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Studies

ANCIENT HISTORY

NOTES ON FLAVIUS AETIUS, “THE LAST OF THE ROMANS”: A REPRESENTATION IN HISTORIOGRAPHY

Abstract: In this paper, classical sources of late antiquity, including writers as Olympiodorus, Sidonius Apollinaris and Procopius are being analysed to point out the significance of the Roman general and statesman Flavius Aetius in historiography fashion. With the sources often being compiled either by pagan bureaucrats or by clergymen, this paper aims to establish the tendency in which the events ascribed to Aetius are presented in the twilight of theological hagiography, hero-worshipping panegyrics and political interests. It shall be attempted to address the impact of classical writers mostly determinist evaluation of Aetius and the fate of the Roman Empire onto later, secondary sources of the 18th, 19th and early 20th century. Considering the later literature, we might state that Aetius representation is more or less typical for his age with factual information lacking and being replaced with moralistic and partially metaphysical descriptions.

Keywords: *Late Roman History, Late Antiquity, Flavius Aetius, Roman Historiography*

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INTRODUCTION

Flavius Aetius' name has been written into the annals of history mainly considering two events that changed the direction of the fading, yet powerful and eternal (later) Roman Empire. The first event is his crucial part in stopping one of the most celebrated conquerors of his time, Atilla the Hun, at the Catalaunian Plains/Campus Mauriacus in June/July 451. The Battle fought on the plains of the Champagne left a great impact on contemporary and later historiographers, even though neither a consensus on the exact location nor on a definite victor has been reached. The other crucial event regarding Aetius involved his very demise in form of murder, that, according to the main sources, was committed by the Emperor Valentinianus III. himself. The later, post-antiquity era view on Aetius in light of the contemporary sources of classical antiquity hitherto has been influenced by political, but also theological considerations and literary style and taste.

Within that spectrum, historical events and the role of the commander and statesman Aetius have, more often than not, been described as being part of a divine plan. Within that scope, such occurrences have been interpreted as an inevitable outcome of “sinful” decisions on part of the Roman state or have been attributed to Aetius' hitherto negatively narrated (and alleged) “sinful” thirst for power.

This paper seeks to shed light on how far the events, as narrated by writers as Olympiodorus, Sidonius Apollinaris, Gregorius Turonensis and Procopius have been affecting and influencing the modern-era historical interpretation in the twilight of historical facts and theological reasoning. This research therefore tries to shed a glimpse on the evaluation of Aetius' role and personality, through critically comparing the main theses of primary sources. It is assumed that Christian theology and more traditional philosophical and ethical concepts of historicity contributed to a determinist reflection in the sources in evaluating Aetius' life and his times. Given the relative multitude of primary sources that often drew upon one another, this paper prefers a rather selective approach towards the subject for the sake of brevity. Only the authors cited above will be analysed to provide the interested reader with a glimpse on the general historiographic stance. This means that the chroniclers have only been relied upon marginally. Putting into perspective primary sources of late antiquity and combining those with modern scholars' findings, we shall strive to determine a balanced view regarding the representation of the personality of Aetius in historiography, ancient and modern.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: THE TWILIGHT OF THE WESTERN ROMAN EMPIRE, ROMANS AND ROMANISED BARBARIANS IN HISTORIOGRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION

After the so-called crisis of the Empire in the middle of the 3rd century A.D. and the reformation of institutions, the army and public finances under Emperor Diocletian, the aforementioned ruler established a co-ruling mechanism, known as "tetrarchy". Economic changes, including inflation and monetary crises, grew more apparent after the 2nd century AD, leading to administrative weakness and social disintegration.¹ However, the provincial administration and public finances were newly organised in a top-down process fostering the stabilisation and distribution of state power around different centres.² Figures as Diocletian and Constantine the Great laid the foundations for the reorganisation of the Empire that led to distinct transformations in the fields of state administration, legal affairs and the economic and social composition of its population alike.³ This also accelerated the division between

the Eastern and Western half of the Empire.⁴ Whether the Roman Empire of the late 5th century, split in an Eastern and Western part since 395 A.D., underwent a transformation, as proposed by more recent historiography or went towards its decline, as alleged by an older school of historians, has been debated controversially.⁵ This severance culminated in a more formal administrative distinction between the Eastern and Western provinces in 395 AD by emperor Theodosius the Great.⁶

The Empire, in particular its Eastern part, was deeply shaken by theological disputes that often erupted in violent struggles. Besides inner-Christian theological disputes, the church, empowered by Theodosius the Great's policies, led an energetic fight to eradicate the remnants of the old, pagan religion. This movement manifested itself also in literary and historical writings and left a lasting mark to the character of the sources still available to the present day.⁷

Emperor Theodosius the Great, while following the teachings of the church, did not hesitate to continue summoning pagans upon the most noble offices. The emperor also fostered the bestowing of military positions of critical importance to capable persons of non-Roman (so-called barbarian) heritage.⁸ This policy supported the emergence of military strongmen during the 4th century AD (i.e., the likes of Arbogast, Rufinus, Aetius and others). Late antique historiography casts greater importance on the actions of individuals, connecting their respective stories to the greater narrative, either secular or metaphysical.⁹ The scarceness of historical tradition in Late Antiquity is another factor that has to be kept in mind while elaborating on that tendency.¹⁰ Accordingly, the gradual emergence of more diverse political and administrative patterns in the Eastern and Western parts of the Empire with their administrative capitals of Constantinople and Rome was detectable. Within the confines of the Tetrarchy, several regional power centres as Trier (Augusta Treverorum), Ravenna and even Serdica materialized under the control of the regional Caesars and Augusti.¹¹ Notwithstanding, the notion of Rome as *res publica*, as a historical ideal and, with growing Christian influence, the emergence of the *oikumene* as unifying subtext were never really challenged in the scope of the contemporary intellectual discourse.

¹ On the economic history of the Roman Empire and the problem of applying modern economic definitions on pre-modern economies refer to: DÉLÉAGE, A. (1945) *La capitulation du bas-empire*. Paris: Macon; DUNCAN-JONES, R. (1998) *Money and government in the Roman Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; ENSSLIN, W. (1939) "The Reforms of Diocletian". 399-405. In: *The Cambridge Ancient History, XII: The Imperial Crisis and Recovery A.D. 193-324*, Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press.; FINLEY, M. I. (1973) *The ancient economy*. Berkeley CA: Univ of California Press; GARNSEY, P. SALLER, R. (2014) *The Roman Empire: economy, society and culture*. Oakland CAL: Univ of California Press; HOBSON, M.S. (2014) "A historiography of the study of the Roman economy: economic growth, development, and neoliberalism." 11-26. In: H. Platts, J. Pearce, C. Barron, J. Lundock, and J. Yoo, (Eds.) *TRAC 2013: Proceedings of the Twenty-Third Annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference*, King's College, London 2013. London: Oxbow Books; 1999. ROSTOVTZEFF, M. I. (1926) *The social & economic history of the Roman Empire. Vol I-II*. New York NY: Biblio & Tannen Publishers.

² SOMMER 2004, 68

³ Primary Works on Diocletian and the Tetrarchy do include but are not

limited to: ALTHEIM, F. (1939) *Die Soldatenkaiser*. Frankfurt a.M. : Vittorio Klostermann; BARNES, T.D. (1982) *The new empire of Diocletian and Constantine*. Cambridge.; Cambridge University Press, BRAUER, G.C. (1975) *The age of the soldier emperors: Imperial Rome, AD 244-284*. Park Ridge N.J. : Noyes Press; CAMERON, A. (1993) *The Later Roman Empire, AD 284-430*. Cambridge, MASS.; Cambridge University Press; CORCORAN, S. (2000) *The empire of the Tetrarchs: imperial pronouncements and government, AD 284-324*. Oxford: Clarendon Press and New York, N.Y. Oxford University Press; JONES, A. H.M. (1964) *The Later Roman Empire, A.D. 284-430*. Oxford: Blackwell and Norman; WILLIAMS, S. (1997) *Diocletian and the Roman recovery*. London: Batsford.

⁴ BROWNLEY 1981, 629-642.

⁵ MARTIN 2010, 166.

⁶ SCHARF 1991: 265-272.

⁷ SCHANZ 1959, 7.

⁸ CHRISTOPHILOPOULOU 1986, 177.

⁹ CROKE/EMMETT 2007, 567-581.

¹⁰ WOODS 2009, 357-75.

¹¹ VACHKOVA 2013, 3-16.

In how far the long ongoing process of Christianisation and the resulting social and intellectual changes, were crucial for the Empire's fate, as suggested by authors as Gibbon, remains debatable.¹² From an economic-political view, the dependence of the imperial treasury on revenues gathered from the domains of prominent landowners can be counted upon as an established fact.¹³ It is necessary to evaluate the position of the landowning, mainly senatorial class to envision the social stratum of a society that was directly affected by Aetius' career. Not only was the landowning class a driving force of political events, but also the very segment of society that usually left us their accounts in historiographical form. According to Heather, those landowners partially could adapt quickly to the new centres of power in form of the Germanic invaders.¹⁴ Others, however, with the times lost their outstanding financial and political role. Given the role of those landowners as a source of revenue for the imperial treasury, and vice versa the role of the state as guarantor for their respective property rights, both sides were deeply affected by external factors. It is likely that the de facto relocation of political power, away from a centralised bureaucratic state towards military strongmen as Aetius and Stilicho, accelerated the financial and political changes within the Western Empire. Nevertheless, any conclusions that this trend led to the inevitable "downfall" of Rome, should be assessed critically.¹⁵ The landowning class in the 5th century, in reverse for the Empire providing stability, did support the imperial treasury. With the waning of central government, parts of the landowners tended to rely on powerful military men able to field large armies, capable of defending their domains. Men as Flavius Aetius or his famous predecessor Stilicho are only two of the examples within the steadily evolving mechanism of power transformation. Besides the central state, those new leaders, equipped with the means to field armies and mitigate external threats were forging the Empire's policy.¹⁶

During the rule of Emperor Arcadius as Augustus of the East (395-408) and his brother Honorius (395-423) as Augustus of the West, the late Roman state experienced an even deeper institutional upheaval. The political and financial power base of the state surged towards the East of the Empire, while migratory pressure on both entities borders was building up constantly.¹⁷ It has to be alluded, that the Empire was still perceived to be a single entity by

its contemporaries. As pointed out by Bury, the legal and ideological continuity of the Roman Empire as a single state was never impugned.¹⁸ Conflicts between East and West, in which the *magister militum* Flavius Stilicho's star was about to rise, should not be seen as an inter-state clash, but more as a dynastic struggle for power and dominance. During the rule of Theodosius, characters as Rufinus or the eunuch Eutropius (396-399) and Stilicho (395-408) exerted power in a way that probably was only matched by the Augusta Aelia Eudoxia, the wife of Arcadius, and Pulcheria, Theodosius' sister.¹⁹ The energy, ruthlessness and political success all those non-senatorial actors displayed during their rise to power would later be mirrored with much more grandeur and cunning by Aetius as the "man of the hour".

With the ascent to the throne of Valentinianus III., the Theodesian dynasty had gained a more relatively secure standing. General Constantius III., Valentinianus' father - not unlike Stilicho and Aetius and probably serving as a paragon for the latter - was appointed as co-regent and Augustus by emperor Honorius in 421 AD.²⁰ Constantinople, relying on dynastic stability and greater resources, proved capable to mitigate internal and external threats. The first half of the 5th was mostly shaped by endless foreign threats of incursion onto the Roman borders and the respective countermeasures. Henceforth arose an opportunity for actors as Stilicho and Aetius to prove themselves as defenders of the imperial order.²¹ Stilicho, the son of a Vandal, as a successful tactician rose up to the rank of *magister utriusque militum* and was bestowed with the hand of the Emperor's niece, Serena.²² Emperor Theodosius, reportedly on his deathbed, entrusted the *magister utriusque militiae* with the tutelage of his minor sons Honorius and Arcadius, which made Stilicho the de facto regent. Stilicho proved himself not only as a competent commander but also excelled in the art of diplomacy, keeping the Empires' neighbours under control through a variety of agreements.²³

When comparing Stilicho to Aetius, it must be stressed that Stilicho, just as his successor, is represented very ambivalent within the literary tradition.²⁴ The panegyric heroization by Claudius Claudianus, idealizing his patron Stilicho as a beacon of ethical values and statesmanship, conflicts with the condemning sentences of Orosius.²⁵ In historiographical comparison, it is possible to find striking parallels in both characters' positive and negative depictions. In how far such negative historical judgements reflected the general attitude within the political elite towards "barbarian outsiders" or if such sentiments were applied afterwards in a moralising tendency to justify drastic actions as the outright murder of former "Roman heroes" remains debatable. Within that context, the long ongoing process of cultural Romanisation created factors of upward social mobility for potential leaders whose families originally might have

¹² MOMIGLIANO 1954, 450-463.

¹³ ROSTOVZEFF 1957, 530.

¹⁴ HEATHER 2008: 6 (1 - 33).

¹⁵ Other references on the transformation of the Roman World do include, but are certainly not limited to: DEMANDT, A. (2013). *Zeitenwende: Aufsatze zur Spätantike*. (Berlin: De Gruyter); GOFFART W. (2010). *Barbarian Tides: The Migration Age and the Later Roman Empire*; MATHISEN, R. W. / SHANZER, D. (2016). *Romans, barbarians, and the transformation of the Roman world: Cultural interaction and the creation of identity in late antiquity*. ; WHITE, L. (1973). *The transformation of the Roman world: Gibbon's problem after two centuries*. Berkeley: University of California Press.; MITCHELL, S. (2015). *A history of the later Roman empire, AD 284-641*.; KAGAN, D. (1992). *The end of the Roman Empire: Decline or transformation?*. Lexington Mass: D.C. Heath.; LEE, A. D., (2014). *From Rome to Byzantium AD 363 to 565: The transformation of ancient Rome*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press.

