puzzling how a scholar of this calibre made such a mistake, unless he considered those not 'solely for the purpose of defending the West'. It is however an arbitrary distinction – we could ask ourselves, how often does it happen that military aid is offered out of sheer goodwill in history in general? Alternatively, Burgess could have meant only the situation when military auxiliaries were being sent directly to the Italian peninsula, but it is quite obvious why the Eastern Romans did not send help to Italy between 425 and 452 – it was not under external threat.

but still existing sources on Marcian's hard-line policy towards the Huns and actual military involvement, it bears saying that Burgess's evaluation is deeply flawed.

This faulty logic seems to stem from Burgess's belief that Marcian was completely unwilling to get involved in the West. Otherwise his argumentation is well presented and his points are strong; however, due to his preconceptions, he is willing to discount the passage altogether instead of seeking *nuance*. Burgess is entirely right in pointing out that the plague was the most plausible primary reason for Attila's retreat. He is however completely wrong in claiming Marcian's military offensive to be implausible. The evidence points to Marcian's involvement in the war of 452 to be a historical fact; the question that remains is what the course of the events was<sup>320</sup>.

The generals involved in the offensive of 452 were likely the same as those the year before, however, there is again little evidence. Appolonius was named patrician just after the war and conducted diplomatic talks, as was often the case for the commanders-in-chief of the forces engaged in a campaign, which indicates his involvement<sup>321</sup>. The information regarding Ardaburius martial achievements can just as well concern the events of 452; thus, it is possible that he and maybe his father, Aspar, commanded some forces against Hun settlements. If Marcian managed to send any auxiliaries to help Aetius directly, we have no means of knowing who could have commanded them. Additionally, there is the possibility that the previously mentioned Eastern official, Aetius, to whom many modern historians attributed the victories of 452, was also involved, despite Burgess's critique. While it is clear that Hydatius meant the famous *magister militum* from the West, there is a possibility that he might have misunderstood the information he was presented with. *Comes* Aetius (the Eastern one) was likely a military official before in 451, and could have taken part in the war of 452 as a *magister militum vacans*. This might have led Hydatius to think that his sources meant that the Eastern soldiers were being led by Aetius, the patrician that he knew well.

Thus, the most likely course of action was that Flavius Aetius, aware of the fact that the Huns are about to invade, asked emperor Marcian for help, offering Valentinian's recognition in exchange. Marcian likely agreed, and possibly started preparing troops in Illyria. To transport the soldiers across the Adriatic would need considerable time and preparation of ships and supplies, not to mention waiting for suitable weather conditions. However, the sudden fall of the fortress of Aquileia thwarted Aetius' plans, as it meant that the Huns could advance unimpeded into

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<sup>320</sup> Cf. M. Meier, *Geschichte der Völkerwanderung, Europa, Asien und Afrika vom 3. bis zum 8. Jahrhundert n.Chr*, München 2019, p. 459. Otto Maenchen-Helfen (*The World...*, p. 137-140) accepts the course of events presented by Hydatius.

<sup>321</sup> Priscus, fr. 23.

defenceless Italy. When the realization that there was no longer any time to prepare came, Marcian decided to turn his soldiers northwards, attacking Pannonia, striking at the heart of the Hun territory. It is possible that at the same time Aetius was conducting hit-and-run actions against isolated Hun detachments<sup>322</sup>. It could not have saved the northern Italian cities and it brought him no fame, but luckily for the general the amassed forces of Attila were not as mobile due to their being overburdened with wagons carrying the spoils of war, and due to the plague, making their advance further down the Italian peninsula impossible<sup>323</sup>. At the same time, it is possible that the news of their own settlements being raided and pillaged by the forces of Marcian had arrived, which might have been the reason why the companions of Attila urged their king to retreat. In fact, the arrival of a diplomatic mission of Pope Leo helped Attila save his face and leave Italy while still keeping up the appearance of a victory, dictating harsh terms for the release of captives, and pretending that he was only restraining his wrath and his warriors thanks to the agreement negotiated with Leo. This would also conform very well to the expectations of Prosper, who could then attribute the rescue of Italy to the Pope and Pope only, not even necessarily in bad faith.

### **The Conclusion of the Hun Problem**

It seems that the wars of 451 and 452 were exactly the kind of policy towards the Huns that the prominent members of the military had wanted when they supported Marcian's ascension to the throne. Those victories were small in scale from our perspective, but the Roman territories were never threatened by Attila. Marcian's moves in the Hun policy were careful and involved little risk - the opposite of those of Theodosius. Contrary to the common belief in historiography, Marcian did not avoid confrontation; instead, he made sure the conflicts played out on his own terms. Furthermore, those military successes were a source of prestige for the generals – Ardaburius was rewarded with the oriental mastery, Apollonius became *patricius*, and *comes* Aetius was awarded with consulate – and those are only the honours we are aware of from our scanty sources.

Later this year Attila once again tried to threaten Marcian into submission and demanded that a tribute be sent. Just as before, the emperor had no intention of appeasing Attila, his intentions were quite to the contrary. After preliminary talks with Hun envoys in Constantinople in which Marcian refused to pay himself off, the Roman embassy was assembled. The envoy to the Huns was the general Apollonius, freshly appointed patrician. To understand the importance

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<sup>322</sup> They would have been forced to split into smaller squads because of the lack of fodder for the horses, as the state of the pastures at that point of the year in Italy was very bad, cf. R. Lindner, *Nomadism...*, p. 11-12

<sup>323</sup> Cf. R. Lindner, *Nomadism...*, p. 11-12; O. Maenchen-Helfen, *The World...*, p. 139.

behind this nomination it should be noted that Apollonius was a supporter of Zeno and a brother of Rufus<sup>324</sup>. The same who had been married to a woman promised to Attila's secretary as part of a peace deal. It is up to speculation whether Attila was fully aware of that, but it seems like this nomination was meant as a political insult. And, it likely that it was taken as such. Attila refused to speak with Apollonius at all and was about to confiscate the customary gifts under the threat of killing the general if he opposed it. Apollonius, however, would not be threatened, which clearly impressed Priscus, who calls the general's behaviour an act of bravery. Thankfully, the Hun king did not follow up on his threats and the envoy returned home safely<sup>325</sup>.

These events illustrate how tense the relationship between the Eastern Roman Empire and the Huns must have been. The phantom of the war continued to loom over the East for three years after Marcian's accession to the throne. In 453, however, Attila died. The circumstances of his death are often brushed over<sup>326</sup>, and much more attention is dedicated to the aftermath which is commonly understood as a predetermined fate of Attila's empire in case of the death of its great leader<sup>327</sup>. While its instability and reliance on the powerful authority figure should be recognized, such approach omits the process that could be observed in the years 450-453. In effect, Marcian's policy towards the Huns challenged Attila's authority and resources. After the king's less than successful campaigns in the West, a rift between the Huns and more volatile elements in his empire,

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<sup>324</sup> E.A. Thompson, *A History...*, p. 148. It should however be recognized that Priscus' passage is not exactly clear, cf. *The Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire. Eunapius, Olympiodorus, Priscus and Malchus*, ed. and trans. R.C. Blockley, vol. I, Liverpool 1981, p. 391 n. 114. Some scholars claim Rufus was not the brother of Apollonius, and that Priscus meant some other, otherwise unknown person who was Apollonius' brother and who married the daughter of Saturninus, cf. *PLRE*, vol. II, p. 121 (s.v. Apollonius 3). However, as Blockley rightfully points out, Rufus and Apollonius being related makes more sense, because why otherwise would the historian even bring up the affair of Saturninus' daughter? In fact, a further conclusion can be made that Priscus wanted to stress how much of a political provocation the nomination of Apollonius was.

<sup>325</sup> Priscus, fr. 23.

<sup>326</sup> Interestingly, this seems to happen because Jordanes (*Getica*, 254) who is generally a reliable source, explicitly says that Attila died of natural causes. However, Marcellin Comes (a. 454) claims otherwise, saying that the king was stabbed to death by his newlywed wife. John Malalas (XIV, 10) reports only that Attila's wife was suspected of murdering him, and he supports it by invoking Priscus' authority. He also informs that other sources claimed Attila was murdered by Aetius, who bribed Attila's sword-bearer.

<sup>327</sup> Cf. E.A. Thompson, *A History...*, p. 148-149; J.B. Bury, *History...*, p. 296; R.C. Blockley, *East Roman Foreign Policy. Formation and Conduct from Diocletian to Anastasius*, Cairns 1992, p. 68; R.L. Hohlfelder, *Marcian's...*, p. 61; P. Heather, *The Huns and the End of the Roman Empire in Western Europe*, EHR 60, 1995, p. 29.

primarily the subjugated Germanic tribes, appeared<sup>328</sup>. The death of Attila was not the cause of the fall of the Hun Confederacy, but rather a coinciding factor, if not even a result of its crumbling<sup>329</sup>.

This bears posing a question: was Marcian fully aware of how his decisions affected the enemy, and were his actions purposeful and pre-planned? Naturally, as is usually the case with questions of intent, the answer is speculative, but the evidence is convincing. The key to understanding Marcian's policy against the Huns is the fact that he was chosen to become an emperor by Aspar and Zeno, probably to the general approval of others in the military. The previous chapter answered how important the problem of the Huns was to those commanders and how they wanted to change the policy directed towards them. Marcian consulted his decisions on the matters of eastern policy and it only makes sense that he did the same when making moves concerning the Huns. The generals fighting Attila, many of them of barbaric origins, might have had a good understanding of the workings of the Hun confederacy and its weak spots. It is thus

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<sup>328</sup> It should be noted that the lands the Eastern Roman forces attacked in 452 were most likely in Pannonia, which was settled likely settled by Gothic allies of the Huns, cf. P. Heather, *Goths and Romans 332–489*, Oxford 1991, p. 242. Jordanes (*Getica*, 264) reports that Goths, after breaking from the Hun Confederacy, claimed Pannonia since they did not want to fight other tribes for land. Thus, it would mean that is where their settlements were. H. Gračanin and J. Škrglja (*The Ostrogoths in the Late Antique South Pannonia*, AAC 49, 2014, p. 171) argue, that Goths settled in Pannonia only after the battle of Nedao, when they asked the emperor to grant them these lands. However, Pannonia was previously in the hands of the Huns, and the Imperial claims over it were only *de jure*. Cf. H. Gračanin, *The Huns and the South Pannonia*, Bsl 64, 2006, p. 49–66. Thus, it is likely it was settled by barbarians before that, probably by more tribes than just the Goths: Sarmatians, Huns and Alans as well. Cf. P. MacGeorge, *Late Roman Warlords*, New York 2002, p. 39. A possibility of dissent among Goths, caused by Attila's falling prestige and influence over his allies could have been a serious problem, even to a point of rebellion. Why else did the Hun king marry a Gothic princess, Ildico, if not to re-establish the political connections by marriage? Cf. Jordanes, *Getica*, 254. On a more detailed analysis of that problem, cf. Ł. Pięćkosiński, *Polityka Zachodnia Cesarzy Marjana (450-457) I Leona I (457-474)*, Łódź 2019, p. 91-97. Cf. also, M. Meier, *Geschichte...*, p. 459-461.

<sup>329</sup> If Attila was in fact murdered. Michael Babcock (*The Night that Attila died. Solving the Murder of Attila the Hun*, Berkeley 2005) presents some convincing arguments why this could have been the case. His hypothetical, however, suspects Western *patricius* Aetius conspiring with Hun nobles Edeco and Orestes are much less likely (although, to be fair, there is some fragmentary mention of that in the chronicle of John Malalas (XIV, 10), but the rest of that passage seem to imply that Aetius was involved in it personally and that his deed was recognized as a 'victory' against the Huns. The chronicler is known to confuse many matters regarding the western history, so those remarks alone do not offer a solid basis for an argument). If the author were to speculate, such plot would seem more probable if it was Marcian who ordered it. After all, we know of one attempt to murder Attila that failed due to potential barbarian conspirators choosing loyalty to their king over Eastern Roman gold. After Marcian's diplomacy undermined Attila's position enough, the plotter's dilemma might have had a different conclusion. On the capacity of Roman diplomacy for intrigues, cf. A.D. Lee, *Abduction and Assassination: The Clandestine Face of Roman Diplomacy in Late Antiquity*, IHR 31, 2009, p. 1–23.

highly probable that the policy towards the Huns was deliberately conceived to undermine the basis of their power and after their collapse, to prevent them from ever regaining it.

### **The Northern Border and the Career of Procopius Anthemius**

After the battle of Nedao and Ellak's death, the Hun confederacy effectively collapsed. The Gepids, who started the rebellion, conquered the Hun abodes and sent their envoys to Marcian, asking for peace and tribute. Other tribes who supported the rebellion and even those who remained loyal to the Huns until after the battle of Nedao sought arrangements with the Empire. Marcian allowed them to seek refuge in the territories of the Empire. As such, the Ostrogoths were settled in Pannonia, the Sarmatians and some of the Huns in Scythia and Dacia Ripensis, the Sciri and the Alans in Scythia and Moesia Minor and the Rugians in Thracia<sup>330</sup>.

It is likely that all of those tribes were brought into the Roman defence system by arranging alliances with them. The Gepids' plea for a tribute was undoubtedly linked with concluding a *foedus*, it is also known that the Ostrogoths received a tribute as well. It can be speculated how expensive was this operation for the Empire, the numerous and powerful tripartite confederacy of Ostrogoths received no more than 300 pounds of gold<sup>331</sup>, but we have no data on other tribes. That being said, considering that the reign of Marcian was a time of prosperity and that he left a full treasury to his successor, it was certainly less straining for the budget than paying Attila off.

There was also an added benefit to this policy. Since most of the tribes were now settled on the territories of the Empires and bound to it by alliances, efforts to rebuild the powerful confederacy by the sons of Attila were no longer possible. The tribes themselves were separated from each other, and even in case of a worsening of relations, they were too weak alone to seriously threaten the Empire. If, however, the relations stayed amicable, Marcian created a buffer zone on the always porous and notoriously difficult to defend northern border, protected by the federated barbarian tribes. Notably, the lands where the tribes were settled were previously depopulated by the Hun raids, thus their settlement did not impact the local populace to the extent it normally would.

The arrangement of the alliance agreements was likely the responsibility of local military commanders. They were the ones overseeing the peaceful resettlement of the tribes into the

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<sup>330</sup> Jordanes, *Getica*, 264-266.

<sup>331</sup> The Ostrogoths were a major power, well organized and cohesive, cf. H. Gračanin, J. Škrkulja, *The Ostrogoths...*, p. 168. The tribute was likely paid in grain, since there are no coin findings in Pannonia from the period of Marcian's reign, (cf. H. Gračanin, J. Škrkulja, *The Ostrogoths...*, p. 169), and later, because king Valamer, after the tribute was cancelled, justified starting a war by having the lack of means to live, cf. Priscus, fr. 37.

territories of the Empire and were negotiating with their leaders. It would not be surprising if the whole policy was consulted with them. Unfortunately, this is all up to speculation save for just one example that was luckily recorded due to his later prominence, the future emperor in the West, Procopius Anthemius<sup>332</sup>.

Procopius Anthemius was a son of general Procopius who served under Theodosius and a grandson of *praefect* Anthemius<sup>333</sup>. His career seems to have quickly developed during the reign of Marcian. Around 453 to 454 he was just a *comes rei militaris* responsible for the defences of the northern border, however, in 455 he was named *magister militum praesentalis*, *consul*, and *patricius*<sup>334</sup>. It might have been due to the fact that his efforts at the northern border were a resounding success, for which he was rewarded. In addition, the title of *patricius* might have been granted to Anthemius to equip him with proper authority to further arrange the necessary agreements with the barbarian tribes. Anthemius was probably already an influential figure, because of his ties to illustrious members of the Roman elite. The offices he received could also have been in recognition of his success when dealing with the barbarian settlement, and the rapid growth of his career could indicate how important of a matter it was for the Empire. While it seemingly looks like an anomaly to have a previously unknown individual rise to so many offices and to receive so many honours in such short order, it has to be recognized that it might simply be an illusion caused by the fragmentary nature of the sources. Having said that, there is a possibility that there was more to Anthemius' sudden advancements, which we shall explore in the corresponding sub-chapter.

### **The Problem of the Vandals**

After 452 the relationship between both parts of the Empire slowly normalized. Valentinian still apparently held a grudge and did not accept Marcian's consul of 453 in the first months of the year, but later the situation was resolved, and in 454 the Eastern emperor was allowed to pick both consuls, one of whom was the previously mentioned Eastern Aetius<sup>335</sup>. However, the short period of *détente* was about to end soon. The young Valentinian had enough of the control that his powerful general exercised over him; perhaps he grew bolder knowing Attila died and his empire no longer posed a major threat, or perhaps his actions were simply caused by an emotional breakdown and the long-lasting build-up of hostility towards and resentment of the overbearing general. Regardless, in 454, when Aetius came to discuss some issues of the state, Valentinian lashed out in

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<sup>332</sup> Sidonius, *Carmina*, II, 199. Cf. P. Heather, *Goths...*, p. 44.

<sup>333</sup> *PLRE*, vol. II, p. 96-98 (s.v. Anthemius 3).

<sup>334</sup> Sidonius, *Carmina*, II, 205-207.

<sup>335</sup> *CLRE*, p. 441.

anger and in the end killed the commander on the spot<sup>336</sup>. For the West this was a turning point that started the era of turmoil which would eventually result in the fall of the Empire in the West. For Marcian it seems as if Aetius was his primary connection and after that his policy towards the other part of the Empire became passive and uninvolved. Certainly there were other reasons as well, but undoubtedly the lack of reliable partner in the West was a major factor.

When in 455 Valentinian was in turn murdered by two soldiers connected to Aetius and instigated by a Roman aristocrat, Petronius Maximus<sup>337</sup>, Marcian did not react to those events, but neither did he recognize the new emperor. However, the accession of Petronius Maximus started a chain of events that eventually resulted in the Vandal attack on Rome, which was captured and sacked by the Vandal Fleet in 455. The empress Eudocia with her daughters was captured by the Vandal king Geiseric along with many other captives and looted treasures<sup>338</sup>. Petronius Maximus was killed while fleeing the endangered city. It would not be an overstatement to say that the West was undergoing the worst crisis in its recent history; however, Marcian appeared seemingly unconcerned by this fact. While it is not true that he was completely passive, his reaction was limited at best. In fact, he only resorted to sending embassies to Geiseric, asking for the return of the women from the imperial family and the withholding of the Vandal raiders<sup>339</sup>.

The Vandal king seems to have ignored the first embassy, as Marcian sent another one. In contrast to Marcian's stalwart attitude towards the Huns, when dealing with the Vandals he clearly sought compromise. This is best illustrated by the choice of the envoy that was sent the second time, Bleda who was an Arian bishop. This fact underlined by Priscus was probably a gesture of goodwill from Marcian, perhaps the emperor hoped that the Vandal king would be more willing to find common ground when speaking with a brother in faith. This however did not happen. Bleda's demands were, as far as we know, the same as before. Nevertheless, it did not make the impression on Geiseric that the emperor was probably hoping for. When the king refused, Bleda assumed a more demanding posture, even threatening war<sup>340</sup>. It did not change the outcome of the negotiations and in the end Marcian did not act upon his threats.

The Vandal policy of Marcian warrants an explanation. This aspect of his reign received, alongside his religious policy, much attention in the scholarship. It is arguably the primary reason

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<sup>336</sup> Priscus, fr. 30.

<sup>337</sup> PLRE, vol. II, p. 749-751 (s.v. Petronius Maximus 22).

<sup>338</sup> On those events, cf. Ch. Curtois, *Les Vandales et l'Afrique*, Paris 1955, p. 194-197; M. Wilczyński, *Gejzeryk...*, p. 145-155; A. Merrills, R. Miles, *The Vandals*, Oxford 2010, p. 115-117; Y. Modéran, *Les Vandales et l'Empire Romain*, Arles 2014, p. 187-189.

<sup>339</sup> Priscus, fr. 31.

<sup>340</sup> Priscus, fr. 31.

why it is sometimes described as passive, and the same quality is being incorrectly ascribed to his actions towards the Huns. The ancients were truly puzzled by Marcian's inactivity in regards to the Vandals. Perhaps this is the reason why the story of Marcian's captivity in Africa and his promise to never take up arms against Geiseric originated in the historical records, either as the authors' own rationalization or following the propaganda of the regime.

That being said, Marcian's policy towards the Vandals is consistent with his decisions in other spheres. The emperor was averse to risk in his policies and the experience of the previous reign of Theodosius had shown that expeditions against the Vandals were very costly endeavours, and despite the resources invested, failed to achieve their goals. Marcian was well aware of that as he took part in one of them. In addition, they exposed the Empire to other threats. And finally, the Vandals posed a threat to the Roman Empire as a whole, but the West was much more affected. Considering that Marcian lacked the dynastic interests that his predecessor had, and for the majority of his reign the relationship with the Western government was not amicable, he might not have seen a reason to invest so much to the cause that mattered to him little. From the perspective of the Empire as a whole, it contributed to the crisis in the West and its eventual fall, but for a ruler of the East, it was a pragmatic decision.

Marcian's Vandal policy was likely the result of emperor's own convictions and previous experiences, but it is highly likely that it was an important matter to the main person to whom Marcian owed the throne – Aspar<sup>341</sup>. While there is no direct evidence on Aspar's influence of Marcian during his reign, it would be naïve to assume that the emperor was free to do as he pleased. That being said, there is no evidence of any conflict either. Admittedly, the sources on the reign of Marcian are scarce, however, in case of the reigns of his predecessor and successor, the conflicts between the emperor and the generals were a central piece of the narrative. While there can be no certainty that there were none, the most likely conclusion is that the emperor closely cooperated with his previous superior. Considering that the Vandal policy of Leo was a major part of his falling out with Aspar, Marcian's policy, which was on the other end of the spectrum when compared to Leo's, seems to have been in accordance with Aspar's convictions. This would not have been strange as they shared the experiences of the failed expedition in the 430s. The embassy of Bleda might be an indirect evidence of Aspar's involvement in policy making. The general was an important figure in Arian circles and certainly would be more likely to arrange the mission, as

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<sup>341</sup> Many scholars bring up Aspar's Alan origins on that occasion. Cf. G. Vernadsky, *Flavius...*, p. 58-60; B. Bachrach, *The Alans...*, p. 45; E. Gautier, *Genséric. Roi des Vandales*, Paris 1935, p. 253-254; 264; M. Wilczyński, *Gejzeryk...*, p. 162.

opposed to the devout orthodox Christian that Marcian was. In fact, the whole idea might have come from the general.

As such, Marcian's policy against the Vandals is another aspect of his reign that was influenced by the military elites. There is however a possibility that it might have changed towards the very end of his life, which will be explored in the corresponding sub-chapter.

### **The Eastern Policy of Marcian**

The Eastern policy of Marcian is even more scarcely illuminated by the sources, since there is no relative abundance of them from the West to sketch the background and the only Eastern sources are fragmentary in nature, or otherwise lacking in detail.

The exception to that rule is Armenia, where the developed historiographical tradition recorded some of the most notable events related to Marcian's eastern policy. Theodosius II had promised the Armenians his military support, however, his sudden death put a stop to those plans. Both Yeghishe and Ghazar mention that Marcian, when facing this issue, sought counsel on how to best deal with it<sup>342</sup>. They relay, the latter even in quite a lot of detail, an answer that Marcian had got, which is the more interesting, considering that one of those who gave it was none other than the general Anatolius<sup>343</sup>. The counsellors argued that helping the Armenians would compromise stability in the relations with Persia and most likely lead to war. The war, however, could go either way and the results would be uncertain.

This event shows not only that Marcian relied on his military advisors when deciding his foreign policy, but also gives a unique insight into a military commander's convictions in regards to how it should be conducted, and it is the only known explicit statement regarding foreign policy coming from a member of the military. In fact, the pragmatism of Anatolius' overview of the situation in Armenia can be observed in Marcian's movements on the international scene in general. While we should recognize that attributing such convictions to other members of the military and other situations is just speculation, it seems to align well with all the other evidence.

Regardless, the insurgency that Theodosius had promised to support had already started when Marcian was deliberating whether to follow his predecessors plans. The bitter remarks in the

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<sup>342</sup> Ghazar Parpets'i, 41; Yeghishe, III.

<sup>343</sup> The other one was some court official, both chroniclers record his Syrian origin – Ghazar records a name P'ghorent while Yeghishe calls him Ephlaios (Eulaios). According to Martindale (*PLRE*, vol. II, p. 478 s.v. Florentius 7), Ghazar's version is the correct one and the official in question was Florentius, who already had a long career in the bureaucratic apparatus of the Empire. He was still present at Marcian's court in 451, since he attended the Council of Chalcedon, however, as a representative of the Senate.

Armenian sources, and accusation of cowardice and impiety (more so of Marcian's advisors than the emperor himself) are understandable in that context. The rebels anticipated they would receive help they had been promised, but the change of the regime in effect doomed their efforts.

The policy towards Armenia in 450 provides direct evidence of Marcian's turn in foreign policy which can be observed in all other areas, and, interestingly, links it directly to advice received from military circles.

### The Arab Raids

At some point before 453 the Arab tribes, called by Priscus Saracens<sup>344</sup>, invaded the Roman Syria. Ardaburius, who held the office of the *magister militum per Orientem*, fought against them near Damascus<sup>345</sup>. The historian does not record the outcome of the battle, but since the time he was travelling to Egypt with his superior, Maximinus, general Ardaburius was already negotiating peace with the invaders. Maximinus was called in the passage a *strategos*, which means he had received a military command of some sort. Either he was freshly appointed *dux Thebaidis* and was travelling to take his assignment, or, which is probably more likely, he was a *comes rei militaris* or even *magister militum vacans*.

If either of the latter two options was true, it is possible that Maximinus had some soldiers at his disposal and the reason he and Priscus made a detour to Damascus could have been that they were meaning to reinforce Ardaburius. The short passage that tells of those events contains however no evidence of any of that and due to its brevity, everything else is left to speculation. It is interesting though, since in the book of Suda there is an entry on Ardaburius, according to which his term in office was a time of peace which resulted in the general becoming *lax*<sup>346</sup>. The information about this war thus stands in contrast with that, or else the critique relates to later developments<sup>347</sup>.

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<sup>344</sup> The name, at that point did not imply a specific tribe and was used as an umbrella term for Arabs, but more likely just for the nomads. For an in-depth overview of the topic, cf. T. W o l i ń s k a, *Arabs, (H)agarenes, Ishmaelites, Saracens – a Few Remarks about Naming* [in:] *Byzantium and the Arabs. The Encounter of Civilizations from Sixth to Mid-Eight Century*, ed. T. W o l i ń s k a, P. F i l i p c z a k, Łódź 2015, p. 31-36. Roger. B l o c k l e y (*East...*, p. 69) assumes they were part of Salih confederacy.

<sup>345</sup> P r i s c u s, fr. 26.

<sup>346</sup> *Suda*, A 3803.

<sup>347</sup> Alternatively, that information could have originated from anti-Ardaburius propaganda, probably broadcasted by Leo's regime, cf. M.E. S t e w a r t, *The First Byzantine Emperor? Leo I, Aspar and Challenges of Power and Romanitas in Fifth-century Byzantium*, Porph 22, 2014, p. 10.

## Blemmyes and Nobades

After their Syrian detour Maximinus and Priscus ended up in the Egyptian provinces. In the south the tribes of Blemmyes and Nobades invaded the Roman territories and Alexandria was in turmoil after a contentious election of the patriarch. We know that Priscus helped a local prefect of Alexandria, Florus, to quell the unrest in the city<sup>348</sup>. Maximinus, however, was responsible for the diplomatic arrangements after the conflict with the invading tribes..

Unfortunately the details of the war were lost, since as it often happens the author of *excerpta de legationibus* omitted the information pertaining to the conflict itself, so that the eleventh fragment of the embassies of foreign peoples relates in detail the course of diplomatic talks and conditions of the treaty. Of the war however, it is only known that it was won. It can be assumed that the command of the Roman forces was in the hands of Maximinus. The representatives of the tribes seemed to treat him with exceptional respect, at first wanting to keep the treaty for the duration of Maximinus' stay in the province, then, when he disagreed, for the duration of Maximinus' life. In the end a 100-year-long treaty was agreed upon<sup>349</sup>. It might indicate that it was so because Maximinus was the leader of the forces which defeated the tribes. It would explain the special treatment of his person and Maximinus did lead Roman soldiers already once, when a punitive expedition against Flavius Zeno was dispatched.

The commanding officer in charge of defending the southernmost borders of Egypt was *dux Thebaidis* and it is possible that this was the assignment Maximinus was travelling to take up. However, as noted before, considering his diplomatic experience and the detour in Syria, it seems more likely that he had a more independent command role, such as *comes* or even *magister militum vacans*. That would mean that he must have been sent to deal with the problems at hand in eastern provinces, first in Syria, where the problem had been resolved before his arrival, and then (it is possible he was rerouted, especially if Maximinus had some forces at his disposal) in Thebaid.

There is however some additional evidence that might change this overview. Jordanes in *Romana* claims it was Florus who defeated the invaders<sup>350</sup>. The passage is short but explicit. It is a fact that Florus combined both civil and military prerogatives holding both the title of *comes Aegypti* and of *praefectus augustalis*<sup>351</sup>. He might have received such broad powers to better deal with the

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<sup>348</sup> Priscus, fr. 28 = Evagrius, *HE*, II, 5. The passage says that Priscus arrived in Alexandria from Thebaid, so the problems in Alexandria must have happened after the first part of the war was over, or he split from his superior, of whom the source says nothing.

<sup>349</sup> Priscus, fr. 27.

<sup>350</sup> Jordanes, *Romana*, 333.

<sup>351</sup> *PLRE*, vol. II, p. 461-482 (s.v. Florus 2). This would however mean Florus' prerogatives extended to the province of Thebaid.

unrest in Alexandria, or perhaps the invasion of the Blemmyes and Nobades was the reason. It is possible he took part in the fighting in the first phase of the war; however, it seems more likely that Jordanes' information on Florus adheres to the second stage of the war. Soon after the aforementioned peace had been concluded, Maximinus died which prompted the tribes to break the treaty and renew hostilities. Priscus does not say what the outcome of this incursion was, but from the general remarks of Jordanes it seems that the barbarians were in the end defeated, possibly by Florus.

The conflict with Blemmyes and Nobades was probably not a major one. Having said that, the tendency in the literature to disregard it as a minor skirmish is unsubstantiated. Of the war itself we know far too little to properly judge the danger. Despite the scale, it was yet another example of the success of Marcian's policy in ensuring the security of the Empire's borders.

### **The Expeditions to Lazica**

Another lesser conflict known solely from the description of the diplomatic arrangements following it was the conflict in Lazica. The reason for the hostilities mentioned by Priscus was the fact that the ruler of this land, Gobazes, had decided to rule jointly with his son. It appears that the Romans assumed the rights of investiture of their subject state as a means of control. Lazica was a strategically important region in the Caucasus and controlling it allowed for potential interventions in the area. Gobazes' move must have been therefore recognized as an attempt to shake off to some extent the subordination to his suzerain<sup>352</sup>.

It seems as if the campaign was moderately successful, however, the Romans must have not achieved all their goals as they were preparing a second one. Priscus mentions that the emperor's advisors were considering whether to attack along the same routes, or to move through Armenia, negotiating it beforehand with the Persians, as the route was apparently close to the Persian border. Perhaps the reason the first campaign was aborted had something to do with the deficiencies of the chosen route of approach. Priscus also writes that the sea route, normally the fastest and the most convenient mode of transport of the time, was out of question due to the ruggedness of the coastline and the lack of harbours. Maybe the route chosen originally was by the coast with the intention of having the army supplied by sea, however, unfavourable conditions made it impossible and the army was forced to retreat<sup>353</sup>.

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<sup>352</sup> R.C. Blockley, *East...*, p 70.

<sup>353</sup> Priscus, fr. 33. Roger Blockley (*East...*, p. 209, n. 22) observes that the sources seem to imply that the first expedition was a naval one.

Unfortunately we are almost completely in the dark as to who could have been the commander of the expedition and who took part in the council on how to organize the second expedition. Priscus does not bring up any names. The most likely candidate was probably Ardaburius, a *magister militum* of the East. Any general could have advised the emperor on the matter, but if Anatolius was still in office, then he surely would have, although it would have been unlikely at this point due to his venerable age, if he was still alive at all.

Eventually, the second campaign in Lazica was not realized. Gobazes tried to get Persian support for his cause but the Lazi envoys were sent away<sup>354</sup>. Consequently, he sent an embassy to Rome where he was informed that only in the instance he or his son abdicated would the hostilities cease. This proposal came from *magister officiorum* Euphemius, who was one of the closest associates of Marcian at that time, as Priscus informs. Gobazes agreed to it and abdicated, leaving his son on the throne. Thus the resolution of the conflict was found diplomatically.

Respecting the case of the conflict in Lazica it is difficult to judge how successful the Romans were militarily. Even though they had to retreat, the show of strength was enough to arrive at some kind of political compromise.

### **The Soldier Emperor**

The political record of Marcian's reign was, as evidenced in the chapter so far, a successful one. In general, the lack of appreciation for his achievements in the scholarship comes either from the fact that the dramatic developments in the West (arguably better illuminated by the sources) overshadow what was happening in the East ruled by Marcian, or from limited attention given to the sources combined with certain preconceptions.

It can be argued that the conflicts the Eastern Roman Empire had to deal with during Marcian's reign were minor and only of local importance. It still speaks volumes to the political pragmatism of Marcian that he was able to avoid entanglement in wars that he potentially would not have the means to conduct with benefit to the Empire.

In any case, Marcian in his reign managed to contain every external danger to the Empire. In his less than seven-year-long reign there were no fewer than five wars, and in all of them the Romans had the upper hand. The Hun Confederacy got dissolved and the resettlement of some of its constituent tribes within the borders of the Empire prevented its recreation. All this success was achieved with minimal expenditure of resources. When presented in this way, it is no wonder why

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<sup>354</sup> Priscus, fr. 33. The historian claims it was mostly due to the Persian king being occupied by the war with the Kidarite Huns and was probably not willing to antagonize the Romans in such a situation.

the ancients considered Marcian a very good emperor and why on the event of the accession of Anastasius, the citizens shouted for him to ‘rule like Marcian’<sup>355</sup>.

### **The Emperor of the Soldiers**

We know of only two nominations by Marcian to the highest military office: making Ardaburius a *magister militum* of the East after the death of Zeno and Anthemius a *magister militum praesentalis*. When it comes to most of the conflicts, the information on the make-up of the command is severely limited, which makes it impossible to create a chronology of the various military offices for this period. However, despite all that, the reign of Marcian is fundamental to understanding the military elite in the 5<sup>th</sup> century.

Marcian was the emperor chosen by the military, and all of the evidence points to his decisions having been informed by the military establishment. Marcian reshuffled his cabinet, letting go officials connected with the previous regime, but he seems to have kept the military positions intact. This appears to be in line with the assumption that Marcian, owing the throne to the military and coming from the military background, effectively was an executor of the will of the military elite.

The main aspect in which Marcian’s decisions affected the generals was foreign policy – Marcian concentrated on the immediate dangers to the Empire, especially the Huns, while avoiding being entangled in the conflicts that affected the West – both in the case of the Vandal menace and the issues of western imperial succession<sup>356</sup>. However, Marcian’s thoughtful administration and tax cuts also benefited the elites of the empire, which obviously included the prominent members of the military as well.

Lack of evidence of conflicts between Marcian and his commanders, while not unambiguously convincing due to general scarcity of sources, also implies Marcian’s cooperation with the military, especially if we consider that during both his successor’s and predecessor’s reigns they were prominently displayed in historiography. We can reasonably assume that Marcian cooperated primarily with Anatolius in regards to eastern policy, Apollonius (and probably Zeno, while he was still alive) when dealing with the Huns, and sought Aspar’s council when deciding on how to deal with the Vandals and the West.

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<sup>355</sup> Constantine Porphyrogennetos, *De ceremoniis*, 425 B.

<sup>356</sup> R.C. Blockley, *East...*, p. 68; 71.

### The Puzzling Last Years of Marcian's Reign

Even though it was argued in this chapter that Marcian consistently followed his vision of pragmatic and safe approach, both in foreign policy and internal administration, there is some evidence to the contrary which I have alluded to. Considering the scarcity of information, it is largely speculative whether that was the case, but important to consider as it might put Marcian and his relationship with the military in a completely different light.

The main point of interest that seems to indicate the possibility of some change in Marcian's policies late in his reign is his sudden elevation of Procopius Anthemius to both the office of *magister militum* and the rank of the consul. This, in combination with the fact that Marcian gave his daughter, Euphemia, in marriage to the general seems to indicate that emperor had some far reaching plans, possibly even to establish his own dynasty. Sidonius Apollinaris, who later wrote a panegyric on Anthemius, claimed that the latter was considered next in the line of succession after Marcian due to his having married the emperor's daughter<sup>357</sup>. Sidonius however is not a very objective source and his claims do not have to necessarily mean Anthemius was formally recognized as Marcian's successor or that the emperor had any dynastic ambitions.

It is however important to consider as that would have likely put Marcian in a potential conflict with Aspar, who was at that point the only remaining powerful statesman who was responsible for putting Marcian on the throne. It is possible that Marcian was influenced by a certain Euphemius, who was a *magister officiorum* and apparently one of his closest associates, as Priscus records<sup>358</sup>. Due to that passage some scholars consider Euphemius to have been Marcian's right-hand man, however, that seems to be a far reaching conclusion based on inadequate evidence. It is unknown when he took up the office, although it is most likely that he succeeded Vincomalus who was last attested on 13 March 452 and was a consul for the next year. Thus it is possible Euphemius was in office since 453 up until Marcian's death. The name of Marcian's daughter seems to indicate that the emperor and his minister might have been related. Thus, it is possible that Euphemius was influencing Marcian and encroaching on the matters that were dear to Aspar.

One of those might have been the Vandal problem. Marcian's inactivity in that matter was certainly puzzling to his contemporaries. There is however a possibility that Marcian was eventually, when diplomacy failed, willing to act. The envoy to the Vandals, Bleda, threatened war as the representative of Marcian after all. In addition, one source, albeit secondary, claims that Marcian was in fact preparing a military action. The *Church History* of Theodor Lector informs us that the

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<sup>357</sup> Sidonius, *Carmina*, II, 216-218.

<sup>358</sup> Priscus, frag. 33; *PLRE*, vol. II, p. 424 (s.v. Euphemius 1).

emperor was planning a grand campaign against the barbarians occupying North Africa<sup>359</sup>. Such a move would have been incredibly costly in terms of time needed for preparation and resources, and it is known that Marcian was gathering the latter. It might have been simply due to his efficient administration that he managed to collect about 100,000 pounds of gold of surplus in the treasury, but it is not without reason to claim that he was amassing resources with a specific goal in mind.

Another piece of evidence that may support this is Marcian's policy towards the western part of the Empire and its rulers. Considering the logistical and political realities of a hypothetical expedition to Africa, this was a matter of utmost importance. Even though the emperor at first did not recognize Avitus who came into power after the sack of Rome<sup>360</sup>, it seems that he eventually changed his policy. Perhaps the prime reason for Marcian's change of heart was the news of the achievements of the new emperor – his successful subjugation of the Goths and the Burgundians and, most importantly, the victories over the Vandals at Agrigentum on Sicily<sup>361</sup> and at Corsica<sup>362</sup>. According to Ralph Mathisen the emperor was willing to recognize Avitus, however, any potential cooperation against the Vandals was cut short by the rebellion against the Western emperor and his subsequent defeat by the plotters, Majorianus and Ricimer, at the battle of Placentia in late 456.

It is within reason that Marcian wanted to send the expedition against the Vandals but simply did not manage to in his lifetime. Considering the time and resources it would take to prepare one, the possibility of bad weather conditions and the unstable situation in the West, there are many reasons why it could have been postponed. Thus a following hypothesis could be put forward regarding Marcian's last years in power: With the help of Euphemius, Marcian attempted to break his ties with Aspar to pursue other goals, that were at odds with the general's interest, namely changing his policy towards the Vandals and establishing his own dynasty by supporting Anthemius. Curiously enough, this is almost the same dynamic that could be observed Aspar and Marcian's successor, Leo – so it is certainly possible and would present an interesting historical pattern.

There are however also major counterarguments to that hypothesis, even beyond it having a flimsy basis. Firstly, the chronology does not exactly follow the supposed cause and effect – the elevation of Anthemius happened before the Vandals' sacking of Rome and the failure of Marcian's diplomacy. In addition, the idea to send the Arian bishop Bleda to talk with Geiseric appears to

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<sup>359</sup> Theodor Lector, *Epitoma*, 367.

<sup>360</sup> R. Mathisen, *Avitus, Italy and the East in A.D. 455-456*, B 51, 1981, p. 235-237.

<sup>361</sup> Sidonius, *Carmina*, II, 366-367; J.B. Bury, *A History...*, p. 367.

<sup>362</sup> Hydatius, 170.

have been Aspar's, thus the general did not lose influence to Euphemius before that point, nor did Anthemius' rapid career affect him.

In fact, many of those events can be explained otherwise. Euphemius' influence on the court might have been exaggerated by Priscus, who was his direct subordinate and might have wanted to elevate his superior. He was certainly influential, if anything, due to his office alone, and likely because of long tenure, but Marcian is known to have sought council of many officials at his court on many occasions. Giving Euphemia's hand to Anthemius would not have necessarily meant that Marcian wanted to secure his political legacy. Anthemius was an up-and-coming general of an illustrious lineage, who likely had already distinguished himself when dealing with barbarians on the northern borders. The emperor (and possibly Euphemius as well, if he was related) might have wanted to simply make sure that Euphemia got married to a promising candidate.

In conclusion, the lack of sources prevents the clear establishment of the meaning behind certain events in the last years of Marcian's reign. Nevertheless, even if it is simply speculative, it is important to consider these things as it might completely reframe our understanding of Marcian's relationship with his generals. To the author, however, it seems more likely that Marcian was consistent in his policies to the very end, and the alternative interpretation seems to be based on the dynamics of Leo's reign, more so than the available evidence..

## **Conclusion**

The emperor Marcian stood in stark contrast to his predecessor in many ways, and his relationship with the military was not any different. Marcian was the candidate chosen for the throne by the most prominent members of the military elite and it seems that he fulfilled their expectations. His reign was the pinnacle of the influence of the military in the matters of the state, which is most vivid in the area of his foreign policy. In such a manner, Marcian was not only a soldier emperor himself, but also, the emperor of the soldiers.

### **Chapter III - The Military Elites during the Reign of Leo I**

On 26 January 457 the emperor took part in a procession, commemorating the victims of the earthquake from ten years ago. During the ceremony, the elderly emperor, who suffered from inflammation of his feet, must have overexerted himself and had to retire. On the next day he died in his palace<sup>363</sup>. This event marked the end of an era. Even though Marcian was a mere officer of common descent, his marriage with Pulcheria brought him into the Theodosian dynasty that ruled the Empire for nearly 80 years. Their death and the fact that Marcian left no male heir meant that there was no obvious successor, and the chaos in the West resulted in the political forces in Constantinople having to choose the next emperor once again.

#### **The Question of Succession**

It appears that the most likely successor to the throne was the general Anthemius. One source, Sidonius, even states that he was considered a natural successor to the late emperor<sup>364</sup>. Even though the poet had a clear goal to paint the hero of his work in as positive a light as possible, his claims should not be discounted. Anthemius was related to the emperor by marriage, he served in the highest military office as the *magister militum praesentalis* and had a prominent place in the Senate as an ex-consul and *patricius*. His ancestry was similarly notable as he was grandson of the praefect Anthemius and the son of *magister militum* Procopius. Considering such political background and heritage, it poses the question why he did not ascend to the throne. For all intents and purposes Anthemius was the perfect candidate. One possible obstacle could have been his young age<sup>365</sup> - there is no exact data on that, but he appears still to have been in his prime 20 years later when he travelled to the West. It was not uncommon for relatively young people to receive high military offices<sup>366</sup>, but it might have been less acceptable for a candidate to the throne.

Regardless, it would certainly not have been a problem at all, if Anthemius were to succeed Marcian with the former emperor's blessing. The fact that he did not is perhaps the best evidence that Anthemius was not officially designated as Marcian's successor. In fact, there is no evidence of any problems with the succession. Sidonius claims that Anthemius continuously refused to

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<sup>363</sup> B. C r o k e, *The Date and Circumstances of Marcian's Decease, A.D. 457*, B 48, 1978, p. 5–9

<sup>364</sup> S i d o n i u s, *Carmina*, II, 212-215.