¹⁶ GORDON 1960, 25.

¹⁷ VASILIEV 1964, 90.

¹⁸ BURY 1958, 18.

¹⁹ CHRISTOPHILOPOULOU 1986, 194.

²⁰ OLYMPIODORUS/BLOCKLEY, fr. X, 1 (164).

²¹ KLEIN 1983, 28-36.

²² ZOSIMUS, *Historia Nea*, IV 57 (97), V 4 (100).

²³ SCHANZ-HOSIUS 1959, 16.

²⁴ BURNS 1994, 153.

²⁵ SANCHEZ-OSTIZ 2018, 310-330.

dwelled outside of the borders of the Empire.²⁶ Modern concepts of ethnicity are not applicable to late antiquity; archaeological evidence, suggests the gradual evolvement of a multi-strata society not clearly divided among ethnic lines.²⁷ However, this should not imply that resentments against outsiders perceived as “barbarian stock” were absent completely.²⁸ It should be mentioned that an Anti-Germanic tendency present on the court of Constantinople during that epoch opposed the rise of Stilicho and other “non-Romans”. However, one has to be careful not to interpret this movement as a “nationalist” or xenophobe reaction rather than a fight for power in the upper stratum of the imperial bureaucracy.

As stressed by Nicholson, Stilicho possesses a somehow more tainted image than Aetius in historiography.²⁹ Political fractions in the East and the West of the Empire did not refrain from using its so-called barbaric enemies’ in order to solidify their respective political standings.³⁰ Without delving too deep into the intertextuality or the target audience of the authors of late antiquity, the “barbarian” argument to denounce a political foe was often applied to justify political intrigues. The circumstances leading to the murder of Stilicho are comparable to the untimely end of Aetius and may simplifying be described as a palace intrigue.³¹ Following the demise of Emperor Arcadius, he was suspected of having planned to support an usurper, Eucherius, and was slain within the sacred confines of a cathedral in Ravenna in 408 AD.³²

After the murder of Stilicho, the Goths under king Alarich laid siege to Rome, forcing the capital to pay a hefty ransom, only to sack the town after a second campaign in in 410 AD.³³ The Goths also directly interfered in Roman politics by proclaiming their own candidate Attalus as pretender in rivalry to Emperor Honorius, who was forced to move to Ravenna.³⁴ During those years, the Huns, according to traditional scholarship, consisted one of the main factors of migratory pressure towards the Roman borders.³⁵ Roman sources already do mention Hunnic warriors during the period around the battle of Adrianople in 378 AD.³⁶ While often described in a very hostile fashion, thus often resulting from the personal bias of the respective authors, the Huns have to be counted as a crucial factor in the balance of power system of late antiquity.³⁷ The role of the Huns in late Antiquity is closely intertwined with Flavius Aetius’ career as well as the developments of the late Roman Empire.³⁸ Rome, in line with traditional policy, engaged in a strategy

of balancing the Germanic and the Hunnic elements against each other.

Within this approach, the concept of Rome as a hegemonic role model, worthwhile to be emulated as an example of statesmanship by its Barbarian foes, was upheld.³⁹

AETIUS BIOGRAPHY IN THE SOURCES

Not much knowledge regarding Aetius is obtainable in the chronicles until his visibility in state and army was becoming apparent during the second quarter of the 5th century. As far as the available sources are concerned, Aetius family hailed from the provinces of Illyria or Pannonia. His father, Gaudentius, is described as a military man who, having joined as a *domesticus* rose through the staff officer ranks of the Roman army, reaching the position of *magister equitum*.⁴⁰ With Aetius’ mother being of noble Roman-Italic descent, there are speculations that his paternal line may have been of Teutonic ancestry.⁴¹ Reportedly being born in the town of Durostorum around 390-400 AD, Aetius, in line with the legal provisions of hereditary profession advancement, proceeded a military career.^{42 43}

Gregorius Turonensis, relying on the earlier author, Renatus Profuturus Frigeridus, reports that king Alaric, in 408 AD, following his successful campaign onto the Italian peninsula, demanded Roman hostages to be send to forfeit the agreement. Among that group was Flavius Aetius, who then would have been in his adolescence. Given the fact that Aetius was considered being sufficiently significant to be part of the group of young hostages, we can conclude that he must have been of substantial rank.⁴⁴ Hughes points out that Aetius’ family was accepted into the higher echelons of Roman society and was very likely a member of the inner circle around Stilicho.⁴⁵ The cognomen “Flavius”, a stressed by Mathisen, might have been honoric and has been often given to prominent figures of non-Roman descent as in the case of Flavius Stilicho.⁴⁶ After spending formative years at Alaric’s court, the young Flavius Aetius also would serve in a similar function at the Hunnic court where he befriended Rugila, one of the later co-rulers of the Huns. The source material does not allow us to inquire much deeper into the level of young Aetius’ association with the Huns. However, the ability of Aetius to establish close contacts with his former hosts and use his connections to advance his career suggests a certain level of familiarity with their customs and culture.⁴⁷

²⁶ ZICHE 2006, 255-76.

²⁷ THEUWS 2009, 283-320.

²⁸ MORALEE 2008, 55-8.

²⁹ NICHOLSON 1984, 126.

³⁰ GLUSCHANIN 1989, 224-249.

³¹ CLASSEN 1983, 45-66.

³² OLYMPIODORUS, fr. V, 2 (156), ZOSIMUS, V. 34 (117)

³³ HYDATIUS chr. V, 43 (17).

³⁴ OLYMPIODORUS, fr. X, 1, (164).

³⁵ NEMETH 1982, 63.

³⁶ STEINACHER 2017, 67-95.

³⁷ AMMIANUSMARCELLINUS XXXI, 2.1-2.11 : “Inconsultorum animalium ritu, quid honestum inhonestumve sit, penitus ignorant,…” (“... unreasoning beasts, utterly ignorant of the difference between right and wrong.”)

³⁸ HUGHES 2012, 20.

³⁹ PARKER 2010,109-132.

⁴⁰ ENSSLIN 1931, 467-502, GREGORIUS TURONENSIS, II, 8, (51).

⁴¹ CULBERTSON 1966, 54.

⁴² TOMLIN 1972, 253-278.

⁴³ IORDANES, XXXIV,176. (104).

⁴⁴ FRANK 1965, 73.

⁴⁵ HUGHES 2012, 11.

⁴⁶ MATHISEN 2006, 1011-1040.

⁴⁷ Atanasov, in his paper on Diptych No. From Monza, defends his theory that the depicted notable is indeed Flavius Aetius, depicted together with his close family. Monza draws attention to the characteristics of the main figure’s sword as probably Hunnic model. This, if correct, would show an even closer relationship with Aetius and the Huns. Refer to: Atanasov, Georgi. THE PORTRAIT OF FLAVIUS AETIUS (390-454) FROM DUROSTORUM (SILISTRA) INSCRIBED ON A CONSULAR DIPTYCH FROM MONZA. – In: STUDIA ACADEMIA ŠUMENENSIS, 1, 2014, 7-21.

Taking part in the campaigns of the western theatre of war and in Northern Africa, Aetius married into an influential senatorial family, a fact that did increase his overall standing remarkably.⁴⁸ Aetius would serve with distinction and advanced in the elite-units of the army, including the *comes domesticorum et cura palatii*.⁴⁹ Aetius rise to power intertwined with the pressure of the invading Goths under their king Alaric, but was also being coined by the complex power struggles among rivaling Roman factions of high officers, landholders and bureaucrats.⁵⁰ Appearing as an active figure in connotation with the emergence of yet another usurper in the western realms of the imperial dominions, the *primicerius notariorum* Iohannes, Aetius emerges as a successful powerbroker able to rely on his contacts with the Huns to draw on active military support from the latter.⁵¹ Emperor Honorius, passed away in 423 AD without leaving a successor. The conflict around the accession to the throne in the Western Roman Empire set the stage for Aetius' entering the realms of grand power policy.⁵²

Emperor Theodosius, favouring a dynastical solution, prepared for his own kin to succeed the throne. Valentinianus III. in accordance with the wish of emperor Theodosius II. was, despite his tender age, first proclaimed Caesar in Thessalonica.⁵³ Valentinianus' mother, Augusta Galla Placidia, contributed significantly to the rise of her son and ascended to a position of significant influence in the Western Empires. Mastering the game of statescraft and palace intrigues, she skilfully balanced powerful figures as Aetius and Bonifatius to provide stability for state and dynasty.⁵⁴ After returning to Italy with an army supplied by Constantinople under the command of Ardaburius, Valentinianus III. was acclaimed as emperor by the Senate in 425 AD.⁵⁵

While Aetius was drawn into the fight between the usurper Iohannes and Theodosius II. in Constantinople, he succeeded to keep his high standing despite his initial positioning at the losing side.⁵⁶ Aetius was, by all means, pursuing his very own interests, and was likely too powerful to be ignored as he could count on the support of the Huns. It should be stated, though, that the Huns have to be accounted not only as pawns in the game or mere mercenaries; but as an entity being able to sharply calculate and advance their own position.⁵⁷ Aetius, with his Hunnic troops, only arrived in Italy after the usurper had already been defeated and executed in Ravenna. Regardless that change of circumstances, the young commander was able to transform the changed circumstances to his own advantage.⁵⁸ This hints that Aetius was already a factor in Roman politics who could not easily be dismissed. The Imperial family would

propel his rise and his formal investiture into the highest offices but would also actively contribute towards the demise of the laureate commander.⁵⁹

The power in the Western empire, yet, was concentrated among the circle around the regent Augusta Galla Placidia and the consul Felix.⁶⁰ Aetius quickly adapted to the new circumstances and cautiously utilized his position. In the years 425-432 AD, clashing with the Franks and the Visigoths, he managed to challenge the ambitions of Rome's foes in the Gallian provinces.⁶¹ Aetius, due to his victories on the battlefield and the leverage he possessed over the Huns was not only exonerated, but also was awarded administrative honours, becoming *comes et magister militum per Gallias*. After his crushing of the Visigoths in 426 AD and the Franks in 428 AD, empress Galla Placidia awarded him the rank of *magister militum praesentalis*. Aetius, with the times became keen to advance towards a stronger position and in this process developed aspirations that started threatening the powerful circles around the empress. We have to recall that Aetius military might relied on a massive force of Huns, whose services he secured most skilfully in his fights against the foe, domestic and foreign.⁶² With that advantage, Aetius, in a stronger position than ever, directly confronted his rivals in Italy and North Africa, namely Felix, the *magister militum praesentalis*, and Bonifatius who, with the support of Galla Placidia, had gathered a powerbase in Italy and Northern Africa and had risen to the rank of *comes Africae*. Rigid in his quest for power and total control, he proved himself able to dispose of the *magister militum praesentalis* and consul Felix in 430 AD. Through the instigation of a military revolt, Aetius managed to dispose of Felix, who was slain by his own soldiers.⁶³

The following years were characterized by a fierce power struggle between Aetius and Bonifatius. The latter having been declared as enemy of the state, owing to Aetius political intrigues, did yet possess a position that could be judged as advantageous. Bonifatius could rely on the important African provinces as his recluse. Galla Placidia strove to foster Bonifatius as counterweight towards Aetius influence which led to the ultimate confrontation only one of the rivals would survive. Depriving Africa of military sources that led to the loss of the province to the Vandals, Bonifatius opted to return to Italy, willing to confront his foe. The culminating battle at Ariminum in 432 AD between both parties, according to Olympiodorus led to a victorious outcome for the forces of Bonifatius. The victor could not harvest the fruits of his success as he perished from an unnamed illness shortly afterwards. Other sources, however, count the battle as a draw or even a victory for Aetius. Whatever the circumstances, Aetius already seems to have had a standing so mighty within the Western Empire that a military defeat alone insufficient to circumvent his rise.⁶⁴

⁴⁸ MOMMSEN 1901, 516-547.

⁴⁹ GREGORIUS TURONENSIS, II, 7, (48), GREGORIUS TURONENSIS, II, 8 (51).

⁵⁰ OLYMPIODORUS, fr. X, 2 (166).

⁵¹ PROCOPIUS, History of the Wars III. Iii. ,4-10 (36).

⁵² PRISCUS, fr. 8, 80 (31).

⁵³ OLYMPIODORUS fr. XL, 2 (106).

⁵⁴ OLYMPIODORUS, fr. XXXIII, 1 (196).

⁵⁵ ZOSIMUS, fr. XLIII,1 (206).

⁵⁶ STICKLER 2002, 35.

⁵⁷ HEATHER 2009, 214.

⁵⁸ CHRONICA GALLICA, OL CCC II, 100 (658).

⁵⁹ DUNN 2018, 21-34.

⁶⁰ MOMMSEN 1901, 516-547.

⁶¹ HYDATIUS chr. II, 98 (22).

⁶² GREGORIUS TURONENSIS, II, 8 (51).

⁶³ IOHANNES ANTIOCHENUS, Fr. 224,2 (406), HYDATIUS chr. VI, 94 (22).

⁶⁴ On the conflicting sources regarding the outcome of the battle of

In the same year, 432 AD, the office of consul was entrusted upon Flavius Aetius for the first time. Aetius proved himself unique in being capable of combining military power with diplomatic and politic cunning within the confines of the state mechanism; he did not desire being reduced to the role of a usurper. As stressed by Wijennadaele, Bonifatius was capable to pursue his political ambitions without resorting to the classical means of a military uprising against the throne, a behaviour displayed so frequently in the Empire's history.⁶⁵ Aetius might have calculated that it was much wiser to take advantage from the institutions of the state than revolting against it. This did not spell that the generalissimo was sufficiently competent to solve the security concerns of the Western Empire as a whole. As Aetius continued to excel, the financial sources became more and more strained and the Imperial government struggled to cope with continuing military constraints, especially in the Gallian and Hispanic provinces. Whether the pendulum shifted adversely for the Romans due to the general financial and security situation or whether the proximity to the south of Gaul was a factor for the more widespread uprisings against central power and Gothic invasions remains unclear.

Against all odds, Aetius was adept to enlist the help of his Hunnic allies in his quest for dominance and control. Returning to the court of king Rua/Rugila, intending to gain military support, he was apt to secure the assistance of his youth companion. Allegedly having promised the Huns control over Pannonia, after defeating the Goths at Arelate, he returned to Ravenna on the head of an army.⁶⁶ Aetius military success, coupled with his outsmarting of his rivals contributed to his exalted position and made him an important cornerstone for the Western Empire. In 433 AD his rise continued with the title of *magister utriusque militiae/magister militum*, (roughly equivalent to commander in chief) conferred upon him. Hydatius explains that he was conferred the title of *dux utriusque militiae* in 431 AD and *patricius* in 434 AD; he was also granted the office of consul for the second time in 437 AD.⁶⁷ The power struggle between Aetius and his foes, however played a devastating role for the Empire in terms of stability; the long-term results, from a later perspective, seem partially to overshadow successes as his victories against the Burgundians, Goths and Bagaudic elements during the 430s, remarkably his defeat of the rebelling Burgundians in 436.⁶⁸

Pushing back Gothic forces who headed for the south of Gaul, Aetius and his lieutenant, the *dux* Litorius, managed to secure the status quo ante; Aetius also seems to have been hold a leading role in controlling the Bagaudic revolts around

437 AD.⁶⁹ The Western Empire, meanwhile, became affected adversely by events as the fall of Carthage in 439 AD and the final loss of significantly important African provinces to the Vandals in 442 AD.⁷⁰ Aetius accomplishments in the Western theatre were untouched by that situation; contemporary sources do not link him to those failures and tend to blame emperor Valentinianus III.⁷¹ Iohannes Antiochenus' judgement that Aetius was controlling the Imperial court in Ravenna does not seem to be an exaggeration, his continued anointment with the consulship in 446 and 454 prove that he was much more than just a titular office holder.⁷² Aetius de-facto controlled Western Rome's foreign policy, but was also responsible to rush to help wherever the Empire was in danger.

The back-and-forth power struggle between Rome and its foes cannot be interpreted from a modern viewpoint of territorial control in sense of a nation state. Within that scope, the rise of Hunnic influence in terms of hegemonic capabilities converted into a decisive factor for Aetius' diplomatic stance vice-versa the Huns. The diplomatic repercussions between the Huns and both parts of the Roman Empire usually are described as a mix of bargaining, tributary payments and military threats by the Hunnic side.⁷³ With the death of emperor Theodosius and the eastern emperor Marcian's more aggressive stance towards the Huns, the latter started to impose pressure on Roman *foederati* subsequently starting larger raids into Roman territory, triggering Aetius to react.⁷⁴

United with his former foes, the Visigoths, as allies, Aetius accomplished to push back a Hunnic invasion at the Catalaunic Plains/ Campus Mauriacus in 451.⁷⁵ The Goths support would prove crucial on the battlefield, while the Franks also did join the Roman side. While the famous battle and the supposed tactical victor have long been debated, the final outcome, shown different in the sources, culminated either in the Huns retreat or, their outright defeat. Gregorius Turonensis claims, that Atilla fled the battlefield and that the king of the Goths, Theoderic, fell during the fierce combat.⁷⁶ Yet, Atilla was still mighty enough to ravage through the plains of Northern Italy. Aetius is not known to have assumed a major role during the following diplomatic events; the sources rather concentrate on the efforts of Pope Leo I. in parlaying with Atilla. In 453AD, following the unexperienced death of their king Atilla, the Huns retreated eastwards and the Roman Empire with Aetius at its helm was able to steer the ship of the state towards quieter waters. The victorious commander strove for even higher honours, when his son was bestowed with the hand of the emperors' youngest daughter, Placidia.⁷⁷ Mommsen conflates Flavius

Ariminum and the power struggle between Aetius and Bonifatius refer to: FREEMAN, E. A. (1887) "Aetius and Boniface" *The English Historical Review*, (2)7, 417-465.; HUMPHRIES, M. (2017) "Italy in the Fifth Century" In: *The Encyclopedia of Ancient Battles*, 1-8. WIJENNADAELE, J.W.P. (2015) *The last of the Romans: Bonifatius-warlord and comes Africae*. London: Bloomsbury.

⁶⁵ WIJENNADAELE 2015, 526.

⁶⁶ HYDATIUS chr. VI. 92 (21).

⁶⁷ HYDATIUS chr. X. 103 (22); HYDATIUS chr. XIII. 110 (23).

⁶⁸ CHRONICA GALLICA, OL CCC II, 118 (660). In: Chronica Gallica A. CCCCLII et DXI Mommsen (ed.), (Berlin-Weidmann 1892) -(Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Chronica minora, Saec. . IV. V. VI. VII. T.)HYDATIUS chr. II, 108 (22).

⁶⁹ CHRONICA GALLICA, OL CCC II, 634 (664).

⁷⁰ DIESNER 1962, 97-111.

⁷¹ CHRONICA GALLICA, OL CCC II, 129 (660).

⁷² IOHANNES ANTIOCHENUS frg. 201,3.

⁷³ NEMETH, 1982, 89.

⁷⁴ MOMMSEN 1901, 516-547.

⁷⁵ IORDANES, XXXVI,192 (108). ; IORDANES XXXVIII, 197 (109).

⁷⁶ GREGORIUS TURONENSIS II, 7, (50).

⁷⁷ Chr. Min. 1,483.

Aetius' revered position, having achieved the consulate for three times, as "de-facto regent" of the realm.⁷⁸

The death of Aetius has been discussed controversially in historiography. The fact that Aetius has to be counted among the most powerful men in the Western Empire remains undisputed. The certitudes may be condensed in a way that intrigues at the imperial court at Ravenna, involving courtiers, eunuchs and rival senators, led emperor Valentinianus to the conclusion to assess Aetius as a direct threat to his throne. That the emperor had a direct role in Aetius demise seems also to be undisputed; besides that, the former consul and senator Maximus is shown to have been a driving factor.⁷⁹ In some sources the emperor himself is being portrayed as the direct perpetrator; summoning his general to the court, he allegedly arraigned his general with treason and, reportedly infuriated, charged upon the generalissimo, killing him with several sword blows to his head.⁸⁰ Other accounts do confirm the emperors leading role in the disposal of Aetius. In that storyline, Valentinianus starts grasping that he might have removed the sole person who might have been able to support imperial throne and guarantee his own rule. He was said, to have cut his "right hand with his left".⁸¹ As result, the sources point out that the emperor, who slew his own brother in law, was murder by a faithful companion of Aetius in 455 AD.⁸² Here the fact, that the condottieri of the 5th century were used to enlist personal bodyguards, the "Bucelarii" as an element of power politics prove to have caused drastic results.⁸³ As demonstrated on the example of the Germanic, specifically Gothic and Hunnic fellowship of men as Stilicho and Aetius, the monopoly of using military force was not only restings in the realms of power of Rome and Constantinople. The element of faithful bodyguards who pledged allegiance only to their commander rather than the state was of course a factor of power struggles and the outright emergence of parallel structures, but was usually presented in the storyline of contemporary authors as result of supernatural justice.

ZOSIMUS AND HIS HISTORIA NEA: A POINT OF REFERENCE FOR THE DETERMINISTIC SCHOOL IN HISTORIOGRAPHY

Among the main sources of the late Roman Empire, the *Historia Nea* (Ἱστορία Νέα) deserves to be cited as a reference point for the tendency in late Roman historiography to showcase the string of events as a logical flow, following deterministic and providential patterns. Zosimus (491-518 AD), part of the higher administrative elite of the late Empire, hold the title of *comes*. Zosimus is likely to have studied law and as *advocatus fisci* specialized on tax and financial matters. Zosimus lived and wrote during the rule of Emperor Anastasius (491-518). As a pagan, his harsher judgement and ridiculing of historical and natural occurrences that were assessed as God-given by Christian

authors is in line with contemporary polemics. Nevertheless, Zosimus himself was not a stranger to metaphysical concepts and their interpretation as within the confinement of the historical logos. Zosimus' logical and reasoning attitude has to be evaluated from his well-versed knowledge of classical philosophy; it is also not likely that his mind-set was sharpened by the systematic study of the law. Among the authors' important sources, we may cite Olympiodorus and Eunapius, whose worldviews are partially reflected in his text, but also Herodotus and Polybius.⁸⁴

Zosimus' critical stance towards court intrigues, the role of the Christian clergy and the eunuchs at the court was duly reflected in his critical stance towards the emperors and the dilapidated state institutions. Correspondingly just as Olympiodorus and his contemporaries, the negative description of female power holders as Galla Placidia is another characteristic of his general inclination.⁸⁵ In his *Historia Nea* the author created a chronic of the times and reigns of the emperors on from the times of the great Augustus; likewise Ammianus, he belonged to the non-Christian intellectual elite. Hitherto, his deterministic view on the deceleration of the Roman state power does transfer an open Anti-Christian attitude. Zosimus openly blames the gradual abandonment of the old traditions for the Empire's envisaged demise. While his literary style is not as eloquent as the one of Ammianus Marcellinus, he engages in detailed descriptions of events and circumstances and remains among the most cited sources of the late Roman Empire.⁸⁶ Zosimus, in the judgement of his successors, is praised for his clear and concise language and provides an original take on the dawn of Rome's power. In the surviving work of Zosimus, only Aetius' role as hostage to Alarics court is mentioned in detail.⁸⁷ His choice of language, style and brevity might very well have been influenced by his position as *comes et advocatus fisci*, as a man of the law, his take on historical events does mirror the evaluating mindset of the jurispudent. Taking into account the sources for the deterministic nature of Roman history writing, Goffart lists Zosimus as "First Historian of Rome's Fall". He puts Zosimus in a direct comparison with Gibbon, in lieu of their clearly deterministic ideology.⁸⁸ Indeed, Zosimus' motivation for his historical body of work is self-described as being motivated by the wish to bear witness to the loss of the Roman Empire due to the "own crimes" of the Romans.⁸⁹ This openly critical viewpoint not only towards an individual, but towards a society as represented by the state and its institutions is remarkable in its historic judgement and provides evidence for the deterministic tendency in his books. Furthermore, his frequent references to oracles and supernatural events are a reflection of literary tradition as well as the pagan

⁸⁴ SCAVONE 1970, 57-67.

⁸⁵ RIDLEY 1972, 277-302.

⁸⁶ On Zosimus refer to: RIDLEY, R.T. (1972) *Zosimus the historian; SCAVONE, D.C. (1969) Zosimus, Greek Historian of the Fall of the Roman Empire. An Appraisal of his Validity and Merits; Goffart, W. (1971). Zosimus, The First Historian of Rome's Fall.; Cameron, A. (1969). THE DATE OF ZOSIMUS' NEW HISTORY. ; Thompson, E. A. (1956). Zosimus on the end of Roman Britain. Antiquity.*

⁸⁷ ZOSIMUS, V, 36,1 (118).

⁸⁸ GOFFART 1971, 412-441.

⁸⁹ ZOSIMUS, I, 57,1 (18).

⁷⁸ MOMMSEN 1901, 516-547.

⁷⁹ PROCOPIUS, *History of the Wars*, III, 4, 24 (40).

⁸⁰ IOHANNES ANTIOCHENUS, *Fr.* 224,2 (406).

⁸¹ PROCOPIUS, III, 4, 27-28 (40)

⁸² SIDONIUS APOLLINARIS *Sidonii Carminum, Panegyricus V*, 305 (86).

⁸³ DIESNER 1972, 321-350.

and philosophical worldview, but have been criticised as superstitious and result of intellectual decadence by later historians as Ernest Stein.⁹⁰ Notwithstanding, the syncretic intertwining of metaphysical events in the interpretation of pagan and Christian authors should not be condemned from a modern perspective; religious as well as literary traditions continued to intermingle and the supernatural explanation of historical occurrences was not deemed as unusual.⁹¹

SIDONIUS APOLLINARIS — PANEGYRICS AND REFLECTIONS

Sidonius Apollinaris (431-489 AD), hailing from a Gallo-Roman family of notables embraced the clerical profession and can be counted among the scions of an influential lineage. In the course of his life he reached the ecclesial honours of becoming a bishop. Sidonius has left us prose as well as his letters which do form a literary source on the calamities that befell the late Western Roman Empire.⁹² His letters and panegyrics characterise him as a man of classical writing and the letters, dwelling upon a well-founded education. As a posthumously canonised representative of the local Gallo-Roman upper class and a man of god, he easily excelled within the realms of diplomacy and statesmanship.⁹³

Kaufmann stresses that Sidonius rather aspired to leave an account of his literary qualities to posterity than compiling a historical work. This reflects on his selective attitude towards his literary subjects; the wish for stylistic perfection trumps over the historical quality. Sidonius' oeuvre is certainly a valuable reflection of his time and the events he bore witness to; however, the reader has to be alert not to assign a value to great to stylistic constructions in perspective to their historical interpretation.⁹⁴ In other words, Sidonius strove to construct literary figures and incorporated historic events into his oeuvre if it befitted his stylistic concerns.