<sup>365</sup> Cf. Е.П. Г л у ш а н и н, *Военная знать ранней Византии*, Барнаул 1991, p. 119.

<sup>366</sup> The best example is Aspar himself.

accept the throne<sup>367</sup>, which meant that he must have had the senators' support<sup>368</sup>. The former could have been true, if slightly exaggerated. Anthemius likely did not try to secure the power for himself. If he were to do so and had he any support for his claims, he would have been likely to succeed, and if not, the sources would probably record some events related to the attempt.

On the contrary, the transition of 457 seemed smooth given the circumstances. The interregnum took only a week, a reasonable timeframe for all the arrangements to be made, from deciding who should receive the diadem to organizing all the ceremonies<sup>369</sup>.

### **The Role of Aspar in the Succession**

This time, however, most sources quite explicitly point to the most important person who was behind the decisions. It was Aspar. Interestingly, it is not certain what his position at that time was. It is very likely that he was the second *magister militum praesentalis*. Most scholars assume so, but, there is no direct evidence for that to have been the case<sup>370</sup>. Only the relative power of the general, his influence, best exemplified by his ability to affect the succession, and the fact that sources are quiet about any other potential senior officer who could have served in that function at that time make the scenario likely. All that being said, Aspar's power base was at that point not only military. As Gereon Siebigs accurately notes, Aspar was a senior senator, an ex-consul, possibly second in rank only to Florentius and Valerius<sup>371</sup>, if they were still active in politics or alive at all<sup>372</sup>. Aspar's influence and connections among powerful civilian notables was also a factor. While the existence of a dedicated political body, akin to a 'Roman cabinet', is debatable<sup>373</sup>, Gereon Siebigs assumes that there was some kind of 'Crown Council' that had such a function and consisted of dedicated members. Whether there was such an organized body, or if the political arrangements of

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<sup>367</sup> Sidonius, *Carmina*, II, 210-213.

<sup>368</sup> J.B. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire*, London, 1923, p. 314.

<sup>369</sup> Brian Croke (*Dynasty and Ethnicity. Emperor Leo I and the Eclipse of Aspar*, *Chi* 35, 2005., p. 149-150) is of the opinion that a weeklong interregnum was proof of some complications in the succession. While a delay could indicate political trouble, as it has been argued in case of Marcian, since it was for the throne to be occupied as soon as possible, a week is very little compared to a month. In 450 there is additional evidence for a political crisis which is lacking in 457, thus his argumentation is most likely incorrect.

<sup>370</sup> B. Croke, *Dynasty...*, p. 150; G. Siebigs, *Kaiser Leo I. Das oströmische Reich in den ersten drei Jahren seiner Regierung (457-460 n. Chr.)*, Berlin 2010, p. 195. Interestingly, Evgeniy Glushanin claims otherwise, cf. Е.П. ГЛУШАНИН, *Военная...*, p. 119.

<sup>371</sup> Brother of empress Eudocia, consul of 432, last mentioned in 455, cf. *PLRE*, vol. II, p. 1145 (s.v. Valerius 6).

<sup>372</sup> G. Siebigs, *Kaiser...*, p. 198-199.

<sup>373</sup> Both the Senate and the *consistorium* were relegated by that time to mostly ceremonial roles, and real political decisions were being made by the emperor and his closest advisors.

457 were being made in a much more fluid and *ad hoc* fashion, is a matter for discussion, but ultimately it does not change the main point. Among the political elite of the Eastern Roman Empire, Aspar was of senior rank and possessed major influence.

Little is known of other powerful generals who served under Marcian. Zeno was recorded to have passed away<sup>374</sup>. Of Anatolius and Apollonius nothing is known, thus it appears that they must have died as well, or at least retired from active military duty and political life in general. As matters stood, Aspar was the only one left of the military elite which assisted the emperor in the governance. Seven years prior, Aspar took part in seating Marcian on the throne, primarily due to fortunate circumstances, being in the right place at the right time. This time Aspar was undoubtedly the most influential individual in the state. Aside from honorary ranks and offices, he certainly built many political connections, had vast resources at his disposal, and arguably controlled half of the standing forces of the Empire<sup>375</sup>.

Gereon Siebigs poses an interesting theory, that the matter of succession in 457 was in fact very contentious. Aspar and his supporters, mostly from the Theodosian era, faced the new elite introduced by Marcian, who in turn had supported Anthemius. However, even if we disregard the unlikelihood of Anthemius' candidacy being actively supported, Siebigs' hypothesis is grounded in the incorrect assumption that Aspar stood in opposition to the emperor. If we consider that there was no conflict between those two groups, it appears that Aspar was in fact supported by the majority.

### **A Dangerous Precedent**

There is an interesting source related to the succession of 457 that provides some unique information. Theodoric the Great on the Roman synod of 501, who mentioned to the bishops, that the Constantinopolitan senators even offered the purple to Aspar. The general refused, claiming that it would set a dangerous precedent<sup>376</sup>.

What he could have meant has been a topic of speculation. Some scholars claim that he could not ascend to the throne due to his Alano-Germanic roots and his Arian creed<sup>377</sup>. Alexander

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<sup>374</sup> J o r d a n e s, *Romana*, 333.

<sup>375</sup> One praesental army under his command, the eastern army under his son, and he had the support of the Gothic *foederati* in Thrace as well, cf. A. U r b a n i e c, *Wpływ patrycjusza Aspara na cesarską elekcję Leona*, USS 11, 2011, p. 196

<sup>376</sup> *Acta Synodorum Habitarum Romae*, 5, 23-26; E. S t e i n, *Histoire du Bas-Empire*, Paris 1959, p. 353-354; L. S c o t t, *Aspar and the Burden of Barbarian Heritage*, ByzS 3, p. 62.

<sup>377</sup> J.B. B u r y, *History...*, p. 315. Other authors disregard the heritage as a factor, and concentrate on Arianism, cf. B. C r o k e, *Dynasty...*, p. 150; A. U r b a n i e c, *Wpływ...*, p. 196.

Demandt posits that Aspar did not think his current office allowed him to legitimately assume the throne<sup>378</sup> and that he simply preferred his current position of influence over the senate and the army, playing the part of a Constantinopolitan grey eminence<sup>379</sup>.

Alternatively, Evgeniy Glushanin doubts the historicity of that event altogether<sup>380</sup>. It was a part of the king's speech at one of the synods meant to solve a dispute over papal nominations and Theodoric had an agenda to push through. It is probably an exaggeration to consider this account completely made up, but it is very likely that the king distorted it to suit the needs of his political rhetoric or simply did not know the details<sup>381</sup>. Even if we cannot be certain that the events went exactly as Theodoric reported them, it is yet more evidence of the officials entrusting the responsibility for the choice to Aspar.

Whatever was the case, it was up to Aspar to name the successor to the throne, and he chose another previously unknown, middle rank military officer, Leo.

### **Leo, the *comes et tribunus Mattiariorum***

All of the above proves that it was up to Aspar to name the emperor. He decided to choose a very similar candidate in many aspects to the late Marcian – a previously unknown middle rank military officer - Leo. Jordanes and Malalas report him as being of Bessian stock<sup>382</sup>. Candidus claims he was from Dacia<sup>383</sup>, however, there is a number of sources which say that he was born in Thrace<sup>384</sup>. Regardless, it is safe to say that he came from the northern, Balkan provinces of the Empire. He had a military career and held the rank of tribune, and, thanks to Candidus, we know that he was stationed in Selymbria<sup>385</sup> as a commander of a regiment of the field army called Mattiari, one of the elite units subordinate to one of the *magistri militum praesentales*, at that point likely Aspar himself<sup>386</sup>. Theophanes and Zonaras report that at some point he managed the general's estates as

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<sup>378</sup> A. Demandt, *Magister militum*, [in:] RE, t. 12 suppl., 1970, p. 770-771.

<sup>379</sup> Another powerful general from a later period, Illus the Isaurian, seem to have arrived precisely at such a conclusion, cf. M.J. Leszka, *Kilka uwag na temat losów Illusa Izauryjszyka w latach 479-484*, M 62, 2007, p. 106–107.

<sup>380</sup> Е.П. Глушанин, *Военная...*, p. 122.

<sup>381</sup> He was present in Constantinople in his youth, possibly under Aspar's care, but he arrived later, in the 460s, and was a child during his stay, so he was probably limited in his capacity to understand political intricacies.

<sup>382</sup> Jordanes, *Romana*, 335; Malalas, XIV, 35.

<sup>383</sup> Candidus, fr. 1.

<sup>384</sup> Theodor Lector, *Epitoma*, 367; Theophanes, AM5959.

<sup>385</sup> Candidus, fr. 1. Selymbria, modern Silivri, was located just about 60 km from Constantinople.

<sup>386</sup> Constantinus Porphyrogennetos, *de ceremoniis*, 1, 91. The unit in question was probably *Mattiari Seniores*. Cf. B. Croke, *Dynasty...*, p. 150, n. 11; *Notitia Dignitatum Orientis*, 6, 42.

a *curator*<sup>387</sup>, however, Evgeniy Glushanin discounts that information as a later justification for Aspar's choice, not grounded in historical facts<sup>388</sup>. In 457 Leo was already beyond his prime, being 56 years old at that time<sup>389</sup>. It is curious in how many aspects Leo resembled Marcian. An older soldier from the Balkans, directly connected to Aspar through his service. Aspar's political bet on Marcian must have really paid off, since he was willing to do essentially the same thing yet again.

Leo must have been a trusted subordinate of Aspar, however, we do not know if he took part in any of the general's campaigns. That being said, Aspar's intention in choosing Leo must have been to pick a reliable candidate who would ensure that the general's political influence stayed as strong as it had been and that he could work with the emperor on matters dear to himself<sup>390</sup>.

In that regard it is important to note that Leo was even more reliant on Aspar than Marcian was. Not only was Aspar probably the only driving force behind Leo's candidacy and he did not have to pay any heed to the interests of other individuals, but the new emperor's legitimacy was also even weaker than that of Marcian. Even though they had a similar status before ascending to the throne, Leo had absolutely no links to the previous dynasty, while Marcian's rule did get legitimized by his marriage with Pulcheria. Thus, Leo's political position was extremely weak at the beginning of his reign<sup>391</sup>.

On 7 February 457 a new emperor was crowned. The ceremonies surrounding the accession are well recorded in *De ceremoniis* of Constantine Porphyrogenetos<sup>392</sup>. Thanks to them,

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<sup>387</sup> Theophanes, AM 5961; Zonaras, XIII, 25.

<sup>388</sup> Е.П. Глущанин, *Военная...*, p. 123-124. The Russian scholar's reservations are well grounded; however, it is possible Leo could have been privately involved with Aspar much earlier, before he was a tribune. After all, it is likely that *magistri militum* had a say in recommending their candidates for lower officer ranks. Cf. A.H.M. Jones, *The Decline of the Ancient World*, 1966, p. 147.

<sup>389</sup> G. Siebigs, *Kaiser...*, p. 221. He was 73 when he died, cf. Malalas, XIV, 46. It is claimed in *Chronicon Paschale* (a. 457) that he was 65, however, it seems like an exaggeration and the version of Malalas is probably the accurate one.

<sup>390</sup> Evgeniy Glushanin claims that Aspar picked a random candidate, and that he knew little if anything of Leo before the crowning. Cf. Е.П. Глущанин, *Военная...*, p. 124. While his arguments that Leo was not a curator of Aspar's estates are sound, this going is too far and his line of reasoning is not convincing. It is extremely unlikely that Aspar, who over the years built his political connections and extensive networks in the military, would not have loyal and reliable supporters and clients among the middle ranks. Consequently, why would a politician of his calibre ever pick a random candidate over one that he could trust and rely on? Glushanin seems to be arguing against an established narrative portraying Aspar's choice of Leo as an extraordinary event, and instead compares it with similar instances of the military making the choice when dynastic succession was impossible. While his observation is interesting, in the specific instances of the accessions of Marcian and Leo the role of Aspar was undeniably paramount.

<sup>391</sup> G. Vernadsky, *Flavius Ardabur Aspar*, SF 6, 1941, p. 59.

<sup>392</sup> Constantinus Porphyrogenetos, *de ceremoniis*, 1, 91.

it is known that Aspar was present during the event as the first patrician, and accompanied Leo in the imperial carriage. When they arrived at the Forum of Constantine, the new emperor received a golden crown from the head of the senate, who, again, was Aspar.

### **The Influence of Aspar**

Aspar's influence over the new regime was soon apparent. When Pope Leo the Great referenced the emperor and his general in his letters, he used terms that likened Aspar to Aetius<sup>393</sup>, which probably meant that for external observer Aspar's position was that of a *de facto* co-ruler of the country<sup>394</sup>.

Some of the first laws issued by Leo in 458 also seem to bear Aspar's mark. They are concerned with the defensive capabilities of the Eastern Roman state. They forbid soldiers from turning to private ventures since their necessities were fully provided for by the state, and similarly, prohibit military officials from using soldiers to their private benefit<sup>395</sup>. The concern there was clearly that the military should remain a professional force, paid for by the state and separate from civilian enterprises. One reason for that was certainly to keep it in fighting shape and ensure the security of the state, a matter that, as we can infer from all of Aspar's involvement thus far, was very dear to him.

Aspar's influence was also apparent in nominations to important state offices. In the first year of his reign, Leo assumed consulship as was customary; however, just after that in 459 Aspar's younger son, Julius, Patricius received that honour. Two years later, in 461, the consulship was bestowed on Flavius Dagilaphus, who was the husband of Godisthea, who in turn was the daughter of Ardaburius, and thus Aspar's granddaughter<sup>396</sup>. The *praefect praetorio* of the East, Flavius Constantinus, was succeeded by certain Vivianus, who was in all likelihood connected politically to Aspar<sup>397</sup>. The general secured important offices for his supporters and family, expanding his network of connections. It also meant that the emperor was surrounded by people loyal to Aspar. The general's influence was at its peak. For an ambitious man that Leo was, such a situation must have been hard to swallow, yet he was likely aware that he could not do much about it at that point. It is probable that he decided to dedicate his attention to other matters, namely foreign policy.

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<sup>393</sup> He is referred as - *Magnificus vir patricius Aspar*. Cf. L e o, *Epistolae*, 149;153

<sup>394</sup> A. D e m a n d t, *Magister...*, p. 771.

<sup>395</sup> *CJ*, IV, 65, 31; *CJ*, XII, 35, 15.

<sup>396</sup> G. V e r n a d s k y, *Flavius...*, p. 59.

<sup>397</sup> B. C r o k e, *Dynasty...*, p. 157; G. S i e b i g s, *Kaiser...*, p. 247

### Leo's Own Ambitions

The first decision of the new emperor was related to the developments in the West. The emperor recognized the outcome of the power struggle and showed his support to the victors. Ricimer was granted the title of *patricius*, while Majorian received the office of *magister militum*<sup>398</sup>. What happened after is more contentious. Some scholars claim that Majorian proceeded to crown himself a *Caesar* on 1 April, which was recognized by Leo, and then assumed the title of *Augustus* on 28 December<sup>399</sup>. Gereon Siebigs, again analysing these events in great detail, bring up many relevant counterarguments and discounts the information on the coronation in April<sup>400</sup>, however, the most pertinent question remains, namely whether Leo recognized and supported Majorian. According to Siebigs that was simply a literary *topos*<sup>401</sup>. That being said, it is possible that Majorian was elevated by his soldiers on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April<sup>402</sup>. His holding the office of *magister militum* had Leo's approval, so it is possible the emperor also accepted that fact. The later date of 28 December could correspond to the official coronation in Ravenna<sup>403</sup>.

The reign of Marcian shows that the generals were interested in the Empire's foreign policy, and the western policy was of particular concern to Aspar. Thus, Leo's ambitions to get involved in the West could have potentially faced obstruction from the powerful general. In fact, all evidence points to Leo's being relatively reluctant in his western policy at first. As long as he did not dedicate any actual resources to help Majorian, it was unlikely that Aspar would take an issue, and nothing evidences that he did<sup>404</sup>. That being said, simply recognizing the new emperor in the West could

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<sup>398</sup> G. Siebigs, *Kaiser...*, p. 257; M. Wilczyński, *Germanie w służbie zachodniorzymskiej w V w. n.e.: studium historyczno-prosopograficzne*, Kraków 2001, p. 295.

<sup>399</sup> PLRE, vol. II, p. 702–703 (s.v. *Maorianus*); G. Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376–568*, New York 2007, p. 263; M. Jankowiak, *Biżancjum a kryzysy sukcesyjne w Cesarstwie Zachodniorzymskim w ostatnich latach jego istnienia (465–474)*, [in:] *Chrześcijaństwo u schyłku starożytności. Studia źródłowe*, t. III, red. T. Derda, E. Wipszycka, Warszawa 2000, p. 195–196; K. Twardowska, *Rzymski Wschód w latach 395–518*, [in:] *Świat rzymski w V wieku*, red. R. Kosiński, K. Twardowska, Kraków 2010, p. 103.

<sup>400</sup> G. Siebigs, *Kaiser...*, p. 794–801.

<sup>401</sup> G. Siebigs, *Kaiser...*, p. 262; 793.

<sup>402</sup> G.E. Max, *Political Intrigue during the Reigns of the Western Roman Emperors Avitus and Majorian*, *Hi* 28, 1979, p. 234; J. Prostko-Prostyński, *Roma – solium imperii. Elekcja, koronacja i uznanie cesarza w Rzymie w IV–VIII wieku*, Poznań 2014, p. 56.

<sup>403</sup> Such delay before conducting the official ceremony could be explained by the fact that Majorian was involved in military campaigns thus far.

<sup>404</sup> Gereon Siebigs (*Kaiser...*, p. 257) claims Leo's recognition of Majorian as *magister militum* and Ricimer as *patricius* was due to Aspar's initiative.

have set the stage for political cooperation in the future. Judging by Leo's later policies, the efforts of Majorian in defending the country<sup>405</sup> and his expedition to put an end to the Vandal threat<sup>406</sup> were tacitly approved by him. However, he could not, and probably did not, want to dedicate any resources at this point either.

### **The Ostrogoths and Marcellinus of Dalmatia**

Soon after Leo's accession the situation in the Balkans deteriorated. The tribe of the Ostrogoths, settled in the regions of Pannonia by Marcian<sup>407</sup> stopped being given the tribute. One of the Ostrogoths' leaders, Valamer, sent envoys to Constantinople, however, he achieved nothing. Instead, he learned about the preferential treatment of the other group of Goths that was settled in Thrace, who were the subjects of Theodoric Strabo. Consequently, Valamer decided to open hostilities and raided the territories of Illyricum and Epirus. This is how those events are being relayed by Jordanes<sup>408</sup>.

On the subject of the war itself not much is known, but it appears that the commander of the Roman forces in the conflict was Anthemius. According to Sidonius, Illyricum was completely defenceless, since it was left abandoned by the local commander. Thus, Anthemius saved the day, destroying the invading force. However, Sidonius' claims are probably a little exaggerated since the conditions of the treaty of 461 that followed the war were quite lenient towards the Goths. The

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<sup>405</sup> He and Ricimer managed to catch and destroy the Vandal raid on Campania in 458. Cf. H. Castritius, *Die Vandalen. Etappen einer Spurensuche*, Berlin 2006, p. 113; F. Anders, *Flavius Ricimer. Macht und Ohnmacht des weströmischen Heermeisters in der zweiten Hälfte des 5. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin 2010, p. 161; K. Vössing, *Das Königreich der Vandalen. Geiserichs Herrschaft und das Imperium Romanum*, Darmstadt 2014, p. 60; M. Wilczyński, *Gejzeryk i „czwarta wojna punicka”*, Oświęcim 2016, p. 165–166.

<sup>406</sup> Majorian managed to gather a massive army and fleet numbering 300 ships (cf. Priscus, fr. 36; Sidonius, *Carmina*, V, 474–483). However, Geiseric managed to trick the emperor into negotiations to delay the offensive (cf. Hydatius, 204; M. Wilczyński, *Królestwo Swebów – Regnum in extremitate mundi*, Kraków 2011, p. 180), while he himself rallied his forces, bribed some of the Roman captains, and destroyed the rest of the vessels, cf. K. Vössing, *Königreich...*, p. 60; M. Wilczyński, *Gejzeryk...*, p. 170.

<sup>407</sup> Jordanes, *Getica*, 265;268. They settled the territories between Sirmium and Vindobona – the provinces of Pannonia prima, Pannonia secunda, and fragments of Pannonia Savia and Pannonia Valeria. In this specific case, however, it is likely that Marcian simply accepted the fact of Gothic settlement in Pannonia, since it appears the tribe came to live there when those territories were under the Hunnic control, cf. H. Wolfram, *Historia Gotów*, Warszawa 2003, p. 301–302; H. Gračaniin, J. Škrkulja, *The Ostrogoths in the Late Antique South Pannonia*, AAC 49, 2014, p. 168–169; 171–173; H.U. Wiemer, *Theoderich der Große. König der Goten – Herrscher der Römer*, München 2018, p. 123–124.

<sup>408</sup> Jordanes, *Getica*, 270–271.

*foedus* alliance was renewed and a tribute of 300 pounds of gold a year was agreed upon again<sup>409</sup>. As a guarantee, the son of 'Thiudimer, Theodoric, later to be known as the 'Great', was sent as a hostage to Constantinople<sup>410</sup>.

It is likely that the reason for the expiration of the tribute was Marcian's death. Treaties with barbarian tribes were usually signed not between the tribe and the state, but the leaders of the parties involved. It still leaves an important question as to why Leo did not renew the treaty. It is possible he sought to change the system of the treaties with the barbarians, although it is puzzling why had he not prepared for an attack that obviously had to come given the circumstances.

Friedrich Lotter provides an interesting theory. He assumes that Majorian set out on a campaign in Pannonia where he was gathering soldiers for his grand expedition against the Vandals in 461. As a result the Ostrogoths were to be included in the Western Roman sphere of influence, and the Western Empire would have been responsible for paying the tribute, thus easing the tributary obligations of Leo<sup>411</sup>. This would however indicate a much closer cooperation between Leo and Majorian than the sources suggest.

Another interesting hypothesis was put forward by Gerald Max, who proposed that Leo cut the payments to the Ostrogoths in order to manipulate them into attacking Marcellinus, a local warlord who ruled Dalmatia since the mid-450s, which would force him into cooperation<sup>412</sup>. This theory is however, as Penny MacGeorge observes, not built on strong evidence<sup>413</sup>. After all, Leo could not control the direction of the barbarian's attack, so even if it appears to make sense on paper, one cannot imagine how such a plot could have worked in practice.