Sidonius emphasises the historical deeds of the Gallo-Roman usurper Avitus and paints a heroic picture of the latter's actions. Having married Avitus' daughter, it was quite natural that Sidonius was prone to support his father-in-law's ascent to the imperial throne in 455 AD. Nevertheless, in his later works, due to the failure of Avitus' short-lived rule, Sidonius chose to suppress utterly idealizing references towards the latter.⁹⁵ This does not mean that Sidonius took an openly negative stance towards the late emperor. Notwithstanding, the panegyrist tendency in his later texts is transferred towards emperor Maiorian. Aetius, in comparison to the usurper Avitus, is presented quite colourless. Therefore, Sidonius clearly seeks to employ his panegyric abilities in favour of his imperial masters rather than to praise the late generalissimo. From a literary perspective, we might even be able to spot parallels between Sidonius' panegyrics and the technique Stilicho's panegyrist,

Claudius Claudianus, chose to glorify his patron. This was not an unique stance for the age as Olympiodorus, too, presented a positive picture of Stilicho.⁹⁶

Sidonius, in his panegyrics, alleges that while Aetius did gain glory on the battlefield, he could have done so only because of his close companionship to Maiorianus.⁹⁷ The latter is even judged to have been a soldier more talented than his former master.⁹⁸ It is noteworthy that the former *magister militia per Galliam*, Avitus (r. 455-456), who also donned the imperial purple, is assigned many character traits originally attested to Aetius by other authors.⁹⁹ The same can be said regarding Sidonius' description of Aetius relationship to one of his other lieutenants, namely the future emperor Maiorianus.¹⁰⁰ In his *Carmina*, Sidonius uses the medium of a panegyric to praise the deeds of the future emperor and then aide-de-camp Maiorinus, presenting the latter as an utmost loyal persona, whose' only passion is loyalty to his commander Aetius as well as to his supreme lord, the emperor himself.¹⁰¹ Depicting Maiorinus to an ideal civil servant, Aetius' importance for the state machinery is duly reflected and Maiorinus glorification is justified literally.¹⁰² Aetius' wife is introduced as a negative person, being responsible for awakening jealousy towards her husband's staff officer. Allegedly, due to those unfounded allegations, Aetius dismissed Maiorianus from service, for a short, but critical time.¹⁰³ Aetius' untimely fate, his death by the sword of the emperor is presented as a result of the alleged and literary overstretched dismissal of his loyal ally, Maiorianus.¹⁰⁴ A deterministic tendency in descriptive form is detectable in Sidonius works and can be identified as being in line with other contemporary authors as Olympiodorus, Zosimus and Ammianus.¹⁰⁵ In the historical context, the reason why Aetius acts as -though misguided but neutral to positive- role model in this panegyric is quite apparent: Sidonius wrote his oeuvre to honour the first consulate and the ascent to the throne of Maiorianus in 457 AD. Therefore, the transformation of literary fame from the late Aetius towards his former subordinate seems logical.

Aetius, the de-facto co-ruler of the Western Empire in reality was quite unlikely the fading figure, craving for Maiorianus' or Avitus' support, as represented in Sidonius' works. In retrospective, it might be established that Aetius served as a mirror-like figure to reflect Maiorianus fame; but given Aetius long years of successful leadership, the authors felt the need to revert the narrative. This switching of images,

⁹⁰ STEIN 1959, 259.

⁹¹ MOREIRA 2000, 115.

⁹² SCHANZ-HOSIUS 1959, 45.

⁹³ SIVAN 1989, 85-94.

⁹⁴ KAUFMANN 1864, 13.

⁹⁵ MATHISEN 1979, 165-171.

⁹⁶ Regarding speculations that Olympiodorus and Claudius Claudianus might have been the same author: FLETCHER, D. T. (2009) "Whatever Happened to Claudius Claudianus?" *The Classical Journal*, (104)3, 259-273.

⁹⁷ SIDONIUS APOLLINARIS Sidonii Carminum, Panegyricus VII, 230 (138).

⁹⁸ "...qui, quamquam celsus in armis, nil sine te gessit, cum plurima tute sine illo."

⁹⁹ HANAGHAN 2017, 262-280.

¹⁰⁰ SIDONIUS APOLLINARIS Sidonii Carminum, Panegyricus V, 120-155 (70-71).

¹⁰¹ SIDONIUS APOLLINARIS Sidonii Carminum, Panegyricus V, 120-155 (70-71).

¹⁰² "erat ille quod olim quaestor consulibus".

¹⁰³ SIDONIUS APOLLINARIS Sidonii Carminum, Panegyricus V, 290 (84).

¹⁰⁴ SIDONIUS APOLLINARIS Sidonii Carminum, Panegyricus V, 305 (86).

¹⁰⁵ "Principis interea gladio lacrimabile fatum clauserat Aetius;".

from a post-hoc perspective, in fact underlines Aetius' real importance and his larger-than-life standing during his era.

The same literary technique had been used by Sidonius in his earlier Panegyrics dedicated to Avitus. Here, Aetius is presented as broken, unable to control the Gothic wrath and dependant on paying tribute or bribes to the foes of Rome.¹⁰⁶ Clearly, Rome is in need of a shining hero. This characterization becomes even more severe: Aetius, retiring over the Alps with a meagre force of auxiliaries and unable to retain the support of the Goths, is construed as "perplexed" man who, with a "wavering hearts" desperately appeals to Sidonius erstwhile champion, Avitus, to save the day.¹⁰⁷ As known, the author was not very keen in dwelling upon this subject in his later texts. Notwithstanding, the Carmina should not be understood as an "Anti-Aetius" polemic, but rather as a literary construct that adapted its reflections according to the changing nature of power and client relationships. Sidonius, the lyricist with historic tendencies, could clearly hope to profit from his imperial patrons if he illuminated their deeds in the same glory as the slain consul Aetius would be remembered by later generations.

From the post-perspective, it can be concluded that the panegyric, a long honoured literary tradition in Roman poetry and historiography, was employed to idealise military strongmen in their service to the state. The panegyric speech, in relation to emperors, had reached a nearly inflationary nature and has to be regarded as a part of the court ceremonies, a ritual act of submission and loyalty.¹⁰⁸ Panegyrics, as a historical source, have to be interpreted accordingly. Whether dealing with Stilicho, Aetius of Maiorianus as heroes, the respective *topoi* remained the same with ever-changing actors. The style employed by Sidonius Apollinaris, as indicated by Grupe, does display the characteristics of the Latin as employed by bureaucrats, more specifically lawyers.¹⁰⁹ Given Sidonius' educational and societal background, this seems in line with his social role as leading clergyman.

Aetius death, in Sidonius text, is presented as the result of a palace intrigue. Just like Iohannes Antiochenus, Sidonius does attribute the heroes' demise to a "mad eunuch".¹¹⁰ According to Sidonius Appolinaris, Maximus, a powerful eunuch, the primicerius sacri cubiculi (chamberlain) Heraclius had started to conspire against the successful warlord who had threatened the standing of the courtiers at the imperial court in Ravenna.¹¹¹ The act of murder itself is not dwelled upon in lengths, but Aetius demise is shown as being of utmost importance with long-term consequences. Sidonius concludes that Aetius demise was more or less equal with the deterioration of Roman political power, implying metaphysical connotations. Heavenly signs and mystical connotations are a pattern of antique historical literature

¹⁰⁶ SIDONIUS APOLLINARIS Sidonii Carminum, Panegyricus VII, 300 (144).

¹⁰⁷ SIDONIUS APOLLINARIS Sidonii Carminum, Panegyricus VII, 325-340 (146).

¹⁰⁸ OMISSI 2018, 60.

¹⁰⁹ GRUPPE 1892, 15.

¹¹⁰ SIDONIUS APOLLINARIS Sidonii Carminum, Panegyricus VII, 360 (148).

¹¹¹ SIDONIUS APOLLINARIS Sidonii Carminum, Panegyricus V, 305 (86).

that were transferred from pagan motifs to Christian authors under slightly changed subtexts. Philosophy and Christianity were not interpreted as utterly incompatible, but shared common motifs that could be set into perspective from a theological viewpoint.¹¹² Within that scope, Sidonius opts to link Aetius death with a pre-destined subtext, pointing to Rome's inevitable fate. The deterministic motif is employed with Sidonius referring to "twelve flying vultures" as omen of fateful events to take place shortly after the act of murder.¹¹³ Here, the author, well versed in interpretation of the classics, refers to the chronological recurrence of the legendary foundation of Rome twelve centuries ago in 753 B.C. and its close traversal with the death of Aetius in 454 AD.¹¹⁴

When Sidonius composed his Carmina he could not possibly have known that the Western Roman State in its present form would "come to its end", at least in the judgements of later historians. On the contrary, it is quite likely that neither Sidonius nor his fellow historians of late antiquity saw a clear connotation between change in imperial rule and the end of Roman power per se. Given the continuity of elements of Roman statecraft, institutions and philosophy after 476 AD -a date assigned its fateful importance by later generations- the "end" of direct imperial rule was likely not perceived by the contemporaries as clear cut. The Empire as concept, whether governed from Rome, Ravenna or Constantinople continued to exist, and from a legal as well of a political standpoint was not questioned in its existence.¹¹⁵ However, notable events as the death of Aetius or grand-scale enemy invasions were judged as sign of a general deterioration of state power that could either be interpreted as straying away from Roman greatness in classical philosophic tradition or be evaluated as signs of the end of days from a Christian perspective. Sidonius, as a Christian who still easily could commensurate classical literary motifs with his beliefs, treated Aetius as a historical figure whose direct presence was still close to his own life and times. Being a man of letters, not bound by later judgement, Aetius, while important, poses a mere metaphor for the author who easily transfers the motif of greatness from the *magister militum* to persons as Avitus or Maiorianus due to stylistic and political concerns.

GREGORIUS TURONENSIS, AETIUS' PANEGYRIST AND THE FRAGMENTS OF FRIGERIDUS

Hailing from noble stock, a Gallo-Roman family of landed senatorial aristocracy, Gregorius Turonensis (538-594), born as Gregorius Florentinus, is an example of the remnants of Roman political and intellectual tradition during the consolidation of Frankish rule. After having being cured from a severe illness, Gregorius took the holy vows and subsequently advanced in the hierarchy of the church, up unto the office of bishop in his native Augusta

¹¹² MORLET 2019, 17-32.

¹¹³ "...iam prope fata tui bis senas vultures alas complebant..."

¹¹⁴ STANLEY 1963, 237-249.

¹¹⁵ KRAUTSCHICK 1986, 344-371.

Turonum. The spiritual background of his motivation to join the ranks of the clergy may have been real or merely constructed as befitting from a moral-literary standpoint; it was a fact, though, that the church offered the scion of a revered Roman family the possibility to advance a career worthy for his social class.¹¹⁶ His style does reveal a well-founded knowledge of the classics and deep familiarity with the scriptures of the church. Gregorius' religious writings are contemplating on the interpretation of the holy scripture and the lives of the saints, a tendency still visible in secular historical texts.¹¹⁷ The authors' *Historia Francorum*, one of the primary sources on Aetius, strives to provide a chronic of the Frankish rule in Gaul, providing further important insides to the dawn of direct Roman rule in Gaul during the 5th century.¹¹⁸ Gregorius did enjoy a respectable standing at the Frankish-Merovingian court and is known to have successfully intermediated among rivalling tribal princes.¹¹⁹ Besides being on amicable terms with the learned clergy and poets of his era, he also did maintain connections with the chair of St. Peter in Rome and is said to have been in close relation to Pope Gregor I. (the Great).¹²⁰

Gregorius Turonensis writing several generations after the events, did draw his knowledge from a number of sources, including the writers Orosius and Sidonius Apollinaris. In contrast to the latter, his textual hero is the Consul Aetius and not the Emperor. His compendium does also preserve lost sources which are critical for the historical evaluation of Flavius Aetius, namely the *Historiae* by Rhenanus Profuturus Frigeridus.¹²¹ As Frigeridus' works do only survive in fragmentary form, it is not really possible to detect in how far Gregorius Turonensis writings in terms of content and style were influenced by Frigeridus., The lack of an emperor figure besides Justinianus and his successors in Constantinople made it possible for Gregorius to compose his writings in relation to Aetius without having to take into account direct political repercussions. As a Christian writer, he would be more concerned about integrating the events into a narrative coherent with the Gospels and the theological confines of his times. Gregorius political concerns were more related to the unfolding, often bloody struggles at the Frankish court and the direct repercussions on him and his circle, coupled with his standing in the church hierarchy.¹²²

From that standpoint, the Aetius figure in Gregorius' does not appear as an active factor but more as a resting pole to which history can be related to. Due to his decisive role in beating back the Huns, a historical event noted as most significant by Gallo-Roman sources, the positive tendency in which the relevant texts reflect upon the

patricius Aetius appears consistent and sincere.¹²³ The much more closer temporal proximity to Aetius by Gregorius' direct source Frigeridus is possible to have had influenced the interpretation in the *Historiae*; Stickler speculates that Frigeridus himself was likely a contemporary of Aetius.¹²⁴ From a textual perspective, Gregorius is giving the reader a sympathetic and positive image of Aetius, embracing the tendency that was drawn by his forbearer. Namely, Aetius is presented as a most noble character, a skilled soldier, statesman and diplomat who does not allow himself to be misled by ill-fated advisors.¹²⁵ Aetius is described in verses containing imaginary of religious hopes and destiny; countering the dark image of Atilla the Hun, Aetius does appear as a saint-like figure, hopes of salvation and deliverance are attributed onto him in invoking various saints.¹²⁶ Aetius shines as the saviour of the realm, his wife, Pelagia, in striking contrast to the negative image as drawn by the author Sidonius, is presented as pious woman praying day and night for her husbands' as well as the Empire's safety.¹²⁷ The story is decorated with miraculous stories of saints that mysteriously appear in the basilica to answer Aetius wife's prayers in order to enhance the dramatic impression upon the reader.¹²⁸ Gregorius' language is well versed, textually and chronologically largely in line with the works of writers as Iordanes and Iohannes Antiochensis, deeply reflecting the religious reminiscences and intentions of the author.¹²⁹ Negative connotations are absent in the characterization of the military strongman Aetius. Regarding Atilla, Aetius is presented by Iohannes Antiochenus as Rome's natural foe who seeks to eliminate his shining rival in order to subjugate the Western part of the Empire.¹³⁰ Furthermore, Valentinian III. sister, Honoria (Placidia's daughter) is presented in a quite unfavourable light, conspiring with Atilla against her imperial brother. Regardless of the negative connotations towards Honoria, the shining image of Aetius as Atilla's future vanquisher is underlined by the author; this tendency seems to have been inspired by the authors predecessors, namely Olympiodorus and Priscus on whom he relied heavily.

During the usurpation of Iohannes, who never gained recognition from emperor Theodosius in Constantinople, the young *curapatii* Aetius in his function as envoy was being send off to the Huns to gather military support. Nonetheless, Aetius' switching of sides after his masters short-lived reign came to an end is not presented negatively in the *Historia Francorum*. Aetius does appear not merely a successful soldier, but an ideal servant of the *res publica*, incorporating traditional Roman deeds and Christian

¹²³ NONN 1998, 82-94.

¹²⁴ STICKLER 2002, 21.

¹²⁵ GREGORIUS TURONENSIS, X, II, 7 (49).

¹²⁶ GREGORIUS TURONENSIS, Gregorii Episcopi Turonensis, Libri Historiarum X, II, 7, (48) In: Gregorii Episcopi Turonensis, Libri Historiarum X, Krusch et Levison (ed.), (Hannover:Hahn 1951) (Monumenta Germaniae Historica, *Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum, Tomi 1 Pars 1*).

¹²⁷ GREGORIUS TURONENSIS X, II, 7, (50).

¹²⁸ "Uxor is Aeti lacrimas diutius sustenire non patior. Petit enim assidue, ut virum suum de Gallis reducatur incolorem, cum aliud exinde fuisset apud divinum iudicium praefinitum, sed tamen obtenui inmensam pietatem pro vita illius."

¹²⁹ „Suspiciabatur enim per domini misericordiam Aetium advenire...”

¹³⁰ IOHANNES ANTIOCHENUS, fr. 223,2 (405) ; "Atilla vero cum paucis reversus est..."

¹¹⁶ On the subject of institutional continuity of late Roman Senatorial families refer to: HALDON, J. (2004) "The fate of the late Roman senatorial elite: extinction or transformation?" 179-234. In: J. Haldon and L. I. Conrad (Eds.) *Elites Old and New in the Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East: Papers of the Sixth Workshop on Late Antiquity and Early Islam*. Princeton: Darwin Press.

¹¹⁷ KITCHEN 2015, 375-426.

¹¹⁸ HEINZELMANN 2001, 106.

¹¹⁹ THORPE 1974, XI.

¹²⁰ LOEBELL 1869, 13.

¹²¹ HEINZELMANN 2001, 107.

¹²² WOOD 1993, 253-270.

ruminations. The battle on the Catalaunian Plains 451 AD is narrated as outright Roman victory, Aetius is praised as an undisputed leader who routs Atilla and collects the booty after combat ceases.¹³¹ The Hunnic raids into Northern Italy, in contrast, are merely shown as a side episode during an unordered retreat; any unfavourable or weak representations of Aetius are utterly omitted. Gregorius, in his histories, adds more detail into what Frigeridus had to say about Aetius. Elaborating on Flavius Aetius' noble family background and the time he spent as hostage on the courts of the Goths and the Huns, he underlines the general's qualifications in stressing his service with the palace guards, a sign of noble upbringing and bright career prospects. Frigeridus, as transmitted by Gregorius, provides his readers with an utterly spotless depiction of Aetius' appearance and character, recalling him to have been intelligent, energetic, soldier like, magnanimous and not prone to flattering and wrong advice.¹³² Most interesting is a closer analysis of the statement that it was seemingly apparent from his earliest youth on that Aetius was destined by fate to hold a leading position with the state and that he was a promising young man upon whom fortune was quite likely to shine upon benignly.¹³³ This passage is outstanding in so far as Aetius rise is elaborated as God-given, pre-determined event. Given the fact that Aetius perished by the emperor's hand, the slain patricius' utmost benign and positive depiction together with the motif of Aetius' live as an act of providence is striking but quite consistent with depictions of the lives of saints and martyrs in contemporary hagiographies.¹³⁴ The Christian connotation is always apparent within the text; nevertheless, literary and stylistic continuity in relation to the grammatical craftsmanship of classical antiquity are always obvious within the text. References in style and content to his literary forbearers were consciously added by the author, who was yet aware of his less refined possibilities of expression in the classic Latin verse.¹³⁵ The death of Aetius is openly attributed to Valentinianus; nevertheless, Gregorius, contradicting Procopius, does present the Emperor not as direct perpetrator but merely as ordering party.¹³⁶ The lengths, in which Aetius is shown by Gregorius and Frigeridus to be an ideal archetype of the Roman soldier serving the state is also clearly traceable in other non-hagiographical sources. Gregorius chooses a middle way: he was not striving to place Aetius in any position that might involve direct Christian theological motifs. However, such connotations are included in a more subtle subtext and are bedded into the tradition of classical historiography. When Aetius' wife's prayers are answered by saints, and Aetius is destined to advance towards his path, the motif of divine destiny has to be present. Aetius appears as a synthesis the shining *heros* and the Christian martyr, on par with the mythical Roman and Greek conquerors and the Christian

saints. Hitherto, the traces of the strong and positive image of "the last of the Romans" that did cast its shadows towards Aetius depiction in modern historic writings since Gibbon and his epigones, are rooted in the depiction of his spotless figure, in stern opposition to the myriad of usurpers and tyrants.¹³⁷ Gregorius provided this image to fit into a historic text in line with Christian teachings and the remnants of classical literary tradition, contributing to yet another interpretation of history as a predetermined unfolding of destiny, divine or secular.

THE LONG SHADOW OF PROCOPIUS

Procopius of Caesarea (ca.500-ca.565), a high ranking bureaucrat and adviser to the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) general Belisarius, has to be counted among the utmost important historians of his time. Hailing from a noble family in Palestine, he was very likely a trained lawyer (rhetorian), a fact that added to his mastery of language and style.¹³⁸ Describing wars and political event during his lifetime, his works, as "De bellis", "De aedificiis" and "Historia arcana" also do offer reflections and descriptions of past events, putting them into perspective with important contemporary occurrences. Procopius well versed Greek puts the author in the tradition of classical Greek scholarship and historiography, a possible connection to the rhetorical school of Gaza, close to his hometown, has been suggested.¹³⁹ Stressing the ambiguous views on the situation and restorative tendencies of literature and the arts in the days of Emperor Iustinianus, Cameron stresses the authors' literary quality as superior in his sophisticated use of Greek language and style.¹⁴⁰

Procopius ambiguous stance towards religious dogma has been discussed widely, some have described him as a crypto-pagan, others have stressed his deep familiarity with the traditional concepts of Christian Orthodoxy.¹⁴¹ What can be attested for sure is his mastery command of classical literary style and philosophical views, still well set in the literary canon of his times. In that sense, a clear-cut definition of a "pagan" or "Christian" Procopius seems not that relevant. His works do embody both traditions as being alive and co-existing in the Eastern Roman Empire of the 6th century. From a literary perspective, the Caesarean sought to immerse his writings into the Greek historiographic style of authors as Thucydides and Herodotus, actively endorsing a continuous perspective of classical scholarship.¹⁴² In Procopius epic histories, describing emperor Justinianus' deeds with a focus on the latter's Gothic, Vandalic and Persian Wars, Aetius is presented as an ideal general. It is not a coincidence that Procopius described the qualities of his patron, Belisarius, in a similar, positive way.¹⁴³ Given his reservations regarding the emperor Iustinianus, the

¹³¹ CHRONICA GALLICA, OL CCC II, 615 (663). In: Chronica Gallica A. CCCCLII et DXI Mommsen (ed.), (Berlin:Weidmann 1892) -(Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Chronica minora, Saec . IV. V. VI. VII.

¹³² GREGORIUS TURONENSIS II, 8, (52).

¹³³ "Cui ab ineunte aetate praedictum liquet, quantae potentiae fati distinetur, temporibus suis locisque celebrandus."

¹³⁴ HEINZELMANN 2001, 153.

¹³⁵ BERSCHIN 2009,181-200.

¹³⁶ GREGORIUS TURONENSIS, II, 8 (52).

¹³⁷ PROCOPIUS, History of the Wars, III, 3,15 (26).

¹³⁸ JOHNSTON 2001, 19-30.

¹³⁹ GREATREX 2014, 76-121.

¹⁴⁰ CAMERON 1996, 24.

¹⁴¹ DOWNEY 1949, 89-102.

¹⁴² BRODKA 2013, 19-28.

¹⁴³ PROCOPIUS, History of the Wars, III, 15,18-30 (136).

intention of consciously mirroring Aetius fame in the reflections of a contemporary general seems likely.

The Vandal invasions directed against the North African provinces are lamented by Procopius as a calamity, caused by the rivalry between Aetius and Belisarius.¹⁴⁴ Taking into account Belisarius' success in the African theatre, a comparison between the latter and Aetius is not far-fetched. This factor should not be interpreted textual, but rather in a comparative perspective focusing on history as a recurring process. Hereby, Aetius' and Belisarius' character traits can be shown as overlapping, without making a blatant political standing. Aetius is presented as a cunning and ruthless diplomatic tactician who successfully manages to raise the suspicion of empress Galla Placidia in tainting his rival Bonifacius as a potential traitor. The formulation "tyrant" (τύραννος) in Procopius description for Bonifacius is placing the accused among the ranks of illegal usurpers, depriving him of his position of legitimacy in the eyes of the Empress, but also the reader.¹⁴⁵ Engaging in a theatre like double play, Aetius afterwards does send a warning letter to Bonifacius, who subsequently is convinced that returning to Rome would result in his early demise. Henceforth Bonifacius, in desperate search of reliable allies to support him, invites the Vandals, who previously had entrenched themselves in Spain, to set sail for the African provinces.¹⁴⁶

Describing the political repercussions of the plot, with Aetius' letter to Bonifacius discovered and the slandering as tyrant being doubted, the accusations are being disclosed as a plot and Bonifacius' rehabilitation is undertaken. Notwithstanding, empress Galla Placidia is presented as not haven undertaken any repercussions against Flavius Aetius, apparently due to the latter's great power and the empire's delicate state.¹⁴⁷ Whether we should fathom the plot as *fait accompli* or dwell towards a more critical analysis of the authors text remains up to the eye of the beholder. As a matter of fact, Aetius' outsmarting of his rival that finally results in the loss of the rich and irreplaceable provinces in Africa seems not to hinder Procopius to present the reader Aetius in the most favourable terms.¹⁴⁸ While it becomes clear that inter-factional fighting weakened the Western Empires capacities to cope with external threats, the general evaluation of the actors involved in it becomes less important in face of the general flow of events. Henceforth, responsibility is also shifted away from the individual and partially replaced by a sense of destiny. Correspondingly, Bonifacius is exonerated by the empress, and his loss in battle against the foe is not described as a shameful act.¹⁴⁹ Likewise, Aetius highly intriguing policy against his rival is not condemned by the author either. Actors as Aetius and Bonifacius can be praised as successful heroes, yet fate proves superior to any great man.

The decline of imperial control in the Western part of the Empire is not an end for itself in Procopius writings,

Rome continues to be existent *de jure* and the question of "the wavering of Roman power" is not been presented as a *fait accompli*. As the waning of Roman power in the Western realms is accepted as a temporary fact that- in retrospective- was bound to happen, the re-emergence of Roman imperial power under the stern leadership of emperor Iustinianus can be justified and duly honoured.¹⁵⁰ This does not mean that Iustinianus as person is judged uncritically even in Procopius' "official" texts, i.e. his estrangement to the inhabitants of Italy after conquering back the peninsula from the Goths is described without extenuation.¹⁵¹ Furthermore, in sharp contrast to the vicious attacks against the emperor in the *historia arcana*, the author focuses on the situation of the state in general, with the emperor being a mere personification of the state.¹⁵² Procopius, in fact, is less justifying the relevant rulers itself than favourably depicting the ideal of the *oikumene* (οἰκουμένη), the Roman state resting on Christian foundations. This does not exclude philosophical reflections and comparing godly power with pagan deities; the higher power, may it be god or the *Tyche* (Τύχη) are interchangeable and do appear frequently in the oeuvre.¹⁵³ Within that scope, the concept of fate and destiny can be rested upon Christian as well as pagan traditions.¹⁵⁴ Accordingly, the historian's role in demonstrating the flow of events resting on past events can duly praise the leadership of Iustinianus as an inevitable fate that was just meant to happen, without implying a panegyric style.