That being said, Max's observations of causality between the Ostrogothic raids and a later alliance between Marcellinus and Leo are a lead worth following. The lands controlled by Marcellinus lied just next to Pannonia. This created an opportunity for the general to recruit the barbarians into his armies, and it is likely that they constituted a major part of his forces. It is possible that the Ostrogoths did not have a treaty with Majorian or Leo, but rather with Marcellinus.

Around that time Marcellinus was on Sicily and found himself in a conflict with Ricimer. Priscus informs us that the Western Roman commander bribed the Scythian companions of

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<sup>409</sup> Priscus, fr. 37; H. Gračanin, J. Škrkulja, *The Ostrogoths...*, p. 174; O. Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of Huns. Studies in Their History and Culture*, London 1973, p. 164; H.J. Kim, *The Huns, Romans and the Birth of Europe*, Cambridge 2013, p. 114.

<sup>410</sup> PLRE, vol. II, p. 1077–1084 (s.v. *Fl. Theodericus* 7).

<sup>411</sup> F. Lotter, *Völkerverschiebungen im Ostalpen-Mitteldonau-Raum zwischen Antike und Mittelalter*, Berlin 2003, p. 108.

<sup>412</sup> G.E. Max, *Political...*, p. 235–236

<sup>413</sup> P. MacGeorge, *Late Roman Warlords*, New York 2002, p. 50–51

Marcellinus. Under this anachronistic term the historian probably meant the Ostrogoths<sup>414</sup>. Thus, many scholars consider that Ricimer bribed Marcellinus' soldiers on Sicily, which forced their leader, now lacking the troops to continue his campaign, to retreat.

There is however a problem with this interpretation. Priscus explicitly states that Marcellinus retreated from Sicily fearing a plot<sup>415</sup>. If Ricimer had bribed his army on Sicily, that would have meant that the plot already succeeded; its 'success' would have been the reason for his retreat, not the 'fear' of it. What could have the historian meant, then?

By using the term 'companions' Priscus seems to suggest that he meant the soldiers accompanying the general to Sicily. However, this term could just as well mean bodyguards, *bucellari*<sup>416</sup>. Those did not have to be with Marcellinus on Sicily, but could have just as well been guarding his estates in Dalmatia. Bribed by Ricimer, they joined forces with their kinsmen in the Ostrogothic tribe, in which there was already some unrest directed against the Romans. It could be that Ricimer used that to his advantage in his intrigue. As a result of Ricimer's plot, the Goths invaded the lands of Marcellinus' in Dalmatia. Fearing that, Marcellinus retreated to defend his domain.

This interpretation puts the decision of Leo to send Anthemius against Valamer in a different light<sup>417</sup>. Defending Marcellinus' land and normalizing the relations with the Goths afterwards, would have set the stage for an alliance between Leo and the general in Dalmatia, who were yet to become an important asset in the policies of the emperor.

### **Timothy Ailuros and the Religious Unrest in Alexandria**

Just after Marcian's death, the Monophysites in Alexandria consecrated a certain Timotheus nicknamed the 'Weasel' as their bishop of the city. However, the orthodox bishop Proterius was still residing in the city, which meant that Alexandria got divided between two religious factions claiming their candidate's right to the episcopal seat. This crisis was allowed to happen during the absence of the commander of the local forces, *dux Aegypti* Dionysius, who, upon learning of the developments in Alexandria, hurried to the city and forced Timotheus away. The latter's popularity among the city folk, however, resulted in a revolt, which Dionysius failed to bring under control.

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<sup>414</sup> R.C. Blockley, *Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire*, t. II, Liverpool 1983, t. II, p. 394–395, n. 147; Frank Wozniak (*East Rome, Ravenna and Illyricum 454–536 AD*, Hi 30, p. 357) claims they were the Huns.

<sup>415</sup> Priscus, fr. 38: εὐλαβηθέντα ἐπιβουλῇ.

<sup>416</sup> Priscus uses the term *παρεπόμενοι* (*παρέπομαι* – to follow), which is used three times more, at all times meaning retainers, cf. Priscus, fr. 11.

<sup>417</sup> It also explains who the 'absent commander' was and why he was not present.

Thus, to appease the rioters he agreed to 'Timotheus' return. To make matters worse, in the meantime Proterius was murdered, either by some soldier<sup>418</sup> or by an angry mob of Alexandrian Monophysites<sup>419</sup>. Following that, the orthodox clergy of the city petitioned the emperor to intervene. Leo decided to write to many important religious figures for advice, both regarding Timotheus and the dogmas of Chalcedon. After he received assurance of the orthodox creed and a universal condemnation of the Monophysite bishop of Alexandria, he ordered to punish those responsible for the murder of Proterius and sentenced Timotheus to exile<sup>420</sup>.

Among those advising the emperor, Theodor Lector mentions the patriarch of Constantinople Gennadius. After mentioning his stance, he also informs us that Aspar opposed the patriarch in that matter<sup>421</sup>. Gereon Siebigs sees in this an important example of Aspar's religious policy<sup>422</sup>; however, it can just as well be explained pragmatically by positing that the general did not want Leo to adopt a hard-line stance on Timotheus considering his popularity<sup>423</sup>. Nevertheless, with an overwhelming support from orthodox clergy, Leo could ignore the general. This was likely an important moment in the relations between Aspar and the emperor, as Leo must have realized that with the support of the Church he could counteract Aspar's influence to a limited degree.

It does not have to mean, however, that these events were what sparked the conflict between the two. No source states that Leo and Aspar had a falling out over that issue. After all, while the seed of discord might have been planted, the emperor had no reason to openly antagonize the person to whom he owed the throne.

### **463 – the Birth of Leo's Dynastic Ambitions**

In 463 the situation in the Constantinople changed. An heir was born to the imperial couple<sup>424</sup>. Such an unexpected event likely brought much joy to the parents, but also deeply affected the political scene.

Aspar, when choosing Leo and Marcian before, probably consciously picked men who were somewhat older. Similarly, he must have taken into consideration that their spouses, Pulcheria in the case of Marcian and Verina in Leo's, were of similar age, which meant that they were

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<sup>418</sup> Pseudo-Zachariach, IV, 1-2.

<sup>419</sup> Evagrius, *HE*, II, 8.

<sup>420</sup> Theophanes, AM 5952.

<sup>421</sup> Theodor Lector, *Epitoma*, 378; Theophanes, AM 5952.

<sup>422</sup> G. Siebigs, *Kaiser...*, p. 700.

<sup>423</sup> L. Scott, *Aspar...*, p. 69.

<sup>424</sup> *Vita St. Danielis Stylitae*, 38; B. Croke, *Dynasty...*, p. 158.

theoretically above the age fit for bearing children. The reasoning behind that decision is easy to guess – the general did not want his candidates to establish their own dynasties. Undoubtedly, the general could expect that the emergence of an heir means his influence and control over the matters of state would diminish, as the emperor would then have a strong motivation to become independent to best address his dynastic ambitions.

Aspar had plans of his own in that regard. Even if he had shown humility when approached by the Senate, it does not mean that he was not interested in expanding his power. Aspar either did not want to, or could not become emperor himself, but he likely could, as Brian Croke puts it, be the father of one<sup>425</sup>. Some scholars assume, following the information related by Zonaras<sup>426</sup>, that Aspar demanded that Leo promise to make his son, Patricius, a *Caesar* and the designated successor<sup>427</sup> following the information relayed by Zonaras. However, Gereon Siebigs points out that the account of Zonaras is faulty and that it is much more likely that Leo just promised Aspar that Patricius would be allowed to marry his daughter<sup>428</sup>.

Nevertheless, this would have placed Patricius as the natural successor, if only he had sufficient political support. Effectively, there was little difference beyond technicalities, because with Aspar's network of connections he would likely have received the imperial diadem, if only that was what the general had wanted.

However, with Leo's son in the picture, those plans were put in jeopardy. Having a male heir could let Leo pursue his dynastic plans and establish a dynasty regardless of his promises to marry off his daughter. Unfortunately, our sources do not record any reaction of Aspar's. Considering the above, it is unlikely that he welcomed a development so surprising and unfortunate for himself, but no mention of any conflict related to these events was found, which probably indicates that he did not actually do much about it.

Neither is much known of Leo's moves, but considering the limited evidence at our disposal, it appears that he started to establish a political position for his family. With those events coincides the nomination of Basiliscus, brother of Verina, to the office of *magister militum per Thracias*. He succeeded general Rusticius, who was rewarded with the consulate for the next year<sup>429</sup>.

Verina's influence and power rose immensely after the birth of Leo's son. Now, she was no longer just the wife of Leo, but also the mother of a potential successor. Verina's image appeared

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<sup>425</sup> B. Croke, *Dynasty...*, p. 157.

<sup>426</sup> Zonaras, XIV, 1.

<sup>427</sup> J.B. Bury, *A History...*, p. 317-318; E. Stein, *Histoire...*, p. 356.

<sup>428</sup> G. Siebigs, *Kaiser...*, p. 772-773.

<sup>429</sup> Malchus, fr. 7; A. Demandt, *Magister...*, p. 766-767; Е.П. Глущанин, *Военная...*, p. 126.

on imperial coinage and she herself received the title of *Augusta*<sup>430</sup>. It is thus likely that the emperor was also partially motivated by his wife. Later events show her political abilities and ambitions, thus it is very likely that she played a major role in these developments as well, and enjoyed her new status very much.

It is possible that the emperor tried to become more independent and removed some people connected to Aspar from his immediate circle. It can be speculated that Vivianus, a close supporter of the general, was replaced as *praefect praetorio orientis* in 463<sup>431</sup>. He received the consulate for that year<sup>432</sup>, which could have been a way to defuse potential conflict. It is known that Vivianus was later the subject of a quarrel between Aspar and Leo, however, perhaps such a thing happened on more than one occasion, as the sources do not give clear information on the matter<sup>433</sup>.

It is also likely that Leo started thinking more openly about his engagement in the West. The evidence for that is only fragmentary, but it is known that Marcellinus was preparing an expedition against the West. At this time he was probably allied with Leo, so it would have been unlikely for the general to make such a decision without the emperor's approval. It does not mean that Leo was already planning to dedicate the Empire's resources to pursue a more active foreign policy in the West, but it seems that his interest in those matters was growing.

### **The Aftermath of 463**

The birth of Leo's son could have been a spark that pushed the emperor towards independent policies, some of which were at odds with his powerful benefactor. Leo was very careful not to cause an open conflict, but whatever plans he put in motion certainly would not escape Aspar's attention.

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<sup>430</sup> B. Croke, *Dynasty...*, p. 158.

<sup>431</sup> He is directly attested in 459-460, but it is likely that he could have served until 462 or 463, cf. G. Siebigs, *Kaiser...*, p. 558, n. 3. His successor was likely Pusaeus, first attested in 465. Cf. *PLRE*, vol. II, p. 930 (s.v. Pusaeus).

<sup>432</sup> *CLRE*, p. 461.

<sup>433</sup> Candidus, fr. 1; B. Croke, *Dynasty...*, p. 162-163; *PLRE*, vol. II, p. 1179-1180, (s.v. Vivianus 2). George Cedrenus (607D-608A) gives the information that the subject of the quarrel was the nomination of the city praefect, however, neither Vivianus, nor the other official mentioned by Candidus, Tatianus, were ever named as city praefects during the reign of Leo (Tatianus served in that office in 450-452). Perhaps the data is distorted (which is likely, considering the brevity of Candidus' fragments and the chronological gap to Cedrenus' and Zonaras' accounts) and there were more points of contention as far as personal policies went. It would not be unlikely for a later Byzantine scholar to mistake different praefects of the fifth century administrative system, so perhaps the events relayed by Cedrenus could be attributed to some quarrel over the nomination of *praefect praetorio orientis*. That being said, this is speculation based on the assumption that Leo tried to seek independence in 463 and the author is aware of its flimsy source basis.

Unfortunately, after five months the sickly baby died. Mourning the personal loss was probably not the only thing on Leo's mind, as politically that put him in a precarious position. In the end, it appears that Leo decided to compromise in order to appease the general in the area of foreign policy. When an embassy from the West came to ask Leo to prevent Marcellinus from attacking Italy, he agreed to lend his help and sent an envoy named Phylarchus to the general and he convinced him to call off the offensive<sup>434</sup>.

The envoy then continued on to Africa to negotiate a new settlement with Geiseric. The king refused to stop raiding Italy, however, it seems that he decided to finally release Eudoxia and Placidia. In addition, Leo nominated Flavius Olybrius as the consul of the year 464, who was for a long time supported by Geiseric as a candidate for the western throne<sup>435</sup>. It is possible that Leo was considering supporting Olybrius' claims and, by extension, pursuing his own ambitions of gaining influence over the Western part of the Empire by reaching a compromise with the Vandals. It was certainly not an ideal choice<sup>436</sup>, but likely one that Aspar favoured, and also a more pragmatic one, considering Flavius Ricimer in Ravenna had a firm grip on his power.

The events leading up to the year 463 saw Leo progressively looking for ways to challenge Aspar's influence and realize his own plans. There is no reason, however, to think that the conflict grew heated at any point; possibly because it did not manage to, as the catalyst for Leo's open striving for the independence, the birth of his son, quickly disappeared due to the latter's untimely death.

Because of that Leo backed down and sought compromise with Aspar, however, he did not abandon his ambitions. In addition, he still held many of the assets he had acquired since his accession - the alliance with Marcellinus in Dalmatia and some control over elements of the army thanks to the nomination of Basiliscus, as well as the continued support of the Church and important orthodox figures. In case Aspar's influence were to be challenged, Leo had the means to independently pursue his goals.

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<sup>434</sup> Priscus, fr. 39.

<sup>435</sup> Brian Croke (*Dynasty...*, p. 159) claims that Leo simply sought the political support of Olybrius, considering the precarious position he found himself in. Marek Janowski (*Bizancjum...*, p. 211) links those events with the foreign policy, and posits that Leo wanted to pressure Ricimer. Both of these could have been factors which Leo took into consideration, however, nominating Olybrius was primarily an apparent political statement of *détente* in relations with the Vandals.

<sup>436</sup> Leo appears to have played that card once again later, when similarly he could not dedicate resources to the intervention in the West.

### The Arrival of Tarasikodissa and the Situation in the East

In 466 a certain Isaurian commander named Tarasikodissa<sup>437</sup> arrived at the court of Leo. He brought letters that informed the emperor of treason committed by Ardaburius, the general of the East and son of Aspar, who according to the presented evidence conspired with the Persian monarch. As a result, Ardaburius was dismissed and his office was given to Jordanes, son of John the Vandal. Aspar, in spite of his influence, accepted the emperor's judgement in this matter and did not try to excuse or defend the actions of his son<sup>438</sup>.

The question remains what did Ardaburius' betrayal amount to. The source states that he was inciting the Persian king to attack the Empire and offered to support him if he did so<sup>439</sup>. If that were the case, Ardaburius received a surprisingly mild punishment. Furthermore, it is difficult to say how he would benefit if that supposed plan of his came into fruition. The source that records these events is *The Life of St. Daniel the Stylite*, a hagiographic text, so its misunderstanding the exact nature of political developments is not unlikely.

Coincidentally, around that time the relations with Persia were tense. Around 465 an embassy from the king Perozes arrived in Constantinople, complaining about the mistreatment of Zoroastrians in the Roman territories, the Romans accepting refugees from Persia, and demanding that that Leo bear some of the expenses of manning the fortresses of the Caspian Gates and of the wars against Kidarite Huns that the Persians were conducting. Leo rejected the complaints and refused to help, however, he sent an embassy under the leadership of Constantine to discuss all the matters raised. Perozes must have been very disgruntled with the Roman stance, since he delayed the talks with Constantine up to a point when he made him travel all the way to the border with the Kidarites, and after that, he dismissed the envoy without reaching any kind of agreement<sup>440</sup>. The Persians asked again for the financial contributions after the invasion of the Saraguri and again were dismissed<sup>441</sup>. Another embassy was sent by Perozes after the Persians had managed to defeat Kidarites, and in addition to the usual demands, the envoys indirectly threatened Leo by boasting

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<sup>437</sup> On the name, cf. R. Kosiński, *The Emperor Zeno: Religion and Politics*, Kraków 2010, p. 59–60; On early career, cf. R. Kosiński, *Początki kariery Tarasikodissy–Zenona*, [in:] *Byzantina Europaea. Księga jubileuszowa ofiarowana Profesorowi Waldemarowi Ceranowi*, red. M. Kokoszko, M.J. Leszka, Łódź 2007, p. 289–304.

<sup>438</sup> *Vita St. Danielis Stylitae*, 55; B. Croke, *Dynasty...*, p. 160.

<sup>439</sup> *Vita St. Danielis Stylitae*, 55. There is also another plot conceived by Ardaburius in the sources, related by Candidus (fr. 1) and involving the Isaurians. Rafał Kosiński (*The Emperor...*, p. 64, n. 47) claims that either account speaks of the same event and only one version is true. However, the sequence of events reported by Candidus appear to place the plot after Zeno already arrived in Constantinople, thus it must be a different event altogether.

<sup>440</sup> Priscus, fr. 41.

<sup>441</sup> Priscus, fr. 47.

about the forces they had at the ready, but were again dismissed since Leo was preoccupied with his western policies at that point<sup>442</sup>.

Another flashpoint was in Lazica where a local conflict erupted between the Lazi and Iberians, the latter being Persian subjects. Such a situation could have easily forced intervention of by the great powers and resulted in a war, but it seems that the Persians were more preoccupied with other issues, most likely the ongoing war with the Kidarites<sup>443</sup>.

The takeaway from the Romano-Persian relations in these years is that they were growing tense, possibly even to the brink of an armed conflict<sup>444</sup>. It does not appear that Leo wished to reach any kind of compromise with Perozes. The fact that a war did not break out should be attributed to the coincidence that both sides happened to be engaged somewhere else rather than any diplomatic efforts from the Roman side.

If Ardaburius had indeed committed treason which involved him contacting the Persian monarch, it is more likely that it concerned some kind of agreement to avoid an outright war. *The Life of St. Daniel the Stylite* claims that Ardaburius urged Perozes to intervene militarily and offered his support, but perhaps its author mistakenly (or consciously) claimed the intervention was supposed to concern the Roman Empire, while in fact it could have involved Lazica, which was a Roman puppet state<sup>445</sup>. This course of events, even if highly speculative, seems the most likely considering the sources at our disposal<sup>446</sup>.

### **The Conflict between the Goths and the Sciri**

An important event that contributed to the growing conflict between Aspar and Leo was the war between the Goths and the Sciri. The tribes broke off their alliance<sup>447</sup> and sent envoys

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<sup>442</sup> Priscus, fr. 51; R.C. Blockley, *East Roman Foreign Policy. Formation and Conduct from Diocletian to Anastasius*, Cairns 1992, p. 73-75.

<sup>443</sup> Priscus, fr. 51.

<sup>444</sup> R.C. Blockley, *East Roman...*, p. 74.

<sup>445</sup> Evgeniy Glushanin also links these events with the Eastern policy, but focuses more on the issue of the defence of Caspian Gates against the Huns. Cf. Е.П. Глушанин, *Военная...*, p. 128. This is also highly possible, although, not directly based on sources. Additionally, it would make more sense for Ardaburius to become so involved if the issues at hand were much closer to the Roman territories, as Lazica was compared to the Caucasian mountain passes.

<sup>446</sup> Unless the evidence provided by Tarasikodissa was fabricated in the first place, which could be possible, if Leo was a sufficiently Machiavellian character, just looking for the opportunity to shake off Aspar's influence. This is a thought that the author entertains, but since no sources exist that could indicate that, it remains in the sphere of pure speculation.

<sup>447</sup> Both Jordanes (*Getica*, 275) and Priscus (fr. 45) mention this. It is the only event that can link both accounts, which proves how confused the chronology of Jordanes is.

seeking help against one another. According to Priscus, when deciding on how to approach the problem, the general advised the emperor to leave the matter alone and to remain neutral, however, Leo disregarded that and decided to intervene on the side of the Sciri<sup>448</sup>.

Unfortunately the sources that inform of that war are limited to a short fragment in Priscus and Jordanes' *Getica*. Even though the latter is seemingly a very detailed account of the whole history of the Goths, the events in Pannonia of 460s seems to be less accurate. All evidence points to Jordanes omitting certain inconvenient details<sup>449</sup>. Thus, the primary source for the chronology of the events should be Priscus. The fragment in question was placed just after the one reporting on the visit of the ruler of Lazica, Gobazes, in Constantinople. Luckily, it is easily datable, since the visit took place after a great fire, that ravaged the city in 465<sup>450</sup>.

Thus, the intervention in the war between the Goths and the Sciri should be placed around 465 or 466. Unfortunately, the fragment from Priscus does not contain much information. The more extensive passage of Jordanes completely omits any Roman intervention and only speaks of the despicable treason of the Sciri, who were agitated by the king of the Suevi, Hunimund, and joined arms with him against the Goths. Despite the element of surprise, the Goths won a great victory<sup>451</sup>. The king of the Goths, Valamer, died fighting valiantly in the battle, but the Sciri were completely obliterated, or so would Jordanes want us to believe. Following those events, the enemies of the Goths gathered in a huge coalition, comprised of the Sciri, Suevi, Gepids, Rugii and Sarmatians, but they were yet again defeated by the Goths, and Jordanes does not spare graphic descriptions of the slaughter<sup>452</sup>. With that one sided account, which completely omits some events reported by the reputable *History* of Priscus, it is difficult to say what is true and what are exaggerated war stories that were circulating in the Amal court, written down by Cassiodorus and abridged by Jordanes.

Priscus, on the other hand, mentions that Leo sent letters to the commander in Illyria to send forces against the Goths. As no record of it can be found in the *Getica*, the course of the campaign or its aftermath can only be a matter of speculation. Similarly, it is unknown who exactly

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<sup>448</sup> Priscus, fr. 45.

<sup>449</sup> Any mention of a Gothic defeat or of the second subjugation of their tribe by the Huns of Dengizich evidenced by Priscus, is absent from the narrative. It appears that those parts of the *Getica* resemble the legendary story of the heroic deeds of the Amal clan, rather than being a veritable historical account.

<sup>450</sup> Marcellinus Comes, a. 465. The exact date was most likely 2 September 465, cf. M.B. Leszka, M.J. Leszka, *Zarys dziejów Konstantynopola w latach 337-602* [in:] *Konstantynopol – Nowy Rzym. Miasto i ludzie w okresie wczesnobyzantyńskim*, red. M.J. Leszka, T. Wołoska, Warszawa 2011, p. 75.