The negative depiction of the emperors of the 5th century, may also be a reflection on the aversive position the author held towards emperor Iustinianus, which could obviously not be openly expressed in his official works. The restauration of the Empire, while founded on the idea of the *oikumene* and the Christian concept of the emperor as the fulfiller of a God-given order, is clearly connected to the classical concept of the Roman Empire as natural ruler over the realm, as expressed by authors as Vergil.¹⁵⁵ Likewise, the emperors described in Procopius books are fulfilling their predestined role in the flow of times. The inter-contextuality of late antique pagan-philosophical beliefs and Christian concepts of destiny and fate is apparent; hence the continuous determinist concept in historiography can be rested on both traditions.¹⁵⁶

In that connection, Aetius diplomatic deals in settling Franks and Goths within the Gallic provinces are not that different from Bonifacius' diplomatic steps towards the Vandals.¹⁵⁷ Might it be possible to evaluate Bonifacius' diplomatic dealings with the Vandals in the terms of a *foedus* that finally did go down the wrong way? Notwithstanding his later military defeat, Bonifacius is presented in favorable terms as just and trustworthy personality by Procopius.¹⁵⁸ Legal agreements of any form involving non-

¹⁴⁴ PROCOPIUS, *History of the Wars*, III, 3,15 (26).

¹⁴⁵ PROCOPIUS, *History of the Wars*, III, 3,15 (26).

¹⁴⁶ PROCOPIUS, *History of the Wars*, III, 3,18-22 (28).

¹⁴⁷ PROCOPIUS, *History of the Wars*, III, 3,28-29 (30).

¹⁴⁸ MEIER 2016, 209-224.

¹⁴⁹ PROCOPIUS, *History of the Wars*, III, 3,36 (34).

¹⁵⁰ BURY 1958, 190.

¹⁵¹ PROCOPIUS, *History of the Wars*, VII, 1, 33 (166) .

¹⁵² CAMERON 2010, 1996, 3.

¹⁵³ DOWNEY 1949, 89-102.

¹⁵⁴ ANWANDER 1948, 315-327.

¹⁵⁵ KOEHN 2010, 341-355.

¹⁵⁶ BULTMANN 1955, 207-229.

¹⁵⁷ PROCOPIUS, *History of the Wars*, III, 3,25 (30).

¹⁵⁸ PROCOPIUS, *History of the Wars*, III, 3,14 (26).

Roman citizens, would be conducted under the *ius gentium*.¹⁵⁹ Within the auspices of the *ius gentium*, a treaty deemed *foedus* would be conducted between the Romans and a third a Barbarian party.¹⁶⁰ Nevertheless, a *foedus*, while bearing the characteristics of international treaties, was not necessarily conducted on equal terms; in that way, it could be conducted either as a *foedus aequum* or *foedus iniquum*.¹⁶¹ According to the legal theoretic reception of the *ius gentium*, the accepting party signing the *foedus* would subsequently respect the given superiority or *maiestas* of the Res Publica, at least if the treaty was conducted on the auspices of a formal surrender known as *deditio*.¹⁶² During the later Roman Empire and especially during the series of events described by Procopius, a *foedus*, conducted by Bonifacius does not seem to be out of the line of usual conduct.¹⁶³ Bonifacius is presented as a loyal soldier, performing his duty to the best of his abilities, but bound to a system of power as shaped by the imperial court. Barbarians, may they be Goths, Huns or Vandals, were defeated by Aetius, and-from the authors perspective- after three generations have passed, are defeated by Roman forces again, only this time commanded by Belisarius. Within that scope, the image of Rome as eternal idea can be upheld; only in Procopius version in “De bellis”, instead of “weak” emperors, the strong figure of Iustinianus reigns supreme.¹⁶⁴

The parallels to Belisarius and the omnipresent role of emperor Iustinianus become evident. Procopius, in general, has been accepted as a relative objective source regarding the descriptive nature of the flow of historical events. Notwithstanding, his reservations towards Emperor Iustinianus certainly left his impressions on the authors stance regarding Aetius and his times. Within that scope, Haury has pointed towards the possibility of a literary rivalry between Procopius and the courtier Lydos, who was commissioned by the Emperor himself to write the official history of the Persian Wars.¹⁶⁵ In fostering the image of a heroic general, Aetius, who becomes a victim of an incompetent ruler, a covered critique into the direction of Iustinianus becomes visible. Aetius’ military capacities and proven success seems to give him additional legitimacy in the judgement of Procopius. In contrast, the condemning judgement concerning the perpetrators of the plot to kill Flavius Aetius -including the revered person of the Emperor - are contributing to the glorification of the victim. The motif of great men, yet powerless against destiny, faced with incompetent rulers’ decisions would throw its shades on generations of later historians’ judgements.¹⁶⁶

Within that context, the downfall and murder of Aetius is described by Procopius as result of the cunning intrigues of senator Maximus who, after his wife allegedly had been raped by the Emperor, started to plot against Valentinianus.¹⁶⁷ The sinister and sensationalist story of

an emperor burning with desire for the wife of one of his senators, and his vicious plan to lay hand on her appears utterly odd.¹⁶⁸ The reader is confronted with the description of an emperor acting immoral, not able to control his urges and acting in affect, be it his personal life or the subsequent killing of his general Aetius. This narrative was very likely fabricated as back-up story for the events regarding the murder plot, the context shows parallels to the dark and often fictional depictions of “immoral emperors” of sources as Suetonius’ “De vita Caesarum”.¹⁶⁹ Taken into account that authors as Suetonius were rather interested comparing “good” to “bad” emperors in a moralizing way, one can speculate whether Procopius did imply a similar technique in his tomes. Iohannes Antiochenus adds that Aetius’ body was showcased on the Forum, adding to the literary dramatic but also to the image of perfidy attributed to Emperor Valentinianus.¹⁷⁰

Aetius is presented as pinnacle of the hopes of Rome, the only capable heroe to overthrow Atilla. In contrast, Maximus’ false denouncement of Aetius and his subsequent annihilation is evaluated as negative and fateful event, caused by a misled ruler. Procopius leaves no doubt regarding the sinister plan of Maximus to dispose of his rival, stressing the prominent and powerful position of Maximus in seducing Emperor Valentinianus’ mind to judge the revered general as dangerous factor for his own position.¹⁷¹ The murder itself is depicted as fateful event; but the author is not inclined in describing the act of murder in detail, leaving it to the readers’ imagination whether the murder was carried out by the emperor himself. Procopius, in contrast to his dramatic depiction regarding the evolvment of the intrigue against Aetius, just mentions in a very prosaic way that the emperor put Aetius to death.¹⁷² Implying moral judgement the authors leave no doubt that Valentinianus is presented as fully responsible for the despicable act. This is implied in an imaginative dialogue between the emperor and an unnamed person. Adding more dramatics to the occurrences when the Emperor, in doubt whether his action against his general was indeed wisely, an anonymous person, in a stoic and oracle-like manner, is brought onto the scene, Absconding from judgement, but underlining the generals irreplaceable standing, a “famous Roman” admonishes the emperor that he himself did cut “right hand with the other”.¹⁷³

Whereas the chroniclers were providing or merely continuing thin factual lines, historians as Procopius and Iohannes Antiochenus were not only concerned with their authorial techniques upon the reader, but were motivated by the wish to provide a concise and logical storyline. In accordance with the authors’ respective worldviews, the act of murder significantly contributed to a climax, the deterioration of imperial power, helping to depict this occurrence as chain within a providential timeline. Literary

¹⁵⁹ SIVAN 1987, 759-772.

¹⁶⁰ PROCOPIUS, History of the Wars, III, 11,3-4 (102).

¹⁶¹ KARLOWKA 1885, 289.

¹⁶² NUSSBAUM 1952, 678-687.

¹⁶³ HEATHER 2006, 242-256.

¹⁶⁴ STEWART 2015, 21-54.

¹⁶⁵ HAURY 1937, 1-9.

¹⁶⁶ IOHANNES ANTIOCHENUS, Fr. 224,3 (409).

¹⁶⁷ PROCOPIUS, History of the Wars, III, 4, 24 (40).

¹⁶⁸ PROCOPIUS, History of the Wars, III, 4, 20-21 (38/40).

¹⁶⁹ ROLFE 1913, 206-225.

¹⁷⁰ IOHANNES ANTIOCHENUS, Fr. 224,2 (407).

¹⁷¹ PROCOPIUS, History of the Wars, III, 4, 26 (40).

¹⁷² PROCOPIUS, III, 4, 27-28 (40).

¹⁷³ “...ἀπεκρίνατο λέγων οὐκ ἔχειν μὲν εἰδέναι τοῦτο εἴτε εὖ εἴτε πη ἄλλη αὐτῷ εἶργασται, ἐκεῖνο μὲντοι ὡς ἄριστα ἐξεπίστασθαι, ὅτι αὐτοῦ τὴν δεξιάν τῇ ἑτέρᾳ χειρὶ ἄποτεμὼν εἶη.”

and stylistic connotations certainly did play a role in that context, however, a significant side effect on posterior historiography has been caused by this technique. Duly, the narrative of a declining empire, thrown into the storms of unruly times under the helm of weak, untalented emperors as its captains, was enforced and planted into the minds of following generations of historians.

JOHANNES ANTIOCHENUS, A HAGIOGRAPHIC HISTORIAN

Johannes Antiochenus, possibly a member of the imperial bureaucracy, with a worldview deeply shaped by the teachings of Eastern Christian orthodoxy, compiled a world chronicle in Greek language, the *historia chronice*.¹⁷⁴ It is assumed that Johannes, believed to have been lived around the beginning of the 7th century was a monk himself, a fact that is supported by strong religious connotations in the sources. His chronicle survives only in fragments, cited in the texts of posterior sources and does not reveal much about the author himself. The originality of his authorship in perspective to other writers as Malalas and stylistic coherence has been discussed controversially since the 19th century under philological and literary historic aspects.¹⁷⁵ Van Nuffelen has pledged in favour of interpreting early Byzantine historical works as “living texts”, arguing that additions by a number of anonymous authors have to be treated with lenience.¹⁷⁶

The oeuvre in its skeletal form, can be classified as historical chronicle, a history of mankind with strong hagiographic characteristics, but is not only motivated by religious zeal. Roberto underlines the intense political reflections in the text, focusing on concepts of political power as tyranny, monarchy and Roman political tradition in general.¹⁷⁷ As stressed by Mariev, Johannes’ compilation is discernable from the authorial perspective at best.¹⁷⁸ While providing insights on church history and the lives and deeds of the emperors, general historical aspects and historical interpretations are clearly identifiable in his text.¹⁷⁹ Johannes Antiochenus’ characterization as mere hagiographic writer would be insufficient. The authors’ view on history itself and its actors, resting on determinist concepts of fate and providence, includes sharp judgements and diverse interpretations of historical facts. Other sources employed by Johannes include Eunapius, Zosimus and Priscus.¹⁸⁰ Despite its fragmentary nature, important background information on Aetius and his time survives in the authors fragments.

¹⁷⁴ Several controversial discussed editions of Antiochenus’ fragments have been published, this paper chose Mariev’s interpretation without taking any judgement regarding the methodology or superiority compared to other editions.

¹⁷⁵ KRAUTSCHIK 1995, 332-338.

¹⁷⁶ VAN NUFFELEN 2012, 437-450.

¹⁷⁷ ROBERTO 2005, XIII.

¹⁷⁸ On the debate regarding linking Johannes Antiochenus’ sources to Malalas and Procopius refer to: PATZIG, E. (1893) “Johannes Antiochenus Fr. 200 Salm. und Prokop” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, (2)3, 591-598; Gleye, C. E. (1896). Beiträge zur Johannesfrage. *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 5(3), 422-464.

¹⁷⁹ DE BOOR 1885, 321-330.

¹⁸⁰ MARIEV 2009, 38.

Concentrating on political the quest for power, Johannes Antiochenus describes Aetius as envying Bonifatius’ fame and backs the “intrigue” narrative as presented by Procopius. Accordingly, the full responsibility for handing over the North African provinces to the Vandals is thrown upon Bonifatius.¹⁸¹ In general, Johannes Antiochenus less glorifies or condemns the persons and actors in his writing in line with their respective personal traits, but chooses to demonstrate the flow of events in a religiously founded worldview based on the holy scripture. His works also do contain mystical passages that are a mix of antique metaphysical concepts and superstitions, coupled with Christian moral and concepts. Johannes Antiochenus draws upon the conspiracy plot directed against Aetius in order to include a dark element of risk to the act of murder. The author furthermore added tragic elements to the demise of the “last of the Romans”, Aetius. Explaining a sinister pact between the eunuch Heraclius and the noble Maximus, both are shown as persuading the wavering emperor to dispose of his loyal commander.¹⁸² A dramatic scene, in which the emperor himself, first verbally and then, together with Heraclius, physically attacks and kills Aetius is developed, with Emperor Valentinianus III. Being credited with uttering wild rants during the theatre-like act of murder.¹⁸³ The author ascertains the plot to have been planned by Aetius rival, the former consul Maximus, utilizing the service of the eunuch and *primicerius sacri cubiculi* Heraclius. The negative connotations of eunuchs and court intrigues are implied in a similar fashion as described by Procopius, leading to a further darkening of the narrative with an utterly negative tainting of the imperial image.¹⁸⁴ Scolding Maximus’ sinister plans, the representation of Roman aristocracy by Johannes is utterly negative and Aetius character as innocent victim is confirmed accordingly. The emperor is presented as a feeble figure caught within a string of intrigues, unwittingly removing the sole person who could have prevented Maximus’ evil deeds. Johannes describes Valentinianus as destroying the only “bulwark of his own sovereignty”, hinting that the final aim to dispose of the emperor himself was in fact a fate the autocrat was unwittingly dragging upon himself.¹⁸⁵ In the narrative, a council meeting during which the unsuspecting general dutifully reporting to the emperor, emerges as the last act in the drama of a murderous cabal. Personally charging Aetius with his sword after throwing insults upon his generalissimo, the monarch and the sinister eunuch Heraclius strike down Rome’s loyal saviour.¹⁸⁶

Stating that Aetius had overcome many enemies, domestic and foreign, Johannes furthermore underlines the loyalty of the fallen *patricius* in stressing the latter’s protective role for the Imperial family. Besides the dramatic effect from a literary perspective, it is interesting to note that Johannes Antiochenus builds up a similar element

¹⁸¹ GORDON 1960, 87.