<sup>451</sup> Jordanes, *Getica*, 275-276.

<sup>452</sup> Jordanes, *Getica*, 277-279.

the said general was. The scholarship usually claims that it was a *magister militum per Illyricum*<sup>453</sup>, however, it is debatable whether this title existed at this point in time. Furthermore, Priscus speaks of a commander ‘in’ Illyria, which could mean anyone who was positioned there at the time<sup>454</sup>. The disagreement with Aspar excludes the general from consideration, however, both Anthemius, who was still a *magister militum praesentalis*, and Basiliscus, a *magister militum per Thracias*, could have been in the region. Both were relatively independent of Aspar, so Leo could trust them to execute the order.

Another possibility could be that the commander in question was Marcellinus. If Leo’s intent was to weaken the Goths, then those plans benefited the ruler of Dalmatia. The Pannonian Goths once raided his lands and they certainly still posed a threat, considering their continuous successes (even if exaggerated by Jordanes). If that was the case, it could explain Aspar’s opposition. Perhaps the Alan general was wary of Leo and Marcellinus tightening their cooperation which could potentially threaten his position.

Although, the situation is often presented as if the general wanted to preserve the Goths due to them being his political asset, the Goths whose support Aspar had were the Thracian part of the tribe, unrelated to these events. Thus, it could not have been the reason for the disagreement, however, it is possible that the general feared that weakening a of the Ostrogoths might be the first step in reorganizing Marcian’s system of alliances in the Balkans by Leo, and the subsequent ones could then affect his allies. Alternatively, Aspar could have been an opponent of upsetting the delicate balance of power in the Balkans by involving the Romans in tribal conflicts between barbarians, or maybe he wanted both sides to bleed each other out, without risking the lives of Roman soldiers. The latter reasons seem likely, if we consider what followed the war.

Of the aftermath of the conflict even less is known than of its course. The pro-Gothic propaganda of Jordanes only mentions more victories, while the fragment of Priscus provides nothing on the matter. That being said, in the next passage in which the Goths appear, they have already been subjugated by the Huns<sup>455</sup>. The Sciri might have been allied with the Huns, who were regaining power under the rule of Dengizich. Jordanes mentions a tribe of Angisciri who were Hun subjects, and on another occasion he mentions that the Sciri were led by Edeco, who was probably

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<sup>453</sup> H. Gračanin, J. Škrglja, *The Ostrogoths...*, p. 176. They also claim the operation was limited to reinforcing border fortifications.

<sup>454</sup> Priscus, fr. 45: γράμματα πρὸς τὸν ἐν ἰλλυριοῖς στρατηγὸν ἔπεμπεν.

<sup>455</sup> Priscus, fr. 48.

one of the Hun noblemen mentioned by Priscus<sup>456</sup>. Perhaps the intervention of the Romans on behalf of the Sciri allowed their Hunnic allies to once again forcefully incorporate the Goths. Even though there is little evidence to support this hypothesis, it is the most likely course of events that explains how later the Romans had to face a rebuilt force of the Hunnic confederacy.

### **The War with Dengizich**

Even though after the battle of Nedao the empire of the Huns gradually declined, it did not mean that the nomads suddenly disappeared from the map or that they lost all of their influence. Even though the sources are scarce, all the evidence seems to indicate that two sons of Attila, Dengizich and Ernach, inherited the remnants of his legacy. Undoubtedly, the years following the defeat passed with them trying to establish themselves and counteracting the attempts of various parts of the confederacy to break off. Furthermore, in the sixties the Eurasian Steppe became an arena for dramatic events.

The tribe of Avars migrated west and attacked the Sabirs. This caused a domino effect, since the Sabirs, banished from their lands, were forced to invade the Saraguri, Onoguri, and Urogi tribes, who in turn attacked the Akatziri Huns. The last tribe was a part of the Hun confederacy and likely was still under Ernach and Dengizich's rule<sup>457</sup>. In this context, it is interesting that the Saraguri sent an embassy to Leo, however, nothing binding was agreed upon. Perhaps they wanted to settle on Roman soil<sup>458</sup>, seek alliance, or Leo tried to use the Saraguri and incite them to continue fighting the Huns. It is possible, that this contributed to the worsening of the relations between the Huns and the Romans, as Priscus vaguely informs of some unresolved disputes between the Romans and the Huns<sup>459</sup>.

In the middle of 460s the brothers sent an embassy to Leo, demanding that the markets on the Danube be set up. The emperor refused on the basis that the Huns caused too much harm to the Romans to be allowed access again. Given the failure of diplomacy, Dengizich wanted to declare war and force their demands, while Ernach disagreed since he was troubled by fighting on his own territories, which probably means that he was defending himself against Saraguri raids<sup>460</sup>.

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<sup>456</sup> J o r d a n e s, *Getica*, 277. Cf. J o r d a n e s, *Romana and Getica*, ed. P. van N u f f e l e n, L. van H o o f, Liverpool 2020, p. 351, n. 859.

<sup>457</sup> It was previously ruled by Ellak, cf. H.J. K i m, *The Huns...*, p. 132. Thus it is likely that after his death at Nedao, it was included in the rebuilt empire of Dengizich and Ernach.

<sup>458</sup> K. R o s e n, *Attila. Der Schrecken der Welt*, München 2016, p. 236.

<sup>459</sup> P r i s c u s, fr. 46.

<sup>460</sup> O. M a e n c h e n - H e l f e n, *The World...*, p. 166.

In spite of that, Dengizich decided to set out against the Romans himself. It is likely that he could have felt empowered by his recent successes in subjugating the Ostrogoths, weakened by their recent clashes against the Sciri. It follows that his army must have been strong in numbers. The campaign itself can be dated pretty accurately thanks to a remark by Evagrius, who mentions that it coincided with the great earthquake that affected Thrace and Ionia<sup>461</sup>, which most likely took place in 467<sup>462</sup>. Thus the barbarians likely attacked in the winter of 466-467<sup>463</sup>. A local *comes rei militaris*, Anagastes, who happened to be a son of Arnegisclus, sent envoys to the Huns when they approached the Danube. Dengizich, however, refused to parley and sent his embassy straight to the emperor. The Huns demanded land for settlement and a tribute. Interestingly, this time Leo replied favourably, only demanding that the barbarians obey him, which most likely meant introducing the Huns into the *foederati* system<sup>464</sup>. This decision stands in stark contrast with the previous one. It is possible that Leo sought compromise because of problems caused by the earthquake and his attention was turned towards the preparations for the expedition against the Vandals<sup>465</sup>. However, Otto Maenchen-Helfen presents another interesting interpretation, suggesting that Leo might have wanted to settle the Huns on Roman territories in order that they would act as a counterbalance to the Thracian Goths, who were loyal to Aspar and served as one of the bases of his political power<sup>466</sup>.

Unfortunately, this is where the passage ends, and the sources return to these events when the both sides were already at war. It is impossible to ascertain whether something happened in the interim period leading up to the conflict, but it is likely, that it took some time for the envoys to travel both ways, and Dengizich did not wait for an answer and simply crossed the border. It is possible that he meant to pressure the emperor, or could not keep his warriors, who wanted to loot and pillage, at bay.

As a result, the Romans gathered an impressive force, led by Basiliscus, Aspar, and Ostrys<sup>467</sup>, likely supported by the previously mentioned detachment under the command of Anagastes and also the army of Anthemius.

The Romans managed to encircle the barbarian forces in a ravine. Despite their advantageous position they did not decide to attack, as apparently the numerous barbarian forces

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<sup>461</sup> Evagrius, HE, II, 14.

<sup>462</sup> R.C. Blockley, *Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire*, t. I, Liverpool 1981, p. 170.

<sup>463</sup> They are reported to have crossed frozen Danube.

<sup>464</sup> Priscus, fr. 48.

<sup>465</sup> C.D. Gordon, *The Age of Attila. Fifth-Century Byzantium and the Barbarians*, Michigan 1961, p. 160.

<sup>466</sup> O. Maenchen-Helfen, *The World...*, p. 166.

<sup>467</sup> Priscus, fr. 49.

must have been considered a formidable foe even then. Alternatively, the Romans were ordered not to do it by the emperor, who still sought to reach an agreement. However, the forces of Dengizich started to run out of supplies. Fearing starvation, he sent the envoys offering that they would submit to the emperor if they were allowed to settle in the Roman territories. The besieging commanders promised to relay the issue to Constantinople and help feed the encircled barbarians while they awaited a response. To make that feasible logistically, they were split up into several camps.

At least that is how it was presented to them, because Aspar, who was likely the senior commander, did not wish to parley at all. His subordinate, Chelchal, who was of Hunnic origin, was sent to one of the camps that was occupied by the Goths. He appeared in front of the council of the elders and began to incite them against Dengizich. He claimed that the emperor had agreed to give them land for settlement, however, he continued that it would not solve their problems as they would remain Hunnic slaves and would have to pay tribute in their crops to their masters. He also accused them of staining their honour, since their ancestors had sworn to shake off the Hunnic yoke. One has to be impressed by the rhetoric skills of Chelchal. His speech must have really resonated with the Goths, since, as a result, they decided to attack the Huns<sup>468</sup>.

However, this was all a ploy orchestrated by Aspar. As soon as the fighting had started, the Roman forces formed up to strike the barbarians. When they realized what was happening, the barbarians joined forces to fend off the attack. Despite their favourable position, the Roman forces had a hard time defeating the barbarians – according to Priscus, only Aspar's contingent managed to destroy their enemies, but the forces of the other commanders were less prepared and as a result many barbarians managed to escape the encirclement, including the leader of the army, Dengizich<sup>469</sup>. It is not recorded what exactly happened to him or to the remnants of his army afterwards. As far as the Roman forces were concerned, it appears that a portion returned to continue their preparations for the Vandal expedition. In the meantime, Anagastes was designated *magister militum per Thracias* in place of Basiliscus. The latter received command over the praesental army, which was under the command of Anthemius up to this point. Anthemius was left with no office, but had Leo already planned to send him to the West to assume the throne in Ravenna. The forces of Thrace commanded by Anagastes continued to hunt for Dengizich and managed to finally defeat him around 468 or 469<sup>470</sup>.

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<sup>468</sup> Priscus, fr. 49; P. Heather, *Upadek...*, p. 419; P. Rouché, *Attila. La violence nomade*, Paris 2009, p. 302–304.

<sup>469</sup> Priscus, fr. 49; T. Burns, *A History of the Ostrogoths*, Bloomington 1984, p. 54.

<sup>470</sup> Marcellinus Comes, a. 469.

An additional source providing more detail on those events is the panegyric on Anthemius by Sidonius Appolinaris. The poet mentions that his hero defeated a group of Huns at Serdica under the command of a certain Hormidac. It is the only source containing such information and the only place where the name of the Hunnic chieftain appears. However, in the description of the battle the same elements appear as in the fragments of Priscus referenced above – logistical problems<sup>471</sup> and the siege of a camp<sup>472</sup>. Although it is possible that Sidonius mistakenly twisted the name of Dengizich, the two names are not all that similar and Sidonius was generally well informed on the details of the events in the Balkans<sup>473</sup>. It seems more likely that Hormidac was a lesser Hun commander, a subordinate of Dengizich, most likely in command of the specific camp that the forces of Anthemius guarded after the barbarians were split into different camps. Sidonius also mentions that Anthemius' allies failed him, which further supports linking the poet's and Priscus' passages together, as the historian reported that many of the barbarians escaped. Sidonius omits other names, especially the most important in these events, those of Aspar and Dengizich, but that is completely understandable. The poet wished to show the glory of his hero and mentioning the military success of Aspar and the escape of Dengizich would only detract from Anthemius' achievements. Nevertheless, the passage of Sidonius proves that Anthemius and his forces were also present in the battle against Dengizich and locates it close to the city of Serdica<sup>474</sup>.

The invasion of Dengizich shows that the dissolution of the Hun confederacy after the death of Attila and the battle of Nedao was neither full nor final. The crisis which it experienced in the fifties was relatively soon alleviated and just ten years later the Huns ruled by Ernach and Dengizich returned as active players on the political scene.

It is crucial to understand this context when analysing the aforementioned events. It seems very likely that Aspar made the decision to attack on his own. The sources state explicitly that Leo was willing to come to an agreement, yet the general forced a battle. Priscus states that the other generals did worse in the battle, since contrary to Aspar's men, they were not prepared – which may indicate that Aspar put into motion his plan of antagonizing the Goths and Huns without anyone's approval or knowledge. This would be understandable in the context of Aspar's attitude

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<sup>471</sup> Sidonius, *Carmina*, II, 228.

<sup>472</sup> Sidonius, *Carmina*, II, 225.

<sup>473</sup> For example he knows of Valamir, the king of Goths, and records his name correctly. Cf. Sidonius, *Carmina*, II, 223–226.

<sup>474</sup> Assumedly, the forces of Dengizich were advancing along *Via Militaris* and were surrounded in some ravine close to Serdica – the general characteristics of the terrain seem to support such hypothesis.

towards the Huns and, even more so, if the hypothesis that Leo was planning to use the warriors of Dengizich to counterbalance Aspar's supporters is correct.

### **The Turn to the West**

In the mean while the Western part of the Empire led by Ricimer was struggling with external and internal enemies. Aside from the previously mentioned opposition from Marcellinus, a certain Aegidius rose up in Gaul in an open revolt<sup>475</sup>. To make matters worse, the constant Vandal raids were a menace to the coastline. Although the pressure from Marcellinus was eventually relieved through diplomatic arrangements with Leo, and the threat from the usurper in Gaul ended being a threat due to Aegidius' death<sup>476</sup>; the Vandals were a problem Ricimer could barely deal with. Their raiders struck and pillaged the Roman coasts, usually successfully avoiding engagements with regular Roman forces<sup>477</sup>.

Ricimer's problems ended up being a boon for Leo. The Western Romans decided to send an embassy to Constantinople pleading for help. The details of the negotiations are unknown, but it can be safely assumed that the Western Romans signalled a willingness to compromise on Ricimer's part. Given the fact that the Western general disposed of his puppet on the throne, Libius Severus, earlier in the year Leo seems to have been receptive to the overture and nominated Tatianus to head the embassy, likely giving him the title of *patricius* at that point. His mission must have been pretty clear – to establish some basis for the involvement of Leo in the West. For Aspar that was unacceptable and the sources state that he quarrelled with the emperor over the nomination<sup>478</sup>. It seems, however, that Leo dismissed the general.

It seems that Tatianus have arrived in the West where he then made arrangements for the Eastern Roman intervention<sup>479</sup>. There is some evidence of him being nominated as a consul in the West, which might have been in recognition of Leo's answer to the Western pleas of help<sup>480</sup>. Later

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<sup>475</sup> *PLRE*, vol. II, p. 12–13 (s.v. *Aegidius*).

<sup>476</sup> Possibly he was murdered by Ricimer (M. Wilczyński, *Germanie...*, p. 303), or died in the plague (D. Zoloteńki, *Galia u schyłku panowania rzymskiego*, Kraków 2011, p. 207).

<sup>477</sup> *Priscus*, fr. 39.

<sup>478</sup> *Candidus*, fr. 1;

<sup>479</sup> Cf. M. Jankowiak, *Bizancjum...*, p. 212. There is no direct evidence of Tatianus' arrival in Italy, however, it is perfectly plausible considering the distances. It is, however, possible that someone else conducted the talks with the Western Romans, but there is no information whatsoever who it might have been.

<sup>480</sup> *CLRE*, p. 466–467. The situation with the consular nominations for 466 is very difficult to ascertain. It has also been argued that Tatianus was nominated for consulate in the East, which however, was suppressed through Aspar's influence, cf. *PLRE*, vol. II, p. 1053–1054, (s.v. Tatianus 1); B. Croke, *Dynasty...*, p. 162.

on, he seems to have sailed to Carthage; however, he did not even receive an audience from Geiseric<sup>481</sup>. Unfortunately, Priscus did not record what Tatianus' demands were; however, this event clearly showed to Leo that it was not possible to find a common ground with the Vandals if he was going to pursue a more active western policy.

So far the said policy was rather reserved. Leo had certainly shown more interest in it than his predecessor, but being observant of the developments and conducting diplomacy was all that it entailed. When an opportunity to become more involved came up in 465, he decided to act on it, much to Aspar's discontent. It seems that Leo was behind Marcellinus' intervention on Sicily in 465<sup>482</sup>.

There is, in fact, some evidence for the tightening of cooperation between Leo and Marcellinus. It is possible that Leo tried to reinstate the long-non-existent office of *magister militum per Illyricum* to give it to Marcellinus and, perhaps, introduce general's forces with him as a commander in to the Eastern Roman military system<sup>483</sup>. Not only would that have bound Marcellinus closer to Leo, but it would also have meant that the emperor could use his loyal ally as a direct counterweight to Aspar.

After securing his immediate alliances, Leo decided to send Anthemius to the West, in order to occupy the throne in Ravenna. A common assertion in the literature is that Leo, thanks to that move, dismissed Anthemius who was his potential rival<sup>484</sup>. There is probably some truth to that, however, it is more likely that Anthemius was a party of uncertain allegiance to Leo, and by giving him such a boon, he secured Anthemius' support and made sure he would not have worked with Aspar. Those plans had to be postponed because of the barbarian incursions in the Balkans, however, in 467, Anthemius was dispatched to Italy supported by the forces of Marcellinus.

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<sup>481</sup> Priscus, fr. 41.

<sup>482</sup> Hydatius, 227; G. Max, *Political...*, p. 236; P. MacGeorge, *Late...*, p. 50.

<sup>483</sup> There is a law in the *Codex Iustinianus* (CJ, XII, 59, 8) issued by Leo, dated to 467-470, which mentions the prerogatives of territorial *magistri militum*, including the one of *Illyricum* alongside generals of the East and Thrace. This is probably the first unequivocal evidence for the existence of this office since 395. Frank Wozniak (*East Rome...*, p. 359) assumes that Marcellinus received the title of *magister militum* from Leo in 461, however, he claims it was a mastery of Dalmatia, cf. P. MacGeorge, *Late...*, p. 40-41. J.B. Bury, *History...*, p. 333. There is merit to that claim, since there was a similar case of Julius Nepos, who held the title of *magister militum Dalmatiae* in 473, cf. CJ, VI, 61, 5. It seems, however, that the commands of Dalmatia and Illyricum would largely overlap, so it is possible that it was the same office that underwent a change of name.

<sup>484</sup> F.M. Clover, *The Family and Early Career of Anicius Olybrius*, Hi 27, 1978, p. 195; J.M. O'Flynn, *A Greek on the Roman Throne: The Fate of Anthemius*, Hi 40, 1991, p. 124

In the same year Leo sent Phylarchus to bring an ultimatum to the Vandals, which was naturally turned down<sup>485</sup>. It seems that Leo hoped to send his troops to Africa in 467, however, the expedition had to be postponed one year due to bad weather<sup>486</sup>. In the meantime Geiseric reacted by sending raiders to Illyria and Greece, especially brutal was the plunder of Zakynthos, where apparently 500 citizens were captured and cut to pieces. Perhaps the Vandal king tried to intimidate the Eastern Romans<sup>487</sup>, however, Leo seemed to have been adamant in his plans.

At the same time, Leo further tightened his links with Zeno, giving the Isaurian general the hand of his daughter, Ariadne<sup>488</sup>. Since she was likely promised to Patricius, this was a direct blow to Aspar's dynastic plans. It is interesting that the change in the direction of the emperor's foreign policy coincided with his distancing himself further from the Alan general in other respects<sup>489</sup>.

### Aspar's Opposition

There are several reasons why Aspar was so adamant in his opposition to Leo's plans. Procopius mentioned, that the general supposedly feared that such a great victory would bring Leo political prestige, which could in turn lead to the emperor becoming completely independent. Considering how tense their relationship was and how many instances of conflict can be traced from the sources, Aspar could have reasonably feared that Leo would continue to limit his influence.

By 467 Leo managed to considerably improve his standing; however, Aspar still had influence in the army and civil service. Winning a great victory and being recognized as a senior *Augustus* in the West would build great foundations for Leo's dynastic plans. After all, the greater the success in the West, and the more recognition he received there, the less the internal power structures, in which Aspar was so firmly embedded, would matter in the grand scheme of things.

There are, however, other reasons related to foreign policy. It has been argued multiple times in this work that the military elite cared deeply about how it was conducted and this was no exception. In fact, Aspar's interests, as far as it is possible to ascertain, seemed to concern primarily the western policy and the conflict with the Vandals. This should be no surprise, since he had

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<sup>485</sup> Priscus, fr. 52.

<sup>486</sup> Hydatius, 232.

<sup>487</sup> Geiseric also pursued alliances against the Romans, possibly with king Rechimund of the Suebi and Euric, the king of the Visigoths. Cf. H.J. Diesner, *Das Vandalenreich. Aufstieg und Untergang*, Stuttgart 1966, p. 68.

<sup>488</sup> The date of the marriage is a subject of discussion, however, the arguments of Rafał Kosiński (*The Emperor...*, p. 65-66) placing it in 468 are convincing.

<sup>489</sup> In addition Leo issued a law in August 468, forbidding the possession of private retinues, cf. *CJ*, IX, 12, 10. It seems to have been aimed against Aspar.

personally experienced the outcome of Theodosian policies when leading troops on the campaigns that were a result of them. In the literature, the problem of foreign policy is recognized, however, it is often presented in a wholly different light. Aspar's opposition to the war with the Vandals is commonly explained by the general's feeling some sort of loyalty towards Geiseric, either because of a supposed ethnic brotherhood between the two or because of an oath, that he swore according to some scholars<sup>490</sup>.

There is however a more reasonable explanation. The situation almost mirrored the one when Theodosius was in power. The barbarians at the northern border suffered a major defeat, but it is likely that happened so only because of Aspar's own decision and, essentially, insubordination. After all, Leo wanted to let the Huns settle in Roman lands. Furthermore, Dengizich and his forces were still at large and the operations against him would continue until 469.

In the East, however, the situation was still unstable. As mentioned before, the Persians managed to deal with the Kidarites and indirectly threatened the Romans, boasting about their military might. Priscus observes that despite Persian's threats, Leo dismissed their envoys because he was more concerned about the developments in the Sicily concerning the Vandals and the West. Due to fragmented sources, the Persian response is not known – in the end the peace was not broken, perhaps because Leo finally paid up. Roger Blockley, however, assumes Perozes simply intervened in Lazica expanding his sphere of influence, which the Romans did not contest due to their problems elsewhere<sup>491</sup>.

From the perspective of 468, however, no one knew that the threat of a destructive war, either from the north or the east, would in the end not materialize, as it did during the reign of Theodosius. Considering what can be assumed of Aspar's convictions, he must have feared that Leo's policies would bring the same misfortunes to the Empire.

### **The Expedition of Basiliscus**

In the year 468 all plans were finally set in motion to deal with the Vandal problem once and for all. With the threat from Dengizich mostly contained, Anthemius seated on the Western throne, and an alliance with Marcellinus firmly secured, a huge army and fleet gathered with the emperor's brother-in-law, Basiliscus, at the helm was finally ready to set out.

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<sup>490</sup> E. Gautier, *Genséric. Roi des Vandales*, Paris 1935, p. 240. G. Vernadsky, *Flavius...*, p. 48-49. B. Bachrach, *A History of the Alans in the West. From Their First Appearance in the Sources of Classical Antiquity through the Early Middle Ages*, Minneapolis 1973, p. 47-48.

<sup>491</sup> R.C. Blockley, *East Roman...*, p. 75.

The army counted about 100,000 men on 1,100 ships according to Procopius<sup>492</sup>. Some scholars put those numbers in question<sup>493</sup>, however; it is likely that in this exceptional case they are reliable. Procopius, with his military experience, was less likely to inflate numbers to unreasonable proportions. In addition, a detailed description of the order of battle of the forces of Belisarius can serve as a frame of reference for the expedition of Basiliscus. Belisarius was sent with an army that was select, but only adequate in number, counting 15,000 soldiers. However, in addition there were around 33,000 sailors and 2,000 marines who manned 500 transport ships and 92 warships<sup>494</sup>. Thus, the total number of men was about 50,000, that is around half of the forces that Basiliscus had at his disposal, and considering that this campaign was probably the greatest of the ones launched against the Vandals, those numbers seem plausible, if the number 100 000 includes both sailors and soldiers. Thus, following that pattern, there should have been around 30 000 soldiers at Basiliscus' disposal<sup>495</sup>, which amounted to one praesental army with supporting forces.

The amount of resources that it took to equip and send the expedition was substantial. John the Lydian reports 65,000 pounds of gold and 700,000 pounds of silver<sup>496</sup>, Candidus a similar amount of 60,000 pounds of gold, 700,000 pounds of silver and some undisclosed sums gathered by Anthemius<sup>497</sup>. Procopius claims 130,000 pounds of gold, which at first glance looks different from the others, but if we were to take into account the conversion of value between gold and silver it may amount to a very similar sum<sup>498</sup>. Regardless, it was clear that it was a great effort in economic and military terms.

The fleet probably sailed along the coast for as long as it was possible for ease of navigation and safety, and for a similar reason it is likely that it made a stop on Sicily<sup>499</sup>. Theophanes and Jordanes report several clashes with Vandal ships, victorious for the Roman side, unfortunately with no further details<sup>500</sup>. Whether these were major engagements that crippled a part of Vandal fleet or just minor skirmishes is unknown, although the latter seem more likely. Thus, the

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<sup>492</sup> Procopius, *History of the Wars*, III, 6, 1.

<sup>493</sup> M. Wilczyński, *Gejzeryk...*, p. 176; K. Vössing, *Königreich...*, p. 67-68.

<sup>494</sup> Procopius, *History of the Wars*, III, 9, 1-23; P. Krupczyński, *Trudności zachodnich wypraw Belizariusza*, Łódź 1984, p. 95.

<sup>495</sup> Y. Modéran, *Les Vandales et l'Empire Romain*, Arles 2014, p. 194-195.

<sup>496</sup> John Lydus, *De magistratibus*, III, 43.

<sup>497</sup> Candidus, fr. 2.

<sup>498</sup> Procopius, *History of the Wars*, III, 6, 2.

<sup>499</sup> Due to the strategic value of the island, it can be assumed that any major expedition to Africa had to take Sicily into account. Cf. T. Wołoska, *Rola Sycylii w wojnach wandalских i gockich Justyniana*, PH 41, 2000, p. 321-322.

<sup>500</sup> Theophanes, AM 5961; Jordanes, *Romana*, 337.

expedition arrived in Africa, and anchored near Promunturium Mercurii, a northernmost point of the peninsula that encloses the Gulf of Tunis from the East. This location was just 280 stadia from Carthage, as Procopius informs, which translates to about 60 km to the north-east<sup>501</sup>.

Apparently, the wind favoured the Romans and if we are to believe the judgement of Procopius, if Basiliscus had attacked right away he would easily have won the victory<sup>502</sup>. However, despite the advantage the general was tardy and did not strike. To many ancient historians as well as modern scholars that was a surprising and inconceivable development. Procopius himself presents as many as three possible interpretations of the events, in an attempt to make sense of the general's decision.

The first one, which is also confirmed by a number of other sources, is that Basiliscus decided to postpone his attack, having been bribed by Geiseric. Procopius said that the general, due to his greed, thought that a couple of days of armistice that the Vandal king asked for would do no harm<sup>503</sup>.

The second one is predicated on Aspar's influence and Basiliscus' imperial ambition. Procopius supposes that Basiliscus willingly sabotaged the expedition as a favour to Aspar, who promised the general that he would be elevated to the throne in return. The existence of such a deal is rather dubious. Nevertheless, two other sources mention that besides Procopius, that is Theophanes and Hydatius<sup>504</sup>.

The third one is simply that it was a mistake on Basiliscus' part. It would no doubt be the most prosaic reason for the defeat. It does not assume ill will on the general's part or any conspiracy. Interestingly, Procopius is the only source that takes such a possibility into account. It might be due to him being one of a few historians who had actual military experience and who truly understood the unpredictability inherent in warfare. For others, a defeat despite favourable conditions and force superiority would have been proof of the general's wrongdoing; Procopius, however, could have understood that it did not need to be the case.

The scholarship is in general in agreement with the last interpretation. The claims of Basiliscus' betrayal caused either by greed or lust for power are seen simply as a way to excuse such a disastrous defeat. Arguing against these points is difficult. The tendency of ancient authors to explain events by invoking individual virtues or vices of those who took part in them is a common

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<sup>501</sup> Cf. K. Vössing, *Königreich...*, p. 68; H. Diesner, *Das Vandalenreich...*, p. 69.

<sup>502</sup> Procopius, *History of the Wars*, III, 6, 10.

<sup>503</sup> Procopius, *History of the Wars*, III, 6, 16. It is commonly repeated in other sources, cf. Jordanes, *Romana*, 337; Theophanes, AM 5961; Malalas, XIV, 44.

<sup>504</sup> Theophanes, AM 5961; Hydatius, 241.

trope. Furthermore, mistakes, bad decisions, and random occurrences can often dictate the outcome of many events and can never be truly discounted. Our knowledge of Basiliscus' previous conduct and his military experience seem to contradict the claim that he could have made such an obvious mistake; however, not enough is known of Basiliscus' orders, the condition of his forces, the intelligence he possessed on the enemy and other crucial tactical and strategic considerations. It is no less possible that the claims he could have won easily are misguided and do not take into account the specific situation that Basiliscus was in.

Discounting sources and their interpretation of events altogether is a risky proposition and requires justification. The information on the conspiracy involving Aspar and Basiliscus can be explained by the existing conflict between Leo and the Alan general. It is possible that the rumours of his betrayal were spread to paint Aspar as a villain, responsible for the failure of the expedition against the Vandals. The way in which these events are portrayed by Hydatius seems to confirm that, as he points to Aspar's supposed connection to the Vandals as the reason for his later execution<sup>505</sup>.

Thus it appears that the correct course of action is to consider whether there could be a grain of truth in the information about Basiliscus taking the bribe. What is referred to as a 'bribe' could have been the gifts, that customarily accompanied diplomatic talks. Procopius reports that Gaiseric sent envoys asking for the armistice and that was probably the true nature of the events<sup>506</sup>. The narrative of Priscus survived only through the lens of other historians, much less informed in diplomatic matters. The sending of gifts would have been a natural occurrence for the experienced diplomat, but that could have been wrongly understood by those who used him as a source afterwards, and likely seen as suspicious. In addition, the common soldiers could have heard of said gifts, and after having to deal with the defeat, the rumour could have spread that it was Basiliscus' greed that damned them.

When all that is taken into account, it appears much more likely that Basiliscus did not get bribed with money, but decided to parley with the Vandals. This was common practice when a show of force was enough to contain the threat<sup>507</sup>. It is also widely repeated by later Byzantine military manuals<sup>508</sup>. Even though the ancient authors want us to believe the victory was certain, for

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<sup>505</sup> Hydatius, 241.

<sup>506</sup> K. Vössing, *Königreich...*, p. 70.

<sup>507</sup> Yves Modéran (*Les Vandales...*, p. 196-197) argues that the concept of total war had not yet been developed in those times, so it is likely that Basiliscus' orders would account for a possibility of seeking an arrangement with Geiseric.

<sup>508</sup> Mauricius, *Strategikon*, VIII, 2, 4; *Peri strategias*, 33. See also – W. Kaegi, *Some Thoughts on Byzantine Military Strategy*, Brookline 1983.

an experienced commander such as Basiliscus accepting what seemed like an offer of surrender, could have appeared preferable to taking any risks inherent to combat.

Unfortunately for the general, he did not realize how cunning a foe he was facing. All evidence seems to point to Geiseric playing for time. The wind was favourable for the Romans, and he needed to wait long enough for it to change, so he could take advantage of it. This was not the first time the Vandal king faked his willingness to offer a diplomatic solution in order to find a right opportunity to strike at unsuspecting enemies. In 461 when Western emperor Majorian gathered a great army and marched to Spain to meet with his fleet, which was waiting to transport his troops to Africa, to deal with the Vandal threat. Geiseric sent envoys to parley with the Romans, however, at the same time he put precautions in place. In case the Romans went ahead with their plan, he poisoned the wells in Mauretania along the way of suspected approach of Majorian's army<sup>509</sup>. Furthermore, he bribed captains of several ships and sent his own forces to capture the remaining vessels that were anchored in the Spanish ports<sup>510</sup>. Thanks to that display of subterfuge the danger to the Vandal kingdom in Africa was averted. The events of 461 are the best example of Geiseric's cunning, but there is also some evidence of him doing the same in 441.

If Basiliscus were to be criticized, it would have mostly to do not with his greed or hunger for power, but rather naivety. And interestingly, this is how one of the preserved fragments in *Liber Suda* portrays the general<sup>511</sup>. It is possible that in the original source that judgement was related to his conduct in Africa.

The details of the negotiations between Geiseric and Basiliscus are unknown, but it is clear that the king only wanted to stall. At the same time the Vandal fleet stationed in Carthage was getting ready to sail out. Some of the ships were kept unmanned, in order to be used as fire ships in the attack<sup>512</sup>.

When the wind changed, the Vandals sallied out and set loose the fire ships. The attack was a complete surprise, and the Romans were unable to react in time. The fire ships crashed into the Roman vessels anchored by *Promunturium Mercurii*, setting them ablaze. Due to how close they were to each other, the fire spread from ship to ship, causing chaos among Roman ranks. The sailors desperately tried to push away the burning ships with poles to save their own vessels. To make matters worse, the main part of the Vandal fleet arrived soon after the fire ships made contact,

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<sup>509</sup> Priscus, fr. 36.

<sup>510</sup> Hydatius, 200. On the campaign see – K. Vössing, *Königreich...*, p. 60-63; A. Merrills, R. Miles, *The Vandals*, Oxford 2010, p. 119-120; M. Wilczyński, *Gejzeryk...*, p. 170.

<sup>511</sup> *Suda*, B 163.

<sup>512</sup> J.H. Pryor, E.M. Jeffreys, *The Age of Dromon. The Byzantine Navy ca. 500-1204*, Leiden 2006, p. 9.

ramming and boarding the disorganized Roman ships. In all this chaos there were some pockets of Roman resistance. Procopius recounts the story of John, who was most likely one of *magistri militum vacantes* who took part in the expedition<sup>513</sup>. The historian acquits him of any responsibility for Basiliscus' betrayal and explains how bravely he fought while surrounded on all sides by the enemies. Apparently, the son of Geiseric, Gento, in awe of John's valiant resistance, offered him to surrender honourably, in response to which the general threw himself into the water in with his armaments, screaming obscenities at his enemies as he was going down. This was likely the fate of many Roman soldiers, and only some of them managed to escape the fiery doom, death by Vandal sword, drowning, or captivity<sup>514</sup>.

### **The Aftermath of the Defeat**

The defeat at Cap Bon was a catastrophe for Leo. It turned out that all of the resources invested in that great endeavour had been wasted, not to mention the loss of trained soldiers and sailors and all the warships and transport vessels now lying on the sea floor by the Tunisian shores. Only a fraction of the forces managed to escape. Basiliscus was among them; however, the setback soon took its toll in other areas. The expedition of Basiliscus was in many ways the cornerstone to Leo's achieving his goals, both in internal and foreign policies. Its failure meant his aims were not going to get realized anytime soon.

Soon after the retreat, Marcellinus was killed on Sicily<sup>515</sup>. The person responsible for that deed was likely Ricimer, who took the opportunity to help improve his own standing in the face of Leo's defeat<sup>516</sup>. The death of the Dalmatian general benefited him greatly, as Marcellinus was a loyal ally to Leo and was of great help in establishing Anthemius on the throne. He also had considerable forces at his disposal. With Marcellinus out of the picture, the emperor Anthemius had no potential ally to counterbalance the influential general Ricimer anymore.

Leo also lost Basiliscus as his ally, at least for the time being. The only information on what happened to the general can be found in the *History of the Wars* by Procopius, who claims he sought refuge in the Church *Hagia Sophia*, and only the intervention of Verina saved him from Leo's wrath. There is no disputing that Leo must have been furious about the outcome of the expedition. However, it does not seem as if Basiliscus had lost his office<sup>517</sup>. This was largely inconsequential,

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<sup>513</sup> Е.П. Глушанин, *Военная...*, p. 130.

<sup>514</sup> Procopius, *History of the Wars*, III, 6, 22-24.

<sup>515</sup> P. MacGeorge, *Late...*, p. 59.

<sup>516</sup> Marcellinus Comes (a. 468) mentioned that he died at the hands of people for whom he was fighting.

<sup>517</sup> PLRE, vol. II, p. 212-214 (s.v. Fl. Basiliscus 2).

since there were barely any soldiers from his praesental army left, however, probably the bigger problem was not that Leo denounced Basiliscus in his anger, but that the general, due to his monumental failure and widely repeated rumours of his betrayal, was politically compromised.

Thus, because of the defeat in 468, Leo lost most of his allies on whom his policies had hinged. In the meantime, the Vandals remained a constant threat, thus, if Leo wanted to salvage his western policy, he had to find a new way to deal with that problem. The only person close to the emperor who had not been compromised in some way was Zeno.

In 469 Jordanes stepped down from his office of *magister militum per Orientem*. Interestingly, he was at that point a year short of serving a full term. There is absolutely no evidence of him falling out of emperor's favour or suffering any major setback that would justify him getting demoted. On the contrary, he was announced as the consul for the year 470<sup>518</sup>. Similarly, no evidence can be found for Jordanes' achieving extraordinary results that would explain him getting such an honour. Naturally, consular nominations for officials stepping down from office were not an uncommon thing, however, in this case there might have been more to it. The nomination itself was a very controversial one. It seems that the obvious candidate for this year was *magister militum per Thracias* Anagastes, who had just delivered the proof of his victory over Dengizich in the form of the Hun's head<sup>519</sup>. Anagastes took the decision of the emperor very badly. The justification was that the general was epileptic; however, it seems to have been just an excuse and a bad one at that. If such condition did not prevent him from leading the army in the field, how could it make him ineligible for an honorary civic office?

It seems that the emperor wanted specifically to cut short Jordanes' term. The consulship might have been a means to appease the general and convince him to accept losing a prestigious office and all the advantages that came with it.

For Jordanes' successor the emperor chose Zeno, his son-in-law and a loyal subordinate. It is likely that after Basiliscus' disgrace, Leo sought to re-establish his influence over the army, and having someone he could trust as a leader of the eastern forces certainly served to further that goal<sup>520</sup>. Cutting Jordanes' term short ensured that Zeno could assume the office immediately.

One of the reasons for such a hasty appointment of Zeno could have been an intention to resume the emperor's foreign policy to try to salvage the situation after the failure of Basiliscus. The praesental army that he commanded was almost completely destroyed, and the other one had

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<sup>518</sup> CLRE, p. 475.

<sup>519</sup> Marcellinus Comes, a. 469.

<sup>520</sup> There are no sources on Jordanes' loyalties, but it is safe to assume that he was not as close to the emperor as Zeno, who had family ties with Leo at that point.

been under the command of Aspar for almost twenty years by then. It is not unlikely that those forces were more loyal to the general at this point than to the Empire. Knowing the convictions of the general, getting him and his forces to embark on the campaign against the kingdom of Geiseric was not possible.

If the emperor had wanted to make war on the Vandals again, only transferring the soldiers from the East could have provided him with sufficient forces. Zeno becoming a *magister militum per Orientem* meant the army of the East was under the command of Leo's most loyal associate and it meant that the emperor could use those forces as he wished. In 470 an army, presumably comprised of the eastern elements, was formed in Egypt under commanders Heraclius and Marsus. Interestingly, Zeno was not going to be the commander-in-chief of the expedition.

There is a reasonable explanation of why it happened. After the failure of Basiliscus, which destroyed the general's prestige and forced him into hiding in disgrace, Leo essentially lost one of his associates. It is possible that this time he specifically chose commanders who were loyal to him, but who at the same time, were of much lower profile than his own son-in-law. Leo could not risk Zeno suffering the same defeat as Basiliscus, as this would have alienated the emperor completely, and, in turn, left him politically at Aspar's mercy.

### **The Campaign of Heraclius and Marsus**

The role of the campaign of Heraclius and Marsus in those events needs to be discussed, since in most of the scholarship (that goes into enough detail to even recognize this event) it is placed not as a separate endeavour, but as a part of the expedition of Basiliscus. It is arguably a misinterpretation, nevertheless, it is crucial to revisit the evidence and explain how the chronology was established here.

The fiasco of the expedition of Basiliscus was a major setback for the emperor in multiple ways. Not only a great amount of resources had been wasted, but also the alliances that the emperor had built over the years were either lost or put in jeopardy. For that reason the views of Procopius, who presents the battle of Cap Bon not only as a turning point, but even a point of no return in the Vandal-Roman relations<sup>521</sup>, are very believable. Thus, most of the scholarship accepts the course of events as presented by the Byzantine historian<sup>522</sup>. There is however an alternative source that relays these events differently – the chronicle of Theophanes<sup>523</sup>. While the chronicler is usually

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<sup>521</sup> At least until the times of Justinian, which, incidentally, were central to Procopius' narrative.

<sup>522</sup> Notable exceptions are – Ch. Curtois, *Les Vandales et l'Afrique*, Paris 1955, p. 202–203; H. Castritius, *Die Vandalen...*, p. 119–120.

<sup>523</sup> Theophanes, AM 5963.

less reliable and his accounts are often confused, especially chronologically, he did have access to and used Priscus and in this instance a case could be made that his version is closer to the truth.

In the *History of the Wars* by Procopius, the historical excurses serve a specific purpose, which is to paint a background to the story of the campaigns of Belisarius and put them in context. This is no different in the description of the expedition of Basiliscus. The themes of virtue and fate are central to Procopius' work. The failure of Basiliscus is presented in such a way as to mirror and contrast with that of Belisarius nearly eighty years later. The historian's point seems to be that the lack of virtue of Basiliscus, his greed and lust for power, made him blind to the smiles of fate, the favourable wind for instance. The more similar the two campaigns seem, the clearer his point becomes. Thus, just as in 533, the fighting did occur in three theatres: the rebellion on Corsica and Sardinia, the pro-Roman revolt in Tripolitania, and the main operation of Belisarius; the historian seems to have condensed the events from several years and put them under the date of 468, so that the two campaigns appear more alike and better suit his narrative.

Naturally, assumptions about the motivations of historical figures are always speculative in nature. Regardless of whether that was the goal Procopius had in mind, there are more reasons to believe Theophanes over him. The chronicler, despite writing much later after these events, records them in much greater detail. This may indicate that he was following his sources much more closely, and that source would be the very reliable Priscus. Aside from historiographical considerations, there are also practical ones. Splitting forces like that would not have helped the Roman efforts, and securing Tripolitania was of dubious military value when the heart of the Vandal kingdom was already under attack.

Some scholars attempted to find a middle ground between the accounts of Procopius and Theophanes and claim that while the expedition of Heraclius and Marsus was sent in 468, they held Tripolitania until 471<sup>524</sup>. From a practical perspective, however, this would not have been feasible. Supplying a large body of men in Africa for several years would have been a logistical nightmare, especially since most of the Roman fleet had been sunk and the seas were under Vandal control.

Furthermore, considering how difficult Leo's situation after 468 was, it is unlikely that he would just keep these forces in faraway lands for a prolonged time. Due to internal problems, first with Anagastes, and then, as he learned of the plot of Ardaburi, he likely needed every loyal soldier he could get.

All the evidence indicates that the expedition of Heraclius and Marsus took place in 470. The primary consequence of such an interpretation is that the failure of Basiliscus, even if of

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<sup>524</sup> A. Merrills, R. Miles, *The Vandals...*, p. 122; Y. Modéran, *Les Vandales...*, p. 198; M. Wilczyński, *Gejzeryk...*, p. 176–178.

catastrophic proportions, did not render Leo's situation unsalvageable. The emperor was still able to pursue his ambitions, albeit in a limited scope.

The expedition set out from Egypt on land using a coastal route to Tripolitania at some point around 470. The commanders of the expedition were Heraclius of Edessa<sup>525</sup> and Marsus the Isaurian<sup>526</sup>. The choice of the commanders was not a coincidence, as it seems they were loyal to the emperor and unconnected to the Ardaburi. In fact, considering the ethnicity of Marsus, it is likely that he was connected to Zeno.