¹⁸² IOHANNES ANTIOCHENUS, Fr. 224,1 (406).

¹⁸³ IOHANNES ANTIOCHENUS, Fr. 224,2 (407).

¹⁸⁴ On Eunuchs in the late Roman Empire refer to: Tougher, Shaun (2008). The Eunuch in Byzantine History and Society.

¹⁸⁵ “Ὁ δὲ Βαλεντινιανός, ἐπειδὴ αὐτῷ ἐχρῆν γενέσθαι. κακῶς τὸ τεῖχος τῆς ἑαυτοῦ ἀρχῆς καταλύοντι....”

¹⁸⁶ IOHANNES ANTIOCHENUS, Fr. 224,2 (407).

of tension in the description of Aetius' violent death as described by Procopius. Procopius underwrites the emperor as responsible and adds more tension to the aftermath of the slaying, when the ruler is made to question himself. Iohannes Antiochenus, however, chooses to give the emperor a direct role as perpetrator in laying hands on the general. The topos of hands, here involving the very hands of the emperor, does feature in both stories. While both explained in a different setting, both authors place the imperial hands into a context that contributes to the direct responsibility of the autocrat regarding the death of Aetius and the subsequent demise of the state. In one version, the emperor draws his sword and strikes deadly blows on Aetius, while in the other version, the emperor metaphorically cuts off his "right hand with the other".¹⁸⁷ In other words, the emperor himself lays hands on Aetius and within that connection threatens the life of the *res publica* or the *oikumene*. The texts of Procopius as well as Antiochenus share similar outlooks: the sinister figure of the wicked eunuch appears as partner in crime, representing the dark web of court intrigues.

After murdering Aetius, Valentinian apparently displayed his victims' dead body at the forum and slandered this once meticulous heroes' memory in front of the Senate. Besides this literary *damnatio memoriae*, Valentinianus is said to have taken measures to prevent any possible revolts on behalf of the slain general. To express it with the authors words, Flavius Aetius was deemed so powerful that "kings and neighbouring people" were said to listen upon his commands. Here the political reality of Aetius as a powerful force, and even a possible threat becomes apparent, a fact that had been utilized by the ruler to justify his violent act.¹⁸⁸ According to the chronicler, justice, was dealt swiftly upon the imperial perpetrator. Enraged that his ambitions for the office of consul have not been fulfilled, the senator Maximus summons two of Aetius' former bodyguards, enthraling their hearts with hate upon their masters' killer. Subsequently, the bodyguards attacked and killed Valentinianus III. at the Campus Martius. If we follow Iohannes Antiochenus, the emperor was dealt a blow to his head and killed, in the same manner he had attacked the late Aetius.¹⁸⁹

In line with the pagan literary tradition of linking alleged supernatural events to the flow of history, the motif of a "divine sign" in form of a swarm of bees that allegedly did suck up the slain emperor's blood from the ground is interwoven into the plot. This consists clearly a religious motive, taken up by the Christian chronicler to present the emperors demise as an act of divine providence in following the image of the martyr in similar hagiographic works.¹⁹⁰ In due context, the victim, Aetius, can also be presented as an innocent victim, enduring a death that awakes connotations of Christian martyrdom by the very own hands of an unjust ruler. Within that scope, the metaphysical dimension of Iohannes Antiochenus' style and content and the moralizing tendency are visible more clearly. Just as the oracle of pagan times, signs were interpreted in a Christian textual compound

to assign meaning and deeper concepts to events- real or imaginative.¹⁹¹ Iohannes Antiochenus furthermore presents Maximus as thriving and apparently evil force behind the plot, and depicts him as an overambitious candidate for the imperial throne. The image of the "evildoing, bad ruler" is a concept that had been featured frequently in the historical writing of antiquity.¹⁹² The coupling of a "bad emperor" with adverse metaphysical signs of divine providence was a widely used literary image that now had to be adapted to Christian belief and its literary manifestations. After having been slain himself with his maimed corpse being paraded around, the short-lived emperor Maximinus becomes linked to a string of events that caused the sacking of Rome in 455 AD by the Vandals under their ruler Geiseric.¹⁹³ Here, again, we are able to identify the deterministic motive in the writers intention, who does draw the demise of the Western Empire as a logical string of events that are steadily bound on divine will. Accordingly, the evil deeds of wicked actors who are not in line with the moral concord of the early Christian church are punished severely. Whether this seemingly overdramatized, epic demise has been painted in a more dire tone by Iohannes to further emphasize his religiously founded worldview has to remain speculation.

OLYMPIODORUS, THE DETERMINISTIC CHRONICLER

While only referring once to Aetius directly, Olympiodorus of Thebes (380-412) is an important source regarding the power struggles in the late Roman Empire, the Theodesian dynasty and actors as Stilicho and Bonifatius. Being a highly respected scholar at the court of Constantinople, he also travelled widely and did serve the state in various functions. Olympiodorus religious allegiance remains unclear; however in his texts he preserved the style and philosophy of traditional pagan writers. As one of the epigones of Greek literary tradition and classical writing, his diplomatic position as an emissary of the Eastern Empire to the Hunnic court gave him the role as a first hand witness. Besides his literary qualities, he also seems to have taken an active stance on the political realm, seeking to defend the restoration of Theodosius II. to his throne and supporting the court in Constantinople.¹⁹⁴ Olympiodorus oeuvre may be only available in fragments, yet does offer us insides on developments during the first quarter of the 5th century AD.

Olympiodorus, writing in the pagan tradition, did not use polemic language regarding the subject of Christianity, but also focused heavily on geographical depictions, social issues and chronological correctness. Thompson stresses Olympiodorus' influence on the reception of fifth century Greek-writing historians and lists him among them as an important medium to distribute their sources.¹⁹⁵ He also has to be counted among the defenders of a less general and more concise school of writing in classical historiography. Displaying positive depictions of emperor Valentinianus III.,

¹⁸⁷ PROCOPIUS, III, 4, 27-28 (40).

¹⁸⁸ IOHANNES ANTIOCHENUS, Fr. 224, 2/3 (406).

¹⁸⁹ IOHANNES ANTIOCHENUS, Fr. 224, 3/4 (408/410).

¹⁹⁰ GEMEINHARDT/LEEMANS 2012, 1-11.

¹⁹¹ MANETTI 1993, 28.

¹⁹² ICKS 2008, 477-488.

¹⁹³ IOHANNES ANTIOCHENUS, Fr. 224,4 (410/412).

¹⁹⁴ MATTHEWS 1970, 79-97.

¹⁹⁵ THOMPSON 1944, 43-52.

Aetius' rival Bonifatius and the late Sticho, Olympiodorus' fragments tend to cast shadows upon the Augusta Galla Placidia.¹⁹⁶ Here, the historian follows the judgement of his contemporaries. One has to be careful regarding Olympiodorus' quite negative and scandalous representation of Galla Placidia. This judgement seems to have its offspring in political polemics.¹⁹⁷ As the events leading to Galla Placidia's restoration did open the path for Aetius career, the textual representation should be given consideration regarding the circumstances of Aetius' rise to power.¹⁹⁸

In literary comparison, just as in the texts of other authors, the recurrence of the metaphor of "cutting hands" is traceable in Olympiodorus fragments. In Olympiodorus' description of the trial of the Visigothic king Ataulf by emperor Honorius, the former has the forefinger and thumb of his right hand cut before being exiled.¹⁹⁹ Obviously, the judicial maiming of the hand with which an oath is taken, has to be evaluated within the context of symbolic and corporal punishments as practiced in late antiquity.²⁰⁰ It is also worth to consider that the pretext of an emperor cutting off his "right hand" (Aetius) can be linked to the physical example of judicial maiming, as practiced frequently.²⁰¹ Olympiodorus, keeping the literary tradition in citing alleged metaphysical events that imply destiny and forfeit explanatory patterns for success and failure, mentions an oracle like declamation. Allegedly having happened during the proclamation of the usurper Iohannes, the people declaimed a slogan as following: "He falls, he does not stand".²⁰² It is implied that the usurper was destined to fail in using a post hoc construction, a pattern used frequently by the author. All those developments have to be evaluated in the context of the precarious position of Galla Placidia who, while enjoying the support of Theodosius II. and legitimately rearing her minor son, the emperor Valentinian III., was in need of stability and support from powerful circles in the West itself.

Aetius is correctly interwoven into the historical events by Olympiodorus in presenting him as a sub-commander of the usurper Iohannes. Together with his Hunnic troops he shortly battles Galla Placidia's forces, but then enters an agreement with her and Emperor Theodosius, being granted the title of comes.²⁰³ Insofar, Aetius indirectly is depicted as gallant saviour from chaos and a noble provider of stability. In contrast to that description, Olympiodorus reserves the image of "weak emperors" for the sons of Emperor Theodosius the Great. The future rulers Honorius and Arcadius are both described as being not as energetic as their mighty father. In conclusion, Olympiodorus provided

source material for posterior historians who then continued the tendency attributing the weakening of state structures to "weak" or "bad" emperors on a stage set by providence.²⁰⁴

LATE ANTIQUITY, HISTORIOGRAPHICAL TRADITIONS AND AETIUS IN MODERN HISTORIOGRAPHY

In order to evaluate Aetius' personality and his significance for classical and modern historiographers, it is necessary to comprehend the generalissimo's representation in relation to the genesis of the source material. Evaluating classical sources of contemporary authors, we are confronted with narratives, literary or ecclesiastical text.²⁰⁵ Following the established literary tradition and the canon of theological works, texts have to be subjected to a critical reading in order to establish their respective exegesis. One has to be careful to avoid post ante perceptions of the „inevitable“ fall of the Roman Empire as being immanent from a later view on the events.

Notwithstanding, most if not all sources of late antiquity have been written with a certain intention, whether politic, religious or mere to display the aesthetics of literary and theological zeal.²⁰⁶ It seems a futile task to decipher the accuracy of information that had been taken to the pen in order to serve certain ambitions. It is possible, though, to try scanning the sources regarding the likelihood of bias towards persons and events. We also have to take into account that generations of historians have judged the fall of the empire as natural given, fatal event and henceforth have interpreted the source material under that very pretext. As stressed by Comber, this sense of manifest destiny, is already identifiable in the writings of Polybius; besides that, Roman historiographical sources do usually bear a moralizing, rhetorical and ethical character.²⁰⁷

The moralizing nature of understanding, traducing and interpreting historical events by the classical authors was duly followed by generations of later historians, especially in the 18th and 19th century.²⁰⁸ Within that scope, a selective reading of historical sources has to take into consideration at least two major factors. One of those consists in acknowledging the descriptive matter of sources together with the involvement of *édition critique*. Another strong point has to be made in correctly interpreting the rhetorical and moralistic aim of the classics as intended for their respective audiences. Auerbach underlines the rhetorical nature of antique historiography pointing towards its more symbolic character. The literary professor here provides an important caveat for all historiographic interpretations, including the findings of modern historians. Stressing that classical texts can never be said to provide a

¹⁹⁶ OLYMPIODORUS fr. XL, (202).

¹⁹⁷ On a balanced characterization regarding Galla Placidia and her rule refer to: SIRAGO, V. A. (1961). *Galla Placidia e la trasformazione politica dell'Occidente*. (Louvain:Université); PATZIG, E. (1895). "Die Troica des Johannes Antiochenus", *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 4, 23-29.

¹⁹⁸ PATZIG, E. (1895). "Antiochenus Fr. 200 Salm. und Prokop" *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, (2)3, 591-598; GLEVE, C. E. (1896). Beiträge zur Johannesfrage. *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 5(3), 422-464.

¹⁹⁹ HYDATIUS chr. I, 85 (21).

²⁰⁰ OLYMPIODORUS fr. XXVI, 2 (190).

²⁰¹ TORRE 1998, 15-26.

²⁰² TWYMAN 1970, 480-503.

²⁰³ OLYMPIODORUS, fr. XXXIX, 1 (202).

²⁰⁴ OLYMPIODORUS fr. XLIII, 2 (208)

²⁰⁵ MAIER 2019, 3.

²⁰⁶ On the historiographical interpretation of sources of late Roman / Byzantine history refer to: CHRISTOPHILOPOULOU, A. (1986). *Byzantine History 1. 324-610*. Amsterdam: Hakkert ; DUMMER, J. & VIELBERG, M. (eds.) (2005). *Zwischen Historiographie und Hagiographie ausgewählte Beiträge zur Erforschung der Spätantike*. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag.

²⁰⁷ WINKELMANN, 2005, 85 (79-99).

²⁰⁸ COMBER 1997, 44 (43-56).