The expedition achieved some success; according to Theophanes, much more than the previous campaign of Basiliscus. Tripoli was captured alongside many other Libyan cities; however, there is no record of any major military engagements<sup>527</sup>. It is likely that a joint military action with the West had been planned originally, since Anthemius was also gathering troops for an expedition against the Vandals. However, all the plans turned to nought when the emperor started quarrelling with Ricimer, and the latter rebelled with the aforesaid forces at his command<sup>528</sup>. The conflict was resolved for a time due to the intervention of bishop Epiphanius of Pavia, but it was probably too late to turn these forces against the Vandals, especially since it was apparent that the resolution was only temporary and for both Anthemius and Ricimer the Vandal problem became secondary.

Nevertheless, Geiseric must have felt threatened since he appealed for peace, which Leo happily accepted. Possibly he could have not expected a better result, especially if it had turned out that he would not be getting any support from the West. Theophanes also informs us that Leo needed these commanders and their forces against Aspar. It had been because a dangerous plot was incited by the general and his son back in the homeland, and Leo needed every reliable asset for the final resolution of the conflict.

### **The Revolt of Anagastes**

However, it bears painting the background for those events. What led to the escalation of the conflict was the revolt of Anagastes. The reason for his open rebellion was the fact that he did not receive the consulate, and instead, it was granted to Jordanes. Not only the official justification for such action, Anagastes' health condition, epilepsy, appears nonsensical, but the general took it as a personal slight. Anagastes and Jordanes were feuding since Anagastes' father, Arnegisclus, had killed John the Vandal, the father of Jordanes.

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<sup>525</sup> *PLRE*, vol. II, p. 541–542 (s.v. Heraclius 4).

<sup>526</sup> *PLRE*, vol. II, p. 728–729 (s.v. Marsus 2).

<sup>527</sup> Theophanes, AM 5963.

<sup>528</sup> Priscus, fr. 62.

To solve the crisis Leo sent an envoy to Anagastes<sup>529</sup>. It seems that the person responsible for that task was Zeno, since the author of the *Life of St. Daniel the Stylite* reports that the general was sent to Thrace in order to prevent war, which appears to refer to these events<sup>530</sup>. Additionally, Theophanes mentions that he had been sent to Thrace for some military purpose, and he was reinforced by the emperor's own soldiers which likely refers to units of *schola palatina*<sup>531</sup>.

Thus, Zeno arrived in force, however, it does not seem that any hostilities between him and Anagastes broke out. In fact, everything points to Zeno being successful in appeasing the disgruntled general. It is not known what arguments the Isaurian used, however, in the end, Anagastes admitted that he was incited by Ardaburius, Aspar's son, and provided Zeno with documents that proved it<sup>532</sup>.

It bears asking what Ardaburius sought to achieve with to Anagastes' revolt. Brian Croke, who was the first to link Zeno's involvement in Thrace with those events<sup>533</sup>, assumes it was part of Aspar's master plan. The general and his son, who harboured an obvious grievance against Zeno, sought to get him out of the capital to make it easier to dispose of him<sup>534</sup>.

It is a fact that when Zeno was in Thrace an attempt was made on his life by his retainers, the same who were given to him in the capital by Leo. Theophanes blames Aspar to be directly responsible, and it seems indeed likely that he was behind this plot. As mentioned before, the troops that Zeno was reinforced with were likely the elite imperial guard of *schola palatina*, and Aspar due to his network in the military establishment, undoubtedly had connections in there too. He therefore had the means to enact the plot.

That being said, Croke's interpretation seems quite convoluted. Aspar might have led the emperor to make Zeno responsible for dealing with Anagastes, and he was likely behind the revolt. However, there were probably easier ways to make Zeno leave the safety of Constantinople that did not involve causing an all-out civil war. Thus, the reasons of the Ardaburi for inciting the revolt must have been different.

It has to be noted that the only military force that Leo at that point had at his disposal in the region was Aspar's detachment. Basiliscus was still in hiding and his army had been destroyed and probably was not reorganized yet. The eastern forces under the command of Heraclius and

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<sup>529</sup> Priscus, fr. 56.

<sup>530</sup> *Vita st. Danielis Stylitae*, 65.

<sup>531</sup> Theophanes, AM 5962.

<sup>532</sup> Priscus, fr. 56.

<sup>533</sup> B. Croke, *Dynasty...*, p. 185-186.

<sup>534</sup> B. Croke, *Dynasty...*, p. 187.

Marsus were conducting a campaign against the Vandals, while the Thracian army was under the command of the rebellious Anagastes. The outbreak of the revolt would have, at least as Aspar had likely envisioned it, made him indispensable to Leo and force the emperor to compromise. Perhaps he incited the revolt, having already a contingency plan to appease Anagastes. Thus, he would not only have put the emperor in a precarious position, having to plead for Aspar's help, but he would also have 'solved' the problem and received all the political fame for the success. That appears to have been a much more likely plan for Aspar, as it explains how the revolt would directly help the general's cause.

Leo, however, likely realized that ordering Aspar's army to intervene would have meant him having to give way to general's demands. If Aspar's plan had one failing it was apparently the underestimation of Leo's stubbornness. The emperor sent for Zeno to deal with the problem. Whatever forces he had at his disposal were probably not enough to challenge the Thracian army of Anagastes, so the emperor provided him with the elite troops of *schola palatina*. Nevertheless, his orders were likely to appease Anagastes. In fact, considering how readily the general abandoned the plot, it seems to suggest he felt misled and lied to. Perhaps, Zeno's (and by extension, Leo's) willingness to make amends contrasted with how the situation was presented to him by Ardaburius.

At that point, however, Zeno was in the possession of evidence incriminating Ardaburius. After his previous plot had been discovered in 466 he was effectively side-lined politically, and undoubtedly this second, much more insolent attempt would result in much graver consequences. In that situation murder might have seemed the only way out. Thus, the assassination attempt was likely not pre-planned<sup>535</sup>. It might have been a desperate attempt of Ardaburius, who might have learned of Anagastes handing over the evidence of his betrayal. If we take into account the fact that Zeno was surrounded by the imperial guard, it is likely that someone, perhaps connected to Aspar, caught wind of Anagastes relinquishing the evidence and sent a courier to inform the Alans.

Zeno, however, managed to elude the assassins and escaped either to Pylai<sup>536</sup> or Serdica<sup>537</sup>. From there he somehow ended up in Chalcedon. From there he travelled to Isauria, likely to seek

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<sup>535</sup> Rafał Kosiński (*The Emperor...*, p. 68) argues it was the birth of Zeno's son that prompted Aspar and Ardaburius to order an attempt on his life. Certainly, it was a factor that made disposing of Zeno even more beneficial to the Ardaburi, however, it raises a question why Aspar needed to incite an open revolt. The scholar does not wage in on that.

<sup>536</sup> *Vita st. Danielis Stylitae*, 65

<sup>537</sup> Theophanes, AM 5962

refuge<sup>538</sup>. Interestingly, the sources report on Zeno's fighting against a bandit leader Indacus who made his lair on the hill Papirius and was raiding the region<sup>539</sup>. This isolated account provides little context and could be unrelated to the grand scale politics, since Isauria often had issues with banditry, however, a passage in the fragment of Candidus mentions that Aspar tried to win over Isaurian troops to his side<sup>540</sup>. Perhaps, when the assassination attempt had failed, the general tried another plot, and he incited some Isaurians to cause trouble for Zeno. Unfortunately, the sources do not allow for a definite answer; however, Zeno being tied up with the problems in his homeland was certainly to Aspar's benefit<sup>541</sup>.

### Aspar's Return to Power

Those events probably took place when the bulk of the Roman forces loyal to the emperor was engaged in Africa. According to Theophanes, Leo learned of Aspar's plot and because of that, he realized that he was openly scheming against him. Nevertheless, regardless of Leo's suspicions, the emperor was mostly at Aspar's mercy, as he was completely isolated from his allies.

Even despite the obvious setbacks, the plot of the Ardaburi seemed successful in the end. Leo was forced into a position in which he had to accept the general's demands. As Croke rightfully observes, it was probably then, when the emperor almost suffered a mental breakdown reported by John the Lydian<sup>542</sup>. This passage offers a rare glimpse at a very personal angle of the discussed events and should serve as a reminder that aside from the grand politics, the players involved were also human, driven by their own convictions, character traits, and emotions, something we should be aware of, but unfortunately the sources so rarely allow us to understand.

Leo must have felt defeated. He finally gave in to Aspar's demands and made Patricius, Aspar's son, the *Caesar* and his designated successor. This meant that Patricius became a co-

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<sup>538</sup> John Malalas (XV, 12) informs on the occasion of Zeno's return after the revolt of Basiliscus in 475, that this was the second time. Considering he could have the support of his compatriots there, it seems reasonable that this was the course of Zeno's action in 469 or 470 as well. Incidentally, Flavius Zeno did the same in 449, when he was suspected of preparing a revolt, cf. p. 65 of this work.

<sup>539</sup> Priscus, fr. 57

<sup>540</sup> Candidus, fr. 1; George Vernadsky (*Flavius...*, p. 69) places those events just before the fall of Aspar, however, Rafał Kosiński (*The Emperor...*, p. 64) assumes that if Aspar tried to secure support among the Isaurians it was when they arrived with Tarasikodissa in Constantinople.

<sup>541</sup> That being said, putting those events in a chronological order is tricky. Rafał Kosiński (*The Emperor...*, p. 66-67) places the operation against Indacus before the revolt of Anagastes. This is entirely possible, and could still mean that Aspar incited the revolt.

<sup>542</sup> Johannes Lydus, *De magistratibus*, III, 44, 3.

emperor. Since Ariadne was already married to Zeno, he offered him the hand of his second daughter, Leontia. It appeared that the Alan general was triumphant<sup>543</sup>.

However, soon the tides turned again. As the nomination of Patricius became publicly known, many renowned Church officials and devout Christians became worried that the emperor, already elderly, would leave the fate of the Empire in the hands of a heretic. Many citizens with the patriarch Gennadius and the monk Marcellus marched from Hagia Sophia to the hippodrome to protest the decision. After hours of chanting, the emperor addressed the crowd and informed that Patricius had abandoned his Arian creed<sup>544</sup>. This information is corroborated by Theophanes, who informs that Patricius was made *Caesar* because he converted to orthodoxy<sup>545</sup>. Most importantly, it seems that the massive popular opposition to the projects of Aspar reinvigorated the emperor. He put in motion a plan to deal with the powerful general once and for all.

Perhaps this was when he decided to completely reorganize the palace guard of *excubitores*. This warrants a further explanation, as that event is commonly misinterpreted in the historiography. Many scholars assume that Leo created a new guard, often linking it with the arrival of Tarasikodissa-Zeno<sup>546</sup>, and Leo supposed attempts to counteract the Aspar led Germanic domination over the armed forces by employing Isaurian soldiers<sup>547</sup>. However, a comprehensive analysis by Brian Croke debunks those arguments<sup>548</sup>. The only source on Leo's decisions involving *excubitores*, John the Lydian, mentions the reorganization of the existing unit and setting it up to be responsible for guarding the palace entrances<sup>549</sup>. As Brian Croke observes, there is absolutely no evidence that *excubitores* were predominantly Isaurian, or that the arrival of Tarasikodissa had anything to do with the formation. Thus, the guard could have been reorganized at any point between Leo's accession and 471<sup>550</sup>. However, the obvious failure of the palace troops given to Zeno on his mission in the Balkans would have been the most obvious and direct reason for this decision of the emperor, especially since he anticipated a violent resolution and having loyal troops at his disposal was paramount.

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<sup>543</sup> B. C r o k e, *Dynasty...*, p. 191-192.

<sup>544</sup> А.С. К о з л о в, Народные массы в конфликте Аспара и Льва, АДСВ 10, 1973, p. 263-265.

<sup>545</sup> T h e o p h a n e s, AM5961.

<sup>546</sup> E. S t e i n, *Histoire...*, p. 361; A. D e m a n d t, *Geschichte der Spätantike*, München 2008, p. 185-187; A. C a m e r o n, *Mediterranean...*, p. 30; W. T r e a d g o l d, *Byzantium...*, p. 13

<sup>547</sup> A. J o n e s, *The Later...*, p. 222; W. K a e g i, *Byzantine Military Unrest, 471-843: An Interpretation*, Amsterdam 1981, p. 27; H. E l t o n, *Warfare in Roman Europe, AD 350-425*, New York 1996, p. 101.

<sup>548</sup> B. C r o k e, *Leo I and the Palace Guard*, B 75, 2005, p. 140-141.

<sup>549</sup> J o h a n n e s L y d u s, *De magistratibus*, I, 16, 3.

<sup>550</sup> B. C r o k e, *Leo...*, p. 144.

For that reason he sent for the forces of Heraclius and Marsus, probably also contacted Zeno and Basiliscus, and maybe even Anagastes. In addition, it is likely that the emperor was behind the rumours of Aspar scheming with the Vandals and being responsible for the failure of the expedition of 468. This would have undermined the support for Aspar among the general populace of Constantinople and the senators.

### Leo the Butcher

In 471 Leo invited Aspar, Ardaburius, and Patricius for a *conventus*, a routine meeting of senators. Little did the general and his sons know that it was a trap. Suspecting nothing, they were surrounded by the eunuchs and cut down with swords, their bodies being thrown out of the balcony. According to some sources, Patricius managed to escape or was allowed to live<sup>551</sup>, but either died later of his wounds or otherwise faded into obscurity, since he is not referenced after that time<sup>552</sup>. The youngest son of Aspar, Hermanaric, was at the time of the plot lured outside the city on Zeno's orders, and later set up to marry into Zeno's illegitimate son's family. After the death of Leo he returned to Constantinople, but no sources inform of his political involvements, so it is safe to assume that he led a private life<sup>553</sup>.

Soon, the news of the murder spread around Constantinople. When various groups of Aspar's followers and supporters learned of this, they started a riot in the city. Among them was Ostrys, *comes rei militaris*, who gathered some soldiers and stormed the palace. A fight broke out between them and the *excubitores* who were defending the building, resulting in many casualties, however, in the end the assaulters were overwhelmed. Ostrys managed to escape, taking Aspar's concubine with him, and headed to Thrace<sup>554</sup>. Thanks to the intervention of Zeno, who came back from Chalcedon, the riot was brought under control<sup>555</sup>. The imminent danger had ceased, however, it was not where the consequences of the murder of Aspar would end.

Ostrys went to Thrace to Theodoric Strabo, a leader of Thracian Goths and a nephew of Aspar's wife. It is possible that with Theodoric's followers they attempted attacking Constantinople itself, but were beaten off by Zeno and Basiliscus, however, the passage in Theophanes that

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<sup>551</sup> Candidus, fr. 1.

<sup>552</sup> His marriage with Leontia was also terminated, as she married Marcian, son of emperor Anthemius. Cf. *Vita St. Danielis Stylitae*, 69. Theophanes (AM 5964) claims, however, that Patricius was also killed at the palace in 471.

<sup>553</sup> Theophanes, AM5964.

<sup>554</sup> Malalas, XIV, 40

<sup>555</sup> Theophanes, AM5964.

informs of that could imprecisely refer to the riots in the city. Regardless, they raided the Thracian countryside.

Eventually Leo decided to send envoys to Theodoric to seek peace. The Goth was willing to compromise, and in a reply he demanded that he should receive the inheritance left to him by Aspar, his people be allowed to remain settled in Thrace, and that he be granted the office of *magister militum praesentalis*. Leo dismissed the first two conditions and agreed to the third one as long as Theodoric would be loyal to him. When the king received the envoys, he decided to continue the military operations. Thanks to surviving fragment of the *History* of Malchus, some details are known of the campaign<sup>556</sup>. Part of the Gothic army was sent to siege Philippopolis<sup>557</sup>. The defenders held as long as they could, but starvation forced them to surrender.

The course of the war might shine a little light on the crisis that the Empire underwent in the years 471-473. The imperial forces clearly were not strong enough to challenge the Goths in the field. No serious relief attempt was undertaken to help the defenders of Philippopolis; instead, Malchus informs that the Roman forces used scorched earth tactics<sup>558</sup>. In fact, the war seems to have brought much brutality – a newly appointed commander of the Thracian forces, a nephew of Verina, Armatus, cut off the hands of the Gothic prisoners of war<sup>559</sup>. In the end, the Goths were worn down by starvation as well; however, Leo agreed to most of the demands of Theodoric, except for his claim to Aspar's inheritance. The king was recognized as the sole ruler of the Goths, the barbarians received 2,000 pounds of gold in tribute and Theodoric was appointed to the office of *magister militum* left vacant by Aspar. Interestingly, Malchus writes that Theodoric refused to ever fight against the Vandals. The only demand that was not met, the one respecting Aspar's inheritance, likely was so because Leo had confiscated it, which was a part of his retaliation against the Arians mentioned by Malalas<sup>560</sup>.

### A Pyrrhic Victory

The internal problems that the Empire was going through deeply affected the emperor's plans in regard to foreign policy. The retreat from an otherwise successful expedition against Geiseric was already discussed, however, its outcome was not all that negative for the emperor in the end. Much worse was the situation in the western part of the Empire.

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<sup>556</sup> Malchus, fr. 2.

<sup>557</sup> Called 'Philippi' in the source itself, most likely erroneously.

<sup>558</sup> Malchus, fr. 2.

<sup>559</sup> Malchus, fr. 15.

<sup>560</sup> Malalas, XIV, 41.

With Marcellinus gone, Anthemius feared Ricimer's power. Soon, the conflict escalated when Anthemius ordered the execution of one supporter of Ricimer, to which the general responded by gathering an army, that was originally meant to be sent against the Vandals (perhaps jointly with the forces of Heraclius and Marsus). The conflict only got temporarily resolved by the intervention of Epiphanius, the bishop of Pavia. However, in the same year, after a failed campaign against the Goths in which Anthemius' son, Anthemiolus, died in battle, Ricimer took the opportunity to set out against the emperor. Supported by the Sciri commanded by Odoacer and loyal barbarian soldiers, he overwhelmed the Imperial forces in a battle on Tiber. Anthemius was forced to flee to Rome, where he was besieged.

It is up to discussion whether Leo abandoned his ally at that point. According to Malalas, the emperor did send Olybrius as an envoy, to inform Anthemius of his crackdown on Aspar's family, and he advised him to do the same against Ricimer<sup>561</sup>. The chronicler then reports that he also secretly ordered Anthemius to execute the bearer of the news. However, according to Theophanes, Leo sent Olybrius to the West to take the throne<sup>562</sup>. It seems that the latter is more probable, considering that Olybrius had the support of the Vandal king, Geiseric, it could have been Leo's attempt at keeping at least some control over the situation in the West, while he was unable to dedicate any forces to help Anthemius due to the civil war in the Balkans. When Anthemius got deposed by Ricimer, the general allied himself with Olybrius who became the emperor, however, he fell ill and died soon after<sup>563</sup>.

Leo after that tried once again to salvage the situation in the West. The Dalmatian territories, after the death of Marcellinus, were ruled by Julius Nepos. Despite the fact that the successor to the western throne, Glycerius, made attempts to obtain Leo's recognition, the emperor decided to support the claims of the Dalmatian ruler<sup>564</sup>. In June 473 he gave to Julius Nepos the permission to crown himself as a *Caesar*, and granted him the title of *patricius*<sup>565</sup>. He did not manage however to see the outcome of the following struggle for power in Italy.

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<sup>561</sup> Malalas, XIV, 45. Cf. M.E. Stewart, *The First Byzantine Emperor? Leo I, Aspar and Challenges of Power and Romanitas in Fifth-century Byzantium*, Porph 22, 2014, p. 13.

<sup>562</sup> Theophanes, AM 5964.

<sup>563</sup> For the reconstruction of those events, cf. Ł. Pięgoński, *Polityka Zachodnia Cesarzy Marcjana (450-457) i Leona I (457-474)*, Łódź 2019, p. 167-173.

<sup>564</sup> M. Janowska, *Bizancjum...*, p. 235-237. The ambitions of Julius Nepos were also actively supported by empress Verina, cf. M.J. Leszka, *Empress-Widow Verina's Political Activity during the Reign of Emperor Zeno*, [in:] *Mélanges d'histoire byzantine offerts à Oktawiusz Jurewicz à l'occasion de son soixante-dixième anniversaire*, red. W. Cerań, Łódź 1998, p. 129.

<sup>565</sup> Jordanes, *Romana*, 338.

In October 473, an already ailing Leo nominated as his co-ruler the 6-year-old child of Ariadne and Zeno as Leo II<sup>566</sup>. Shortly thereafter, on 18 January 474 he died.

### **Conclusion**

In many ways, the subject of the military elites under the reign of Leo is completely overshadowed by the conflict with Aspar. Even though Leo came from a similar background as his predecessor, his relations with the person he owed the throne to developed entirely differently. It is difficult to pinpoint why Leo and Aspar ended up in a conflict that escalated to such a tragic end. Undoubtedly, the animosity kept growing over the years and there were many singular events that compounded each other. Aspar's overbearing influence, Leo's ambitions related to foreign policy, and the dynastic plans of either could simply not be accommodated. An important aspect was also the Church's support for Leo, which made the emperor realize that he had ways to challenge the power of Aspar.

A factor that should not be underestimated, is that the conflict between Aspar and Leo could be boiled down to the personalities of the two, both ambitious and stubborn men. It is also highly possible that Leo was influenced by his wife, Verina, also an ambitious woman, who later would show her political aptitude. Although it is impossible to present unambiguous sources for all of the above to have been the case, it would explain why neither side was willing to compromise at any point and why their relationship deteriorated to the point of escalation in 471.

Even though Leo managed to walk away victorious from the conflict, it was for all intents and purposes a Pyrrhic victory. His ambitious western policy had failed, and the Roman Empire in the West was already nearing its end. He secured his legacy the way he wanted, but the reign of his successor, Zeno, would show extensively, that the problem of military commanders reaching for power and influence in the state did not end with Aspar's death in 471.

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<sup>566</sup> B. Croke, *The Imperial Reigns of Leo II*, BZ 92, 2003, p. 570.

## Conclusion

As the topic of the military elites during the reigns of Theodosius II, Marcian and Leo appeared in the scholarship, there have been three primary groups of factors brought up in the attempt to explain the various events described in previous chapters – ethnic, dynastic and religious.

### **Ethnicity – Solidarity and Division**

The problems of ethnicity are probably the aspect of the Eastern Roman military elite in the fifth century that garner the most attention from historians.

Contrary to a popular belief, the barbarians did not constitute an overwhelming majority of the Eastern Roman high command. In fact, if we look at the representatives of various ethnic groups among the *magistri militum* – Plintha, Arcobindus, Arnegisclus and Anagastes were the Goths, John the Vandal and Jordanes, Vandals. The famous clan of Ardaburi were reportedly Alan, although, it should be noted they were intermarrying with the Goths. Those who served as *magistri militum* are Ardaburius, Aspar and Ardaburius the Younger. The Isaurians were represented by Flavius Zeno and Tarasikodissa-Zeno. The known Romans are Macedonius, Procopius, Dionysius, Apollonius, Rusticius, Theodulus, Basiliscus, Anthemius, Marcian and Armatus. Thus, the barbarian element constituted a major, but not overwhelming part of the Eastern Roman military command.

Nevertheless, it has been argued that the Eastern Roman Empire was undergoing a political conflict, in which the division followed ethnic lines – with Romans on one, and Barbarians on the other side<sup>567</sup>. There has been two primary instances in which the scholarship claimed ethnic factors to be the driving force behind those events. Interestingly, they nearly constitute the chronological brackets of the time period that is of interest of this work – the revolt of Gainas and its aftermath, and the conflict between Aspar and Leo.

In the direct aftermath of Gainas' rebellion there were some calls for anti-barbarian action, namely the works of Synesius of Cyrene, who on the pages of *de providentia* and *de regno* opposed Gainas himself and inclusion of barbarians in Roman system, both army and civilian service. The fact that the population of Constantinople gathered up and slaughtered the Goths who were

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<sup>567</sup> Such view has been shared by many fundamental works, such as - J.B Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire*, London 1923; E. Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire*, Paris 1959; A.H.M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire 284–602. A Social, Economic and Administrative Survey*, vol. I–III, Oxford 1964.

trapped in the city also should be a reminder that prejudices against different ethnic groups certainly existed at that time. Then, there is a notion that after the murder of Fravitta, there was a period when there are no attested high-ranking military commander of Germanic origin in Eastern Roman service. The idea of anti-Germanic reaction taking place within the Eastern Roman Empire had thus some support in the historiography, especially in older works.

There are however numerous arguments against those claims. Firstly, there is little evidence to support any policy was implemented that would target Germanic commanders. Considering the general scarcity of sources, the claim that the Germans were not allowed to serve cannot be based on the fact that none were recorded up until 419. For the years 404-419 there are only five commanders mentioned in total, most of them only in passing<sup>568</sup>. Furthermore, when Germanic commanders finally are becoming attested in the sources, they are recorded in the highest offices of *magistri militum*. Their careers were likely swift and successful, but they still must have went through different ranks to get promoted, which obviously took time. It means that among *comites* Germanic officers must have been relatively common even in the years in which supposedly they were barred from attaining high offices<sup>569</sup>.

The conflict between Leo and Aspar has long been interpreted as a reaction of the emperor to the Germanic dominance over the army. It has been argued that this was the reason why Leo invited Isaurians to the capital, to counter Aspar and his Germanic allies<sup>570</sup>. This interpretation is however based on entirely wrong assumptions<sup>571</sup>.

This argument was usually associated with the reorganization of *excubitores*, however, there is no evidence for its members to be recruited solely, or even primarily from Isaurians. Similarly, the fact that emperor decided to support Tarasikodissa was not due to his ethnic origins, but simply that he was not Aspar's supporter, or otherwise connected to the clan of Ardaburi. The first time

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<sup>568</sup> If we assumed each office would be occupied by a different person each tenure, that makes it 20 different potential commanders, thus, there is a possibility there could have been some Germanic officers that were just not recorded.

<sup>569</sup> Е.П. Глушанин, *Военная знать ранней Византии*, Барнаул 1991, p. 102-103.

<sup>570</sup> Cf. E.W. Brooks, *The Emperor Zenon and the Isaurians*, Her 8, 1893, p. 212; J.B. Bury, *History...*, p. 320; R.W. Burgess, *Isaurian Factions in the Reign of Zeno the Isaurian*, L 51, 1992, p. 874; A. Cameron, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity AD 395-600*, New York 1993, p. 30; W. Treadgold, *A History of Byzantine State and Society*, Stanford 1997, p. 150-156. This idea is possibly most explicitly put forward by Edward Thompson (*The Isaurians under Theodosius II*, Her 68, 1948, p. 31). The comprehensive critique of that view was put forward by Brian Croke (*Dynasty and Ethnicity. Emperor Leo I and the Eclipse of Aspar*, Chi 35, 2005., p. 147-203). Interestingly, there have been studies, largely unnoticed in the West, that challenged this view much earlier, cf. А.С. Козлов, Народные массы в конфликте Аспара и Льва, АДСВ 10, 1973, p. 263-265.

<sup>571</sup> Cf. p. 140 of this work.

he appears in the sources is in relation to the plot of Ardaburius and the fact he decided to inform the emperor of it, thus proving his loyalty (and burning bridges with the powerful general). Likely, it has been mostly an alliance out of an opportunity. All appears to indicate that until 465 or 466 the grievances of Leo towards Aspar were slowly mounting. The fact that Leo learned of Ardaburius' was probably both a factor that further antagonized the emperor and Aspar, but also a first real opportunity for Leo to combat the influence of the all-powerful general. The fact that Tarasikodissa was an Isaurian had no bearing on those events, at least not directly. Not to mention the fact, that in place of demoted Ardaburius, Leo appointed another general of Germanic ancestry, Jordanes.

Jordanes' alignment is almost impossible to ascertain, and likely he was just on the sidelines of the political conflict between the emperor and Aspar. Most importantly, however, he likely was not a supporter of Aspar and that seemed enough for Leo. This is additional evidence that the emperor was being concerned about loyalty and not concerned about ethnicity whatsoever.

Later on when the conflict developed, Leo tried relying on Basiliscus, who was a Roman. While seemingly it appears as if Leo again looked for support of non-Germanic commanders, the explanation here is obvious. Basiliscus was Leo's brother-in-law, and the emperor certainly expected loyalty from a member of his own family. Nevertheless, if Procopius were to be believed, it is possible that Aspar still tried to drag Basiliscus to his side<sup>572</sup>.

It is clear from the above that ethnicity played at most a minor role in the various socio-political developments regarding the military elites in the fifth century Eastern Roman Empire. What was observed by various scholars and was attributed to some kind of conflict along ethnic lines, was, when put under a closer scrutiny, mostly a coincidence.

### **Kinship and Family Matters**

There was however one aspect, in which ethnicity was of some importance. The generals were willing to use their position within the communities they originated from to their advantage. While it usually followed along ethnic lines, it was not due to some kind of common ethnic identity but because of family ties, and extended relationship between clans. For example, it was common for the military elites to engage in marriages between their families and establish their networks of family connections that way<sup>573</sup>.

This phenomenon was essential in forming the military elite as a distinct group. Afterall, the generals were appointed by nomination. However, the practice mentioned above meant that

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<sup>572</sup> Procopius, *History of the Wars*, III, 6, 2.

<sup>573</sup> Cf. A. Demandt, *Magister militum*, [in:] *RE*, t. 12 suppl., 1970, p. 622-628.

the emperor could choose from a pool of military professionals, mostly limited to people who were related to each other. It can be observed that many of the generals had their sons also reach the highest military offices. Most famous examples are of course the members of the Ardaburi clan, whose careers span three generations, from Ardaburius, through Aspar, and Ardaburius the Younger. Furthermore, Aspar himself was related by marriage to Plintha. Other examples include Jordanes, the son of John the Vandal, and Anagastes, the son of Areobindus. Those are only the known examples, but there is no telling how deep those networks of connections went among lower officer ranks. Even though this phenomenon was most common among Germanic commanders, it is known that Basiliscus came from a Thracian family with military traditions<sup>574</sup>, and he was related to Marcian, the general of the Thrace in 473 and most importantly, emperor Leo, whose earlier military career should also not be forgotten.

In some cases those connections extended very far, giving an illusory appearance of solidarity following ethnic lines. The relationship between Aspar and the tribe of Thracian Goths is one of such examples. It is known that one of Aspar's wives was a sister-in-law of Theodoric Strabo, the leader of the Goths. Arguably this gave Aspar the ability to consider this federated tribe as his asset, however, this was again due to Aspar's familial connections and not due to some kind of common goals shared by all of Germanic ethnicity. The only instance in which that seems to have been partially the case is with the Isaurian commanders. Both Flavius Zeno and Tarasikodissa-Zeno, escaped to Isauria when facing political backlash in the capital. Obviously, they must have felt the safest among their compatriots, however, there is no telling whether it was due to them benefitting from some kind of Isaurian solidarity, or simply the fact that due to their positions of influence they had many of their clients and supporters there.

Family matters were also at the forefront of the conflict between the emperor Leo and Aspar. Leo's primary ambition, especially after 463, was to establish his dynastic legacy. Similarly, it appears that Aspar pursued his own plans to make his son, Patricius, a successor of Leo.

It seems that securing the position of the family, creating beneficial relationships with other notable clans, and establishing a legacy were major ambitions of most members of the military elite, which is no different to most groups that could be classified as aristocracy. It was one of the primary reasons that established this group's cohesion, despite its internal diversity, and the fact that its claim to status and power, military careers, were dependent on imperial nominations.

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<sup>574</sup> M. S a l a m o n, *Basiliscus cum romanis suis*, [in:] *Studia Moesiaca*, red. L. Mrozewicz, K. Ilski, Poznań 1994, p. 179–196.

## Faith and Religious Policy

One of the aspects that exemplifies Eastern Roman military elite's diversity is religion. Religious beliefs of the generals sometimes tended to follow along ethnic lines, however, there were exceptions. Most of the generals of Germanic origin are assumed to have been Arians, and that was probably the most defining factor of that group. Most Romans were Orthodox, and some were involved in religious matters and Church politics. For example, at the Council of Ephesus, general Dionysius was reported to have been interfering in some Church affairs in Cyprus<sup>575</sup>. In addition, Anatolius was chosen as Marcian's representative for the council.

Interestingly, paganism seems to have been relatively common among the military elite, regardless of anti-pagan legislation of that period. Most notable examples are *magistri militum* Flavius Zeno and Apollonius<sup>576</sup>. The latter however converted to Christianity in late 440s.

It has been argued, especially in more modern works, that religion was an important factor in at least some of the events discussed in this work. Most notably, the Arianism of Aspar has been brought up as a primary reason why the general could never assume throne and why he had such problems in promoting his son for Leo's successor. Gereon Siebigs assumed that religious differences were a major cause for the conflict between Leo and Aspar<sup>577</sup>. Those arguments are not without merit. It should be recognised that Aspar did support the side of Timothy Ailuros in the religious unrest in Alexandria, against the counsel of orthodox patriarch Gennadius. In addition, the personal piety of Leo, especially exemplified by his close reliance on the counsel of St. Daniel the Stylite is beyond question<sup>578</sup>.

Disputing all of the above is difficult, because it is a matter of fact that religion and personal faith was a major driving force behind people's action in Late Antiquity. Thus the burden of providing the evidence is on the one claiming to the contrary. That being said, while the capacity to sincere belief of those people should never be doubted, there is evidence that religious matters did not influence the dynamic of the events regarding the military elite in the East as much as it is commonly assumed. For example, Aspar was able to cooperate with emperor Marcian, who was a

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<sup>575</sup> *PLRE*, vol. II, p. 365-366 (s.v. Fl. Dionysius 13).

<sup>576</sup> There was also a case of a pagan commander Lucius, who wanted to make an attempt on emperor's life, however, was prevented by an apparition, which is recorded in *Philosophical History* of Damascius. Cf. D a m a s c i u s, *Philosophical History*, 115A; *PLRE*, vol. II, p. 692 (s.v. Lucius). However, nothing close to such an event is recorded elsewhere, Lucius is otherwise unknown, thus the historicity of the account is doubtful.

<sup>577</sup> He highlights as many as 14 instances of Aspar's involvement with religious policy. Cf. G. S i e b i g s, *Kaiser...*, p. 699-706.

<sup>578</sup> Cf. R. K o s i ń s k i, *Holiness and Power. Constantinopolitan Holy Men and Authority in the 5th Century*, Berlin 2016, p. 129-147.

pious orthodox Christian. A major part to play in choosing that same emperor was done by a pagan Zeno. Anatolius, who was pious enough to be chosen to represent Marcian in the council of Chalcedon, argued against helping fellow Christians in Armenia against Zoroastrian Persians. Son of Aspar, Ardaburius, sent his retainers to guard the body of saint Symeon the Stylite from the relic hunters, and escorted it to Antioch. There are many instances of events in which religious beliefs of involved generals did not play any part.

It appears that religion was not something that guided the development of the military elites in any considerable way. Most evidence of it being of any significance refer to singular, specific events, on an individual basis. In case of Aspar, it appears the general was a sincere believer in Arian doctrine, as he never abandoned it despite the fact it undoubtedly created problems for himself. Perhaps he saw himself as a protector of Arians in the increasingly intolerant Empire. However, there is little evidence that would indicate his attitude towards religious politics extended beyond that. His support for Timothy was likely nothing more, but a pragmatic consideration advocating for not interfering in the developing religious conflict that was taking place in Alexandria.

Ultimately, the claims that religious matters defined many aspects related to the problem of the military elite in the Eastern Roman Empire seem exaggerated. In fact, an opposite claim could be made – the military elite as a whole tended to consider religious factors as secondary, compared to military, political and dynastic considerations.

### **Closing Thoughts**

It is interesting how from the beginning of the fifth century up until the death of Leo the historical narrative on the military elite makes almost a full circle. Initially, the crisis that was the revolt of Gainas illustrated to the Eastern Roman emperor and civilian elites the danger of military commanders using their influence within the army to assume control over the state. What followed was a period when no exemplary military careers can be traced and little is known of the Eastern Roman commanders altogether, most likely because the central government tried its best to suppress them from growing ever powerful and influential. At that point it is difficult to even speak of a military elite as a group, as it seems military commanders were being appointed and relieved of commanding positions and not being able to establish any power and influence. This was possible in the early reign of Theodosius, however, as soon as the country faced wars from the 420's onwards, the situation changed. Due to the military successes a few commanders made names for themselves – most notably Plintha, Ardaburius and Areobindus.

Theodosius tried to counteract the influence of the generals by rotating them in and out of offices, as well as making extensive use of the *magistri militum vacantes*. It appears that his attempts did not prevent the members of the military from achieving positions of significance, however, they were a factor contributing to their dissatisfaction with the emperor's rule. In addition to that, the general opposed the policies of Theodosius and his minister Chrysaphius, especially in the area of foreign policy. Having common gripes and enemies, brought the members of the military closer together, creating some unlikely alliances towards the end of Theodosius' reign. At that point the military elite as a cohesive group finally emerged, and despite its diversity, its members pursued a common goal.

The death of Theodosius and the following dynastic crisis was finally a chance for the military elite to assume control. Aspar who happened to have been the only commander of the highest rank in Constantinople at that point, chose the next emperor, an officer from under his command, Marcian. Even though this lucky coincidence gave Aspar the ability to be the one making the decision, it appears the other influential generals rallied behind the newly chosen candidate. In addition, the generals entered a political alliance with Pulcheria, who gave Marcian legitimacy through marriage.

The reign of Marcian was the pinnacle of military influence over matters of the state. The emperor addressed most of the issues that the generals opposed Theodosius on. He refrained from conducting costly and bloody campaigns in faraway lands, and focused on the Empire's security and defence. Simultaneously, he cancelled any payments of tribute to Huns, however, when opportunity came, he launched offensive campaigns against them, at times personally commanding the troops. Marcian was for all intents and purposes not only a soldier emperor, but also an emperor of the soldiers. He appears to have sought the council of his generals in most matters of foreign policy, as well as guaranteed stability and development of their careers. However, despite the latter, at the end of Marcian's reign, one general and his family emerged most powerful – Aspar, with his son Ardaburius. It was again a coincidence, as most of the other powerful generals died or retired during Marcian's reign, such as Flavius Zeno, Anatolius and Apollonius (or shortly before as Areobindus). Towards the end of his reign, Marcian promoted a young Anthemius to consulate and high military offices, and married his daughter to him. It has been argued that he tried to secure his dynastic legacy through him, and simultaneously, pursue more active foreign policy, however, there is little evidence that would indicate that was really the case.

Thus, when Marcian died, the question of succession was unresolved. The decision in that matter was laid down on the hands of Aspar, yet again, however, this time due to his influence and seniority among the Constantinopolitan aristocracy. The general decided to do a similar thing to

what he had done seven years earlier, and chose another officer of medium rank who served under his command, Leo. This time, however, Aspar was unequivocally the most powerful person in the whole country. Not only the whole military elite that emerged in the latter part of Theodosius' rule was centred around Aspar, his family and followers, but his status and influence extended into civil servants and aristocrats. In effect, Leo was constrained by his general in his policy making and nominations to the offices. Even though, as the later events show, the emperor was a highly ambitious individual, at first he seems to have accepted his dependence, even if begrudgingly. It appears, however, their relationship slowly but progressively deteriorated. During the religious crisis in Alexandria regarding Timothy Ailuros, the emperor realized that he could in some cases find an ally in the Church, and with its help make decisions independently of his general. In 463 his dynastic ambitions were revitalised due to the imperial couple having a son and potential successor born. Even though the sickly child died, the event had long lasting consequences. Around 466 the emperor finally had a falling out with Aspar. One of the issues was the disagreement over the policy towards the war between the Sciri and the Goths, but more importantly, a certain Isaurian, Tarasikodissa, later known as Zeno, brought to Constantinople letters proving the betrayal of Aspar's son, Ardaburius. He was relieved of his command, and from now on Aspar was side-lined, while Leo realized his own plans. Against his general's advice, he engaged himself in the West, planting Anthemius as the Western emperor, and sending a great expedition against the Vandals in 468, under command of Basiliscus, his brother-in-law. An important role in those events was also played by the sovereign of Dalmatia, Marcellinus, who was allied with Leo. In essence, the emperor was creating a counterweight to Aspar's powerbase by placing his allies in positions of influence, also in high military offices as was the case with Basiliscus. The failure of the expedition, however, revitalised Aspar's opposition. His plots, including inciting an open rebellion and an attempt at life of Zeno, led to the emperor's political isolation. Leo agreed to Aspar's demands of designating general's son, Patricius, as his successor. However, the opposition of the Church to this and the public unrest that followed convinced Leo that he has enough support to win the confrontation. He ordered the murder of Aspar and his sons in 471. However, death of the powerful general had serious ramifications, including a riot in Constantinople of his followers and a civil war with Theodoric Strabo, which ultimately ended with Leo accepting a compromise.

The time period between 408 to 474 ended up being a very tumultuous one for the whole Mediterranean. In that time of strife, the ability for the Empire to defend itself was of utmost importance, and a capable core of military professionals commanding the armies was a necessary condition for that to be possible. However, this importance led eventually to the growth in influence and status of said commanders. With their newly-found power, the generals wanted to

be a part of decision making in how the Empire is going to be defended, especially if they felt as if the central government, as was the case with 'Theodosius' regime, did that ineptly. For the central government that was not acceptable, as the army was meant to be its tool to pursue its goals, and in the case of Theodosius, those were irreconcilable with what military elites wanted. Thus, as he tried to limit the generals' influence and keep control, the generals' opposition grew. This led to them choosing an emperor, whose goals would align with theirs – Marcian. His reign was truly the closest to what could be seen as the realisation of military elites' political programme. When he died, Aspar, who at that point was the central figure of that group, tried to continue that practice by nominating a similar candidate. Leo however turned out to be driven by his own ambition and unwilling to accept Aspar's control. When he realized he could challenge it, he did, provoking a conflict, that found a violent resolution. However, the only way he could do it was by essentially supplanting Aspar's power over the military elite by promoting his own supporters.

In the end, the dynamic of the discussed events was centred around control over the Eastern Roman Empire's military power. For the emperors it was a necessary tool of conducting politics. For the military elite it was an essential condition for keeping status and influence. At many times since the revolt of Gainas, until the butchery of 471, it was inevitable they collided.

## List of Abbreviations

AAC	Acta Archeologica Carpathica
ACUSD	Acta Classica Universitatis Scientiarum Debreceniensis
АДСВ	Античная древность и средние века
AJAH	American Journal of Ancient History
B	Byzantion. Revue internationale des études byzantines
Bsl	Byzantinoslavica. Revue internationale des études byzantines
ByzS	Byzantine Studies/Études byzantines
BZ	Byzantinische Zeitschrift
<i>CAH</i>	<i>Cambridge Ancient History</i>
Chi	Chiron. Mitteilungen der Kommission für alte Geschichte und Epigraphik des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts
ChrA	Christianitas Antiqua
<i>CJ</i>	<i>Codex Justinianus</i>
<i>CLRE</i>	<i>Consuls of the Later Roman Empire</i> , ed. R.S. Bagnall, A. Cameron, S.R. Schwartz, K.A. Worp, Atlanta 1987
CP	Classical Philology
<i>CTb</i>	<i>Codex Theodosianus</i>
EHR	English Historical Review
GRBS	Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies
Her	Hermathena. A Dublin University Review
Hi	Historia. Zeitschrift für alte Geschichte
HOJ	Histos. The On-line Journal of Ancient Historiography
IHR	International Historical Review
K	Klio. Beiträge zur alten Geschichte
L	Latomus
M	Meander. Miesięcznik poświęcony kulturze świata starożytnego
<i>MGH.AA</i>	<i>Monumenta Germaniae historica, Auctores antiquissimi</i>
Mil	Millennium. Jahrbuch zu Kultur und Geschichte des ersten Jahrtausends n. Chr

ODB	<i>The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium</i> , ed. A. Kazhdan, Oxford 1991
PH	Przegląd Historyczny
Phoe	Phoenix. Journal of the Classical Association of Canada / Revue de la Société canadienne des études classiques
PK	Prawo Kanoniczne
PL	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus, Series latina</i> , ed. J.P. Migne, Paris 1844–1880
PLRE, vol. II	Martindale J.R., <i>The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire</i> , vol. II, A.D. 395–527, Cambridge 1980.
Porph	Porphyra. La prima rivista online su Bisanzio
PP	Past and Present: A Journal of Historical Studies
RE	<i>Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft</i> , ed. G. Wissowa, W. Kroll, Stuttgart 1894–1978.
SCer	Studia Ceranea
Sem	Seminare
SF	Südost-Forschungen
Ty	Tyche. Beiträge zur Alten Geschichte, Papyrologie und Epigraphik
TAPhS	Transactions of the American Philosophical Society
USS	U Schylku Starożytności. Studia Źródłoznawcze
VP	Vox Patrum. Antyk Chrześcijański
ZPE	Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik

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