²⁰⁹ DEMANDT, 1984, 584.

full view on social, economic or cultural history, Auerbach points out that those texts yet can help is in grasping the spirit of bygone days.²⁰⁹ Accordingly, the finding that classical authors may have posited a determinist worldview in their interpretations of history is itself a mere reflection of later judgements on texts as passed down over the generations. Collingwood judges Roman historiography, with all its literary importance, as substantial on equal standing with the topos of Rome itself; being presented by generations of historians as “changeless and eternal”. Therefore, no innovations are allowed in the descriptions and Roman sources. According to Collingwood, classical authors tend to be descriptive without taking into consideration the human nature of its actors or.²¹⁰ In addition to Collingwood’s thesis, within Dray’s explanation of causality, it is postulated that certain historical events tend to be shown as linked to causal laws which -whether existent or not- do not necessarily have to be present.²¹¹ The failure to proof those laws is not being evaluated as an illogical fact. Within that scope, the finding of Roman historians’ tendency towards repeating and renew their predecessors style, ideals and philosophy should be judged accordingly.

The tendency to evaluate and to classify historical characters, emperors or leading personas as Aetius, within a recurring string of events that seemingly replicate itself must be a caveat for the modern interpreter. Taking into consideration the annalistic tendency among Roman historians and their faithful reference towards the traditional and ancient values, the *mos maiorum*, the majority of historical writing during late antiquity is prone in describing the string of events in history as an inevitable outcome of fate and destiny. The very idea of Rome not only as a political, but also as a moral force can be found in the oeuvres of Roman historians, literates and poets at least from the 1st century A.D. onwards.²¹² Taking up the tendency of ecclesial historians, who tended to describe the goods and evils which befell the state from a Christian, moralizing perspective, the pagan aristocrats of the late empire excelled in developing their very own concept of morality. Within that scope, they embraced morality within concepts of “good old” virtues and values, the *mos maiores*.²¹³ The Roman Empire as an eternal and static, always present factor in history was a classical concept that did cast its shadows on later authors, classical and modern.

The flow of history, in that sense, was seen less as progressive, linear concept in a Hegelian sense; authors as Cicero, Tacitus or Vergil interpreted history as a cyclical and recurring body of events to which Rome as idea and fact contributed as perpetual presence.²¹⁴ Stoic philosophy had developed the topos of imperial responsibility that did justify territorial expansion, but also the concept of an eternal state.²¹⁵ As such, the determinist view served well in conserving the ideal of Rome as an idea that might physically

deteriorate, but exist in perpetuity within in the realm of thoughts. Choosing a metahistorical frame, the treatment of texts as “literary artefacts” that contain rhetorical elements and have to be treated accordingly can help in interpreting themes in spite of the recurring determinist view on late Roman history.²¹⁶ This said, the transformation of ideas and their later interpretation may be evaluated as coherent as long as the “historical intent”, meaning the authors motivation at the time of writing, is duly considered. Accordingly, classical writers’ texts can be reflected upon as a discourse of narrative prose, wherein the literary model itself represents the spirit of bygone processes and times.²¹⁷ Within that frame, the empire and the *res publica* as an idea, derived from discourses with the stoic philosophy, left the realms of politics and entered into a philosophical concept. Modern and ancient historians alike more often than not did embrace this worldview and projected it towards their understanding of the state as an ideology.²¹⁸

From a historiographical perspective, the literary traditions of the Latin West and the Greek East, as well as the conflict between emerging Christianity and pagan traditions should be taken into critical consideration. Coupled with intra-confessional differences, all those tendencies have left their imprint on the sources and have to be judged accordingly.²¹⁹ The early hagiographers strove to emulate the literary traditions of the classical age, yet felt inclined to express an extreme form of humility regarding their own works. As Christian authors they were dealing with the subject of sacredness and divine revelation as expressed in the flow of history. This is indeed a break with the cunning writers of the classical ages, who laureated themselves on their level of eloquence, rhetoric and richness of expression.²²⁰ Hagiographers wrote to serve the divine; classical authors presented moral lessons as part of a philosophical whole that was debatable. Despite that dichotomy, it should not be omitted to note that Christianity and traditional pagan values were never really two deeply segregated worlds: the interaction of pagan philosophy and the new faith both adding its impact on the theological discourse cannot be underestimated.²²¹ This means that “pre-Christian” and “Christian” sources, while having to be interpreted in the context of their respective authors intentions, shall not be treated as opposing and incompatible concepts.

THE “FALL” OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE IN DETERMINIST HISTORIOGRAPHY

The doyen of Roman history, Anthony Gibbon, in his epic “History and Decline of the Roman Empire”, following Procopius, did bestow the term “last of the Romans” to Aetius as well as to Bonifacius, judging that the discord between those great figures did accelerate the fall of the Empire itself.²²² Anthony Gibbons with his deterministic view of history was

²⁰⁹ AUERBACH 2003, 40.

²¹⁰ COLLINGWOOD 1994, 45.

²¹¹ DRAY 1964, 105.

²¹² SALEWSKI, 2000, 169.

²¹³ FUHRMANN 1998, 53.

²¹⁴ BLOCKLEY 1998, 305-314.

²¹⁵ MCDONALD 1939, 124-146.

²¹⁶ BURKE 2013, 437-447.

²¹⁷ WHITE 1975, 4.

²¹⁸ VOGT 1943, 22.

²¹⁹ CHRISTOPHILOUPOULOU 1986, 65.

²²⁰ KRUEGER 2010, 18, 13-30.

²²¹ HEATHER 1997, 75 (69-85).

²²² GIBBON, 2001 (1786),174.

compelled to judge the fall of the Empire as inevitable. The Whig Gibbons, who did believe in the progressive character of history, naturally did judge Aetius as well as Boniface as figures who-willingly or not- did contribute to the seemingly inevitable: the final demise of the Empire.²²³ With the British Empire having experienced the rebellion and loss of the American colonies, a process that was ongoing when Gibbon wrote his lines, one wonders whether the deterministic view on the actors and events during the late Classical age was influenced by those disturbances.²²⁴ It has been duly expressed that Gibbon's judgement towards the Classical Ages was influenced by his disdain for the emerging Christian clergy as well as his preference of Latin over Greek sources and his treatment of the Antonine age as non-plus-ultra of Roman virtue.²²⁵ Gibbons' epic historical tomes, identified by Bentley as a literary enlightenment approach, are proof of the authors meticulous devotion to the study of selected primary sources as well as his strive to combine those with new findings.²²⁶

The Gestalt of Aetius as a topos of literary-historical sources should be interpreted as being set within an area of tension between pagan and Christian philosophy. The echoes of the past manifested themselves as the deeds of great men, whose virtues were worthwhile to be memorized and to strive up as an ideal, just as presented by Cato and his successors.²²⁷ This perspective on history, with "great men as the makers" of historical events did create its echoes in the 19th century, with historians as Carlyle and Treitschke adapting that worldview onto their very own understanding of history.²²⁸ The tradition of historiographical values from the classics itself is a subject worthwhile researching; for our perspective it shall be sufficient to realize the lasting effects on our, contemporary understanding of ancient history. Banchich pointed out the historiographers of late antiquity as creators of oeuvres of an epitomizing nature who managed to successfully summarize and brevify the string of historical events down to its essence.²²⁹ For authors of the 18th and 19th century, events had to be explainable and make sense, either from a metaphysical or philosophical perspective. "Great men", usually emperors, but certainly also strong characters as Flavius Aetius, were presented as makers of history in a moralizing, educating fashion that usually sought to preserve the literary finesse of previous authors. New interpretations and new perspectives were not so much important as the faithful recounting of events, a tradition that can also be found in the early hagiographies of the saints.

In the 19th century, the historical evaluation of Aetius changed towards a more critical reading of the ancient sources. This coincided with the wish to interpret ancient history in harmony with the present political structures, especially in terms of nation or empire building. Ranke as one of the forthcoming and prominent national inspired

German historians accordingly drew special importance to the state of the late Roman Empire and its relationship with the Germanic tribes. Besides a romanticizing depiction of Attila's personality, he strikes a reference to the national-centered worldview of the 19th century. Accordingly, the battle at the Campus Mauriacus appears as determining "whether the Hunno-Germanic or the Roman-Germanic development would rule over Europe, whether the Germanic tribes would be given back to the Barbarian elements in the world".²³⁰ This description is highly symbolic and driven by the will to incorporate the genesis of German national identity. Nevertheless, Ranke's style has to be credited with historical depth and attention for detail. Another great historian of the 19th century, Burckhardt, in line with Gibbon, does assign to the Roman Empire a historical mission, marked by a deterministic character.²³¹

The historiography of the 18th and 19th century, with its strive for meta history and the desire to carve out deeper, underlying structures and laws in the flow of history (the Weltgeist, in Hegelian tradition) tended to interpret historical personas and events accordingly. A frequent theme among the primary sources regarding Aetius is his positive depiction in comparison to the so-called "bad emperors". That literary construction of antique historiography presented Aetius nearly saint-like. In contrast, the rulers were depicted as part of a rather immoral quest of leadership, doomed to fail by virtue of divine providence. In conclusion, a hagiographical literary interpretation of the historical sources did cast its shadow on the persona of Aetius.

Actions did not have mere causes and consequences, but had to be justified by a deeper meaning and a broader sense. Accordingly, the example of Burckhardt, with all his deterministic connotations aside, disdained the concept of an all-present, underlying worldplan (Weltplan).²³² Burckhardt did focus on Rome's cultural continuity and its function as preserver and conservator of culture and knowledge. Given the fact that historiography always strove towards to explain the ebbs and tides of events in the vast ocean dubbed "history", the figure of Aetius was treated as part of that plan. Only in the 20th century a more critical approach was slowly developed. Isaiah Berlin warned against the pre-judgement of events according to mere materialist or metaphysical pre-sets, with the methodologies of Hegel, Herder or Marx respectively cited as prove for the respective historical cause.²³³ In rejecting the definition of "rise" and "fall" of states as anti-empirical, Berlin drew attention to the precarious nature of "manifest destiny", as drawn from the oeuvres of the classical authors and their epigones. Within that interpretation, deterministic outsets shall be avoided. This of course also includes the awareness that all objectivity is still of a subjective nature including the deterministic worldview. Within that scope, evaluations on late antiquity and Aetius as one of its important actors usually tend to assign and seek a deeper meaning in the historical process.²³⁴

²²³ MATTHEWS 1997, 16 (12-33).

²²⁴ GIBBON 2001 (1786), 175.

²²⁵ AYLMER 1997, 275 (249-280).

²²⁶ BENTLEY 1997, 404 (395-506).

²²⁷ WISEMAN 1981, 375-393.

²²⁸ STREULI 1895, 125.

²²⁹ BANCHICH 2007, 308 (305-311).

²³⁰ VON RANKE, 1930, 408.

²³¹ BURCKHARDT 1983, 156.

²³² BURCKHARDT 1983, 5.

²³³ BERLIN, 1954, 13.

²³⁴ WILLIAMS and FRIELL 1998, 165

TOWARDS A CONCLUSION

As proposed by Ernest Stein, the historical figure of Aetius was presented as a representative of the late (Western) Roman landholding aristocracy. The previously mentioned group's interests mostly collided with those of the imperial government, in particular regarding economic matters.²³⁵ Following this interpretation, Aetius may be evaluated as an aristocrat whose actions were motivated by the wish to preserve the state, an institution which existence contributed to his peer group's political and economic wellbeing. However, in the realms of historiography, Aetius live was interpreted by classical and modern historians in a quite textual manner. Henceforth, the rise and fall of Flavius Aetius is largely seen as one of the causes of the end of the Roman Empire without applying much critical reasoning or literary critique.

In the classical sources, Aetius appears as a polarizing figure who accordingly was slandered or half-deified by the respective authors. It is helpful to remember that those authors target audience consisted of the ruling or spiritual and cultural elite of the Empire or its successor institutions. Accordingly, Aetius does appear in the sources as a Janus like figure: on one side the successful defender of the empire who managed to throw back a myriad of larger than live threads, internal and external alike. Aetius is bequeathed with the shining and tragic attribute "last of the Romans", whose untimely end seals the fate of the western part of the Empire. In other sources, Aetius becomes a symbol of a cunning, intriguing and coldly calculating politician who does not hesitate to allow Roman provinces to fall into the hand of the enemy if it suits his own ambitions.

Given the conflicting nature of the texts, we might conclude that Aetius as historical figure, as soldier and as politician remains ambivalent because the sources themselves do bear a quite divisive character.

The reason Aetius' personality traits have been discussed so vividly is based on the fact that historiography itself, tended to treat the death of Aetius as a milestone in Roman history per se. Duly in line with a historiographical approach based on the linear interpretation of history a la Hegel, the end of the Western Roman Empire was explained as inevitable fact of history. Since the 18th century, antique texts and authors had accepted the notion that the empire was doomed to fail, history was determined by godly power or Hegel's "Weltgeist". Likewise, in line with Carlyle's reasoning, those events were preferably linked to the fate of certain, distinctive personalities. It seemed convenient to relate the fall of the "eternal city" to the death of the "last of the Romans".

However, the authors of late antiquity, in their determinist concept of decline and disruption, were contemplating on the dire state of contemporary political events. Within that scope, they might have pointed to the "end of days" if writing from a Christian perspective, but did never challenge the notion of empire as such. In modern historical writing, Aetius rise and fall was presented as a factual and a moral problem; a historical critique of ancient

sources was often omitted. Judging the events linked to Aetius and his time, the application of textual critic might help to shed light to attribute the respective authors' intentions in relation to their subject.

